



The Symbolic Meaning in the Matende Mamongo Traditional Ceremony of the Pamona Ethnic Group in Taripa Village, East Pamona Subdistrict

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the following questions, such as: 1) What is the process of the Matende Mamongo traditional ceremony of the Pamona ethnic group in Taripa Village, East Pamona Subdistrict?; and 2) What is the symbolic meaning of the Matende Mamongo tradition of the Pamona ethnic group in Taripa Village, East Pamona Subdistrict?. The purpose of this study is to describe the process and the symbols found in the Matende Mamongo tradition of the Pamona ethnic group in Taripa Village, East Pamona Subdistrict. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method, which allows for the collection, processing, analysis, and presentation of research results in accordance with actual conditions, thus producing objective data. Based on the research conducted, the Matende Mamongo traditional ceremony consists of several stages: Opening prayer, Inquiry, Wrapping of areca nuts at the groom to be's house, Delivery of the wrapped mamongo to the bride to be's house, Unwrapping of the areca nut, Necklace placement on the bride-to-be, and the Giving of advice or counsel by village government figures, ending with a closing prayer by the pastor. The study also found that the Matende Mamongo ceremony contains symbolic meanings represented through various items: Siga (male head covering), Tali Bonto (female headband), Pamona traditional attire, Areca palm bark skin, Rattan, Areca nuts, Betel leaves, Slaked lime, Tobacco, Coins, and Gold necklaces

INTRODUCTION

Matende Mamongo is one of the traditional customs that has emerged and developed among the hundreds of ethnic groups in Indonesia, each with its own unique characteristics. As is well known, a marriage proposal is a process that integrates individuals into a sacred order, which is why certain conditions governed by norms and even traditions are required during the process. According to Prof. Kusumadi Pudjosewojo, custom (*adat*) is behavior that has been accepted and institutionalized by society. These customs can be strong or weak and tend to fluctuate over time. The behavioral rules within society are customary rules and are not formal legal regulations.

One such traditional practice in marriage proposals that continues to be preserved in Taripa Village is the Matende Mamongo ceremony, which is an integral part of the engagement process. This traditional engagement process is represented and conducted by traditional leaders in the form of a dialogue between representatives of the groom's and bride's families. Traditional ceremonies are a form of cultural expression realized through a complex of patterned human behaviors in society, commonly referred to as a social system (Embon, 2018; Adriyanti et al., 2021).

Matende Mamongo holds meanings and symbols that are highly valuable to the life of the Pamona ethnic community. Although this tradition has been passed down through generations and is still practiced in Taripa Village, many young people today have little understanding of the meanings behind the rituals in the engagement process. The symbolic meanings of the Matende Mamongo tradition are mostly understood only by traditional elders who are knowledgeable about these customs. This indicates a lack of initiative among the younger generation to learn and explore their own cultural heritage an expectation that they will eventually become the successors and preservers of local culture, which characterizes the Pamona ethnic identity in Taripa Village, East Pamona Subdistrict.

In this context, meaning is a central element of the Matende Mamongo tradition, as it represents something valuable and useful for human life. Meaning can be broad and uncertain (Wiyana, 2008:13). Furthermore, symbols are images, shapes, or objects that represent an idea or quantity. Although a symbol is not the value itself, it plays a crucial role in helping individuals internalize and appreciate the values it represents. Therefore, this study will also explore the meanings and symbols embedded in this traditional custom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tradition is an essential part of the cultural heritage passed down through generations within a community. In customary societies, traditions serve not only as tools for cultural preservation but also possess deep symbolic and spiritual significance. One such tradition preserved by the Pamona ethnic community in Central Sulawesi is Matende Mamongo a customary engagement process filled with profound symbols and meanings. Studies on symbolism in traditional customs have been extensively explored by anthropologists and cultural sociologists. Clifford Geertz (1973), in his interpretive theory, emphasized that culture is a system of symbols rich with meaning, used by people to understand

their environment. Geertz viewed every cultural act, including traditional rituals, as a text filled with symbolic messages. Likewise, Victor Turner (1969) highlighted the importance of symbols in rituals as mediums for shaping and reinforcing social cohesion.

