



‘*Tepung tawar*’ Tradition in Javanese Wedding Customs in North Sumatra as A Form of Rite of Passage

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Abstract. Almost all Javanese communities in Java and overseas perform weddings according to their customs, as in North Sumatra. However, one unique and different thing is the ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition for the bride and groom. Then, this research aims to determine the influence of the ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition on Javanese wedding customs in North Sumatra. Then, to know the meaning of the ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition for the Javanese ethnic group in North Sumatra. The research method used is qualitative, with theories about rites of passage and language. The ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition during a traditional Javanese wedding shows that culture is dynamic. The ‘*tepung tawar*’ is a tradition of the Malay ethnic community but is also used by Javanese people who migrate to North Sumatra. When giving ‘*tepung tawar*,’ rhymes in Malay are not used but are expressed in Javanese as a means of communication.

Keywords: Javanese Custom, Rite of Transition, ‘*Tepung tawar*’, Wedding.

1 Introduction

Every human being will grow and develop and then die. The phases of life that begin when a baby is conceived, is born, grows, matures, produces offspring, and finally dies are all biological processes that every human being will go through in their life. As social creatures, humans, in their growth and development phase, need recognition or witness from their community. For example, when a child is born, there needs to be a ritual to welcome the birth, then there is a wedding as a sign that the human has changed his social status and is ready to give birth to offspring, and there is a death ritual as a sign that the human phase of his life in the world has ended.

The idea of rites of passage as a technical term in social anthropology first appeared in the early 20th century AD. This term describes the ritual process of a person’s transition from one social status to another. Marriage is one of the ritual processes that change human status from single to partner; certainly, it is the most awaited moment in this phase of human life. Therefore, at this moment, most people have carried it out seriously, including Javanese ethnic communities. Javanese society has several complete procedures for conducting a traditional wedding, including the procedures before, during, and after the wedding (Pratama & Wahyuningsih, 2018). Javanese people,

wherever they are, both in Java and abroad, will carry out these ritual procedures, such as those in North Sumatra.

The Javanese ethnic group in North Sumatra (formerly known as East Sumatra) has existed for approximately one hundred years, but its customs and traditions have not just been abandoned. They can still use Javanese although they no longer use language levels such as '*ngoko*', '*alus*', and '*kromo inggil*' (rough language, soft and high language). This is also the case with Javanese wedding customs in North Sumatra. They still carry out various traditional wedding processions, but there is something unique and different from the wedding traditions in Java, namely the provision of '*tepung tawar*' for the bride and groom, as in ethnic Malay weddings. The tradition of '*tepung tawar*' in wedding processions is carried out by Javanese people in North Sumatra, such as in Medan, in coastal areas such as Deli Serdang, Serdang Bedagai, Asahan, Tanjung Balai, as well as in the hinterland such as in Simalungun.

Concerning that background, the problems are: How does the '*tepung tawar*' tradition influence Javanese wedding customs in North Sumatra? What does the '*tepung tawar*' tradition mean for the Javanese ethnic group in North Sumatra? Then, this research aims to determine the influence of the '*tepung tawar*' tradition on Javanese wedding customs in North Sumatra. Then, to know the meaning of the '*tepung tawar*' tradition for the Javanese ethnic group in North Sumatra. The research object was the traditional Javanese wedding tradition of '*tepung tawar*' in Tanjung Anom Village, Pancur Batu District, Deli Serdang Regency.

2 Method

The research method used is qualitative. The method itself is defined as a scientific way to obtain data. Apart from that, this scientific method has scientific characteristics, namely rational, empirical, and systematic (Sugiyono, 2013). Qualitative research methods examine the natural conditions of objects. The researcher functions as a critical instrument. Data analysis is inductive, and the results emphasize meaning (Sugiyono, 2014). Researchers interpret how subjects gain meaning from their surroundings and how that meaning influences their behavior. The research was conducted in a naturalistic setting, not by treating or manipulating the variables involved (Fadli, 2021).

The following concerns are rites of passage borrowing opinions from Jean Holm and John Bowker. Rites of passage are organized events in which society, as in the past, took individuals by the hand and led them from one social status to another, guiding them across borders and holding them temporarily in one position when they were not in any other status (Holm & Bowker, 2007). Rites of passage emerged as an attempt to interpret the ritual events that marked the various social changes experienced by members of a society as they progressed through life. Many cultures use their religious beliefs to explain these status change periods and perform these rites religiously (Holm & Bowker, 2007).