In the Pamona context, Matende Mamongo represents the initial stage of marriage and is imbued with symbolic values. Each element used in this ceremony such as areca nut, betel leaf, tobacco, and rattan holds specific meanings that reflect the community's worldview and philosophy on love, family, and household life. This tradition is not merely ceremonial but embodies social relations, kinship structure, and social legitimacy of the marital bond. This study aims to identify, analyze, observe, and describe the processes and symbolic meanings found in the Matende Mamongo engagement tradition of the Pamona ethnic group in Taripa Village, East Pamona District. The researcher finds it necessary to delve deeper into how this tradition is practiced in current social life and how its symbolic meanings are maintained or altered over time. The study is also motivated by the urgency to preserve local values increasingly eroded by modernization. By understanding the symbols in Matende Mamongo, it is hoped that the younger generation of the Pamona ethnic group can continue to appreciate and preserve their cultural heritage. Therefore, this research is entitled: "The Symbolic Meaning in the Matende Mamongo Customary Process of the Pamona Ethnic Group in Taripa Village, East Pamona District."

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method, which is used to gather, process, analyze, and present data based on actual conditions in the field. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring social and cultural phenomena in depth, allowing researchers to interpret meanings, values, and symbolic aspects within a community's traditional practices. In this context, the focus of the research is on understanding the symbolic meaning embedded in the Matende Mamongo customary process of the Pamona ethnic group. The purpose of this research is to provide a detailed description of the stages and symbolic meanings found in the Matende Mamongo tradition as practiced in Taripa Village, located in East Pamona Sub district. To achieve these research objectives, data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted by directly witnessing the implementation of the Matende Mamongo ceremony in the community. Interviews were carried out with key informants, including traditional leaders, community elders, and local residents who have knowledge and experience regarding the ritual. Documentation involved collecting photographs, recordings, and written records relevant to the ceremony and its elements. The collected data were then analyzed using a model adapted from Miles and Huberman (as cited in Sugiyono, 2009:91), which consists of four interrelated components: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data collection refers to the initial gathering of all relevant information from the field. Data reduction involves selecting, simplifying, and organizing the data to focus on aspects related to symbolic meanings and

processes. Data display is the stage where the organized information is presented in narrative or visual form to facilitate understanding. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on patterns, themes, and interpretations derived from the data, allowing the researcher to formulate insights into the cultural significance of Matende Mamongo in the Pamona community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Traditional Process of Matende Mamongo

Matende Mamongo marks the beginning of marriage in Pamona tradition, initiated through a proposal (Matende Mamongo) from a man to a woman. Its purpose is to inquire whether the woman is willing to marry the man proposing. This custom is carried out by the local traditional council upon the request of the man's family. According to Syah in Nurlin Ibrahim (2009:5), customs are sacred traditional social norms, meaning they are ancestral decrees passed down through generations. These traditions govern Indonesia's indigenous communities and are deeply binding to their members. Thus, the execution of this custom should adhere to the prevailing traditional norms in each region, without regard to social stratification within the community.

Based on research findings, the Matende Mamongo ceremony is conducted by the Pamona tribe as a core part of the wedding sequence. Informants explained that the ceremony takes place at the homes of both prospective spouses, culminating at the bride's home. It is attended by the Traditional Council, a pastor, the village head/officials of Taripa, and the families of both parties. The following outlines the stages of the Pamona tribe's Matende Mamongo engagement process: 1) Opening prayer; 2) Metukana or Meoasi (the asking process); 3) Mantonge Mamongo (the wrapping of betel nut); 4) Delivering the Mamongo bundle (proposal) to the bride's home; 5) Mantarima Pai Mabulere Mamongo (the unwrapping and acceptance of the betel nut bundle); 6) Placing the Enu (necklace) on the bride; and 7) Advice or counsel from village leaders, concluded with a closing prayer by the pastor's wife.

The Meaning of Matende Mamongo's Traditional Symbols

The symbolic meanings of the Pamona tribe's Matende Mamongo (Loren Bagus, 2005:1007) in historical thought have dual interpretations, particularly in religious contexts. In religious practice, symbols are seen as representations of intangible realities, not fully explained by logical or scientific reasoning. Research findings identify seven key symbols in the Pamona tribe's Matende Mamongo: 1) Betel Nut, Slightly oblong and red when ripe, symbolizing the human heart; 2) Betel Leaf, Grows alternately, has stems, and emits a pleasant aroma when crushed, representing human skin; 3) Tobacco, Upright, round, sticky, hairy, and large, symbolizing human hair; 4) Lime (for betel chewing), White in color, representing human bones; 5) Betel Nut Sheath, Long and patterned, symbolizing household protection; 6) Rattan, Long, brown, and flexible, signifying the union of two families in engagement, fostering togetherness; and 7) Coins, Round, thin, and gold-colored, serving as compensation for any damage to the betel sheath or leaves during the Matende Mamongo ceremony.