According to van Gennep, the entire process of transition or change in social status is divided into three stages, which reflect the process of leaving one room, then not being in space at all during the previous transit, finally being accepted into a new room,

so the entire ritual process is composed of three rites. First, it separates people from their original status. Second, it covers a period that is separate from normal status. Third, giving new status to individuals (Holm & Bowker, 2007).

In the tradition of '*tepung tawar*,' the important part is language. Language is a symbol system used to communicate and interact between the giver and the receiver of '*tepung tawar*.' Language is a system of sound symbols used by members of a society for cooperation, interaction, and self-identification (Kridalaksana, 2011). Language is a tool for communicating and expressing feelings and thoughts. In giving '*tepung tawar*,' parents and family will convey prayers and blessings through actions and language. In Malay society, language is used in rhymes when the '*tepung tawar*' procession is carried out, whereas in Javanese society, the language used is different.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 History of The Arrival of Javanese Culture in North Sumatra

Marriage comes from the word '*nikah*,' which, according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, means a marriage bond (contract) carried out by legal provisions and religious teachings. While marriage is (the act of) getting married, a marriage ceremony (KBBI, 2016). In ethnic Javanese society, marriage is a process of changing human social status that can be said to be mandatory.

Javanese wedding customs and procedures originate from palace culture. In the past, traditional Javanese wedding ceremonies could only be carried out within the palace, *abdi dalem* (king's servant), or people who still had descendants with the king ('*priyayi*'/nobles). Javanese traditional wedding procedures have several stages that are usually passed through, namely the initial stage, the preparation stage, the peak stage of the event, and the final stage. However, not everyone who organizes a wedding consistently implements this. Some of these series have now changed in line with developing values.

Around the 1880s, many ethnic Javanese people came to the North Sumatra region (formerly called East Sumatra). Historical records indicate that the arrival of the Javanese ethnic group to North Sumatra was contributed by the Dutch Colonial Government and the Deli Maatchapij Tobacco Plantation Company (Putra, 2017). They were brought in en masse to meet the needs of contract laborers for these private plantations. Likewise, ethnic Chinese and Tamils were directly imported from their countries.

It cannot be denied that the current existence of the Javanese ethnic group in North Sumatra is a form of intergenerational struggle. Start from the ancestors who arrived in North Sumatra (East Sumatra) in the early 1900s to the fourth and fifth generations today. They are the people who opened a new village and created a 'hometown' atmosphere in the new village through the home memory obtained from their respective parents and built a kinship network through the concept of '*sedulur sak kapal*' (brothers of the same ship) (Putra, 2017).

Along with the times, ethnic Javanese people in North Sumatra began to mingle with other ethnicities. Although initially there was friction between ethnic groups, gradually, the Javanese ethnic group began to be accepted. The start of intermarriage between

Javanese and other ethnicities, such as Malay, Karo, Batak, and other ethnicities, has resulted in a mix of cultures in their lives. Even today, the intensity of inter-ethnic marriages is increasing in North Sumatra. They no longer see differences in ethnic identity as a measure of marriage because they result from intermarriage.

3.2 The Influence of the '*Tepung tawar*' Tradition on Javanese Wedding Custom

Javanese wedding customs or procedures then blended with the local culture in North Sumatra. Javanese people began to adapt to the local culture without losing their tribal identity, one of which is the '*tepung tawar*' tradition. Providing '*tepung tawar*' during the wedding procession is a necessity for the Javanese people in North Sumatra. This happened in one of the traditional Javanese wedding processions in Puri Anom Asri, Tanjung Selamat Village, Pancur Batu District, Deli Serdang Regency. In the wedding between Siti Sarah Sabrina and M. Dwiki Prananda, who held their wedding in June 2022, the '*tepung tawar*' tradition was held after the bride and groom sat together at the altar (see Fig. 1). This means the '*temu manten*' (bridal meeting) procession using Javanese customs has been completed. When giving '*tepung tawar*,' it is usually accompanied by tambourine musical instruments as part of the *Marhaban* event. During the procession, parents and family will give their blessings and prayers by sprinkling flowers, spreading rice flour, and sprinkling water mixed with flowers using leaves tied to the bride and groom's hands.



(Doc. Nasoichah & Susilowati, 2022)

Fig. 1. The traditional Javanese wedding with the '*tepung tawar*' tradition in Tanjung Anom Village, Pancur Batu district, Deli Serdang regency.

Initially, Javanese people did not know the '*tepung tawar*' tradition during the wedding procession. '*Tepung tawar*' is a tradition of the Malay ethnic community, which is in the North Sumatra Provinces, Riau, the Riau Islands, and Palembang. Apart from Sumatra, the '*tepung tawar*' tradition is also known on the island of Kalimantan. The people in the eastern part of North Sumatra are mostly ethnic Malays. In that region, there were several sultanates, including the Deli Sultanate, Serdang Sultanate, Langkat Sultanate, and Asahan Sultanate. The '*tepung tawar*' tradition is part of Malay cultural ceremonies inherited from previous kings and continues today. The '*tepung tawar*' tradition is a form of gratitude to God for blessings such as health, safety, fortune, and the

fulfillment of a wish or business. This ceremony is carried out in two conditions, both on humans and on objects (Ditwdb, 2019).

The tradition of offering flour is also found in the marriage procession of the Malay community in Tanjung Balai City, North Sumatra. In his writing, (Pangaribuan, 2023) explained that for the Malays, '*tepung tawar*' is a tradition that should not be abandoned as an expression of the Malay proverb '*kalo hendak buat keje kawin, kalo tak buat acara tepung tawo belum sah acara tu*' which means 'If you are going to make a wedding reception, if you don't carry out the '*tepung tawar*' tradition, the event is not yet valid'.

The ingredients used in this tradition are rice flour, tied leaves, and water in a container. Leaves, as the main element, are considered to have properties after being mixed with other ingredients, then sprinkled or hit on people or objects in a certain way. When sprinkling or hitting the leaves dipped in '*tepung tawar*' water, the traditional chief as the leader will also recite prayers with mantras. In addition to these ingredients, a set of betel chewing materials and their place, a keris, nails, and money are also included. This tradition is still found in the community of Durian Sebatang Village, Seponti District, Kayong Utara Regency, West Kalimantan Province (Linyang et al., 2021). The community there also uses '*tepung tawar*' in various ritual or healing events so that disasters do not happen again or as a ward off disaster.

In the Malay community in Sumatra, the tradition of '*tepung tawar*' is usually used in certain events, for example, occupying a new house, buying or driving a new vehicle, weddings, circumcisions, returning from the Hajj, as well as forms of outbursts of joy, and various other sacred traditional ceremonies. The tradition of '*tepung tawar*' for the Malay community is conveyed in the expression "if it is for a wedding ceremony if you have not held the '*tepung tawar*' patting (*tepung tawo*) event then it is not a valid event to be held" (Ditwdb, 2019). The life of the Javanese people in the Malay community environment caused the tradition of '*tepung tawar*' to be applied in Javanese wedding customs in North Sumatra. In addition to the '*tepung tawar*' tradition, the Javanese people in North Sumatra also use the henna tradition. In contrast to the Malay community, which carries out the *tepung tawar* tradition in every aspect of life, the Javanese community only applies this tradition at weddings.

Plants are an essential medium for the use of '*tepung tawar*.' Plants cannot be replaced by other synthetic equipment. This is because plants are a medium that symbolizes the relationship between humans and nature, which is very close in human daily life. The tradition of '*tepung tawar*' is a form of interaction between humans and the surrounding environment and the interaction between fellow humans. The ingredients used come from various types of plants, such as white rice or flour, yellow rice, flowers, leaves, and water. These ingredients are symbols that interact between those who give and those who are given '*tepung tawar*.'

Furthermore, language is essential to the series of events, prayers, and blessings conveyed by parents, family, and religious figures in Javanese. Sayings such as: "*Mugo-mogo tansah diparingi sehat, seneng, lan dadi keluarga sing sakinah, mawaddah, warohmah; Mugo-mugo langgeng nganti kaken ninen; Sing rukun ojo tukaran ben perkawinan langgeng; Tak dongake rumah tanggane rukun, langgeng, lan Samawa,*" is a form of blessing and prayer for the bride and groom. The meaning is "May you be

given health and happiness and become a peaceful, loving, and affectionate/merciful family. May you last until old age. Those who are peaceful do not fight so that the marriage lasts; I pray that your household is peaceful, long-lasting, and Samawa." In addition, the giving of '*tepung tawar*' in traditional Javanese marriages is accompanied by tambourines by the '*marhaban*' group, which contain poems containing '*sholawat*'. In this way, Javanese people combine the '*tepung tawar*' tradition, an old ethnic Malay culture, with elements of Islamic culture in North Sumatra. Meanwhile, the '*sungke-man*' tradition, typical of Javanese society, is carried out after the '*ijab qabul*' is completed.