The Traditional Courtship Process of Matende Mamongo

The Matende Mamongo courtship is a highly respected and valued tradition in Pamona marriage customs. In the past, marriages were often arranged by parents, who played a decisive role in selecting partners. It was not uncommon for the groom-to-be to have no prior knowledge of the bride chosen for him, and similarly, the bride might not know her suitor beforehand. However, with changing times, this practice has evolved and is no longer strictly followed. The process begins with a family meeting on the groom's side, where discussions center on the prospective bride, including her family lineage. The compatibility of the couple is assessed by examining the social standing of both families from four ancestral perspectives (father and mother from both sides). If no obstacles are found, the betel nut wrapping ceremony proceeds. However, if any familial conflicts or social hindrances are identified, traditional reconciliation methods must be applied before moving forward.

Before wrapping the betel nut, another family gathering is held to formally announce the intended proposal. Once consensus is reached, the betel nut bundle is prepared using essential symbolic items: (1) betel nut palm sheath, (2) betel nut, (3) betel leaves, (4) lime paste, (5) sliced tobacco, (6) betel palm fronds, and (7) rattan.

The delivery of the betel nut bundle (Mantende Mamongo) follows strict customary protocols. The groom's family sends a delegation, typically consisting of at least seven members (an auspicious odd number, often seven, nine, or eleven), including the bearer of the bundle. The number seven holds spiritual significance, representing an offering to the divine through seven betel nut halves, mediated by Tadunya (a spiritual intermediary), to seek blessings for the union. On the bride's side, there is no fixed number of attendees awaiting the proposal. However, given the ceremonial importance, the receiving party usually includes representatives from the Traditional Council, local government officials, and religious leaders.

The acceptance and unwrapping of the betel nut bundle take place during a formal family gathering hosted by the bride's family. The session begins with the customary leader or an elder questioning the bride and her parents regarding her relationship with the suitor and his family. The lineage of both families is scrutinized again from four ancestral angles. If no conflicts are found, the proposal is accepted. However, if any issues arise, they must be resolved according to customary law before the engagement can proceed. This intricate process reflects the Pamona tribe's deep cultural values, emphasizing familial harmony, ancestral respect, and communal participation in marriage traditions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The traditional ceremony of Mantende Mamongo follows a structured sequence of stages: 1) Opening prayer; 2) Inquiry (Metukana or Meoasi the formal questioning process); 3) Wrapping the betel nut bundle (Mantonge Mamongo) at the groom's family home; 4) Delivering the betel nut bundle (Mamongo) to the bride's family home; 5) Unwrapping the betel nut bundle (Mabulere Mamongo);

6) Placing the ceremonial necklace (Enu) on the bride; and 7) Words of advice from village leaders, concluding with a closing prayer by the pastor.

Beyond being a mandatory customary practice, Mantende Mamongo is deeply symbolic, reflecting the cultural values and way of life of the Pamona tribe. As revealed in this research, the ceremony incorporates eleven key symbols, each carrying profound meaning: 1) Siga, Traditional male headgear; 2) Tali Bonto, Female headband; 3) Pamona traditional attire; 4) Betel nut palm sheath; 5) Rattan; 6) Betel nut; 7) Betel leaf; 8) Lime paste (for betel chewing); 9) Tobacco; 10) Coins; and 11) Gold necklace. These symbols collectively embody the spiritual, social, and ancestral heritage of the Pamona people, reinforcing the significance of Mantende Mamongo as more than just a ritual – it is a living tradition that preserves their cultural identity

FUTHER STUDY

This research still has delays, so further investigation is needed regarding the topic *The Symbolic Meaning in the Matende Mamongo Traditional Ceremony of the Pamona Ethnic Group in Taripa Village, East Pamona Subdistrict* in order to enhance this research and provide more insight for the readers.

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