The '*tepung tawar*' ritual divides the plants into two essential components. First, the plant is torn into small pieces and then tied like a broom, but small in size. Usually, when making this equipment, there are types of plants with wide and long leaves, such as coconut, banana, pandan, and other types of reeds. Second, the plants are chopped and placed in a vessel (a basin, bowl, or coconut shell). The plants or parts in the container are then given water, and a mantra/prayer is recited first. When the ceremony occurs, the shaman/'*kyai*' will recite the mantra again while his right-hand holds a leaf made like a broom, and his left-hand holds a container filled with leaves and water (Royyani, 2014).

Marriage is a manifestation of a culture called a social system, which is about the patterned actions of humans. As a series of human activities in society, marriage is concrete, occurs around us every day, and can be observed, photographed, and documented (Koentjaraningrat, 1990). Marriage is a rite of passage in human life that guides them from one social status to another, guides them across borders, and holds them temporarily in one position when they are not in any other status. The wedding rite emphasizes the post-liminal world of unification into a new family group in which marriage occurs, the separation of humans from their original status from being alone to becoming partners. Marriage also indicates a period of separation from normal status and gives a new status to the human/individual (Holm & Bowker, 2007).

Another dimension of rites of passage relates to personal experience or environment about socially articulated categories. Van Gennep, for example, is very aware of the possibility of a gap between personal circumstances and socially determined identities, as he points out that in some societies, boys and girls will be considered adults before or after they are biologically and sexually mature (Holm & Bowker, 2007). In this case, marriage is a concrete manifestation of the boys' and girls' readiness to enter their adult life, who are biologically and sexually ready to enter life with their new status.

Cultural traditions or oral traditions always transform due to developments over time and as a result of their adaptation to the context of the times. The life of a tradition is essentially in the process of transformation because a tradition will not live if it does not transform. On that basis, culture is dynamic. Changes and development characterize such characteristics according to the context and tide of the times. Human abilities as creators influence the dynamism of culture (Sibarani, 2014). The example of the '*tepung tawar*' tradition at a Javanese wedding in North Sumatra above shows that the tradition of giving '*tepung tawar*' proves this culture is dynamic. When Javanese wed-

ding customs were brought to North Sumatra, far from their place of origin, they underwent changes and developments to suit the local socio-cultural context and, of course, the times.

4 Conclusion

Marriage is a manifestation of a culture called a social system, which is about the patterned actions of humans. Marriage is a rite of passage in human life that guides them from one social status to another, guides them across borders, and holds them temporarily in one position when they are not in any other status. The tradition of giving ‘*tepung tawar*’ during Javanese weddings in North Sumatra shows that the tradition of giving ‘*tepung tawar*’ is proof that this culture is dynamic. The ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition is a tradition of the Malay ethnic community. Javanese people who migrated to North Sumatra began to adapt to local culture without losing their tribal identity, one of which is the ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition.

Providing ‘*tepung tawar*’ during the wedding procession has become necessary for the Javanese people in North Sumatra, which is still the case today. Several adjustments have been made to align with local culture. For example, in Javanese wedding customs, the ‘*tepung tawar*’ tradition is not accompanied by pantun but by prayers and blessings in Javanese. The implementation of this tradition is accompanied by tambourines and poems performed by the Marhaban group. The sungkeman tradition, characteristic of the Javanese people, is carried out when the *ijab qabul* is finished.

Research related to rites of passage, especially related to the use of ‘*tepung tawar*’, is still rare. It is hoped that this research can provide a view for the general public that cultural adaptation is very likely to occur and may not be inevitable. The need to respect local cultures without eliminating their own culture is a reflection of a dynamic, tolerant society, and does not need to be clashed so that it can cause problems in the future. Maintaining harmony is the key to maintaining the culture itself.

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