



Shifting Functions and New Meanings of The Ritual of Rejecting “Treatment” The Malay from Serdang Bedagai

¹ SUTIKNO, ¹ WARIYATI, * RAMADI ALI,

^{*1} Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al Washliyah, Medan, Indonesia
Correspondance author: ramadiali@gmail.com *

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Abstract

The ritual of ward off/rejecting misfortune or Tolak Bala is a culture of the Serdang Bedagai Malay Community. Now the ritual has a new function from a traditional ceremony to a commercialization activity. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. The shift occurs due to several factors including the attitude of the people who are open and willing to accept the changing times and the flow of globalization. This makes rituals commodity goods that change the function and meaning of traditional rituals into processes of production, distribution and consumption. This is very impactful and gives a new meaning to Tolak Bala which has an impact on socio-cultural life. This shift has had an impact on increasing the income of the Malay community of Serdang Bedagai by commercializing the Tolak Bala culture. In addition, the strategy of inheriting the ritual of Tolak Bala of the Malay ethnicity in Serdang Bedagai is carried out in three forms: empowerment, documentation, and development.

Keywords: Shifting; Meaning; Malay; Serdang Bedagai

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Introduction

(Haviland & Soekadijo, 1985) states the ritual of repelling evil is a way of connecting humans with the supernatural. Ritual is not only a way to strengthen the social ties of the community and reduce tensions but also a way to organize important events and events that cause crises such as repulsive ceremonies. Preusz (Koentjaraningrat, 1998) says that the most important ritual in many religions of the world is a ritual procession of “Tolak Bala” (ward off/rejecting misfortune), such as the one in Melayu Serdang Bedagai. Such rituals usually have the same main theme, which is the process of separation between living beings and dead beings.

In addition to cultural values, ritual ceremonies play a role in binding customs and cultures in human life which are always used as a code of ethics, connecting human beings, gathering thoughts and togetherness, and connecting human beings with nature (Daeng Hans, 2004). Humans cannot be separated from culture. One form of culture can be seen from the economic view, cultural, and so on. Ceremonial performances depict obedience and disguise of something magical with symbolic feelings and equipment (Syamsuddin, 1984).

Similarity, a study conducted by Van Genep (Koentjaraningrat, 1998) discusses ritual of rejection ceremonies. Van Genep argued

that the ceremony/ ritual procession of Tolak Bala Melayu Serdang universally based on its role as a social activity among fellow citizens. According to him, people will experience a decline in the spirit of social life that usually occurs at the end of the hunting, harvesting, or fishing season. The ritual is used when human labor seemed to have been used in the past season, so that in facing each new season people have to restore a new spirit of life in their souls.

Tolak Bala ritual of Malay Serdang Bedagai Regency, Kuala Lama village, is a tradition of local knowledge that has been there from time immemorial and is the ancestral heritage. The focus of this research is to study the change of function and meaning of Tolak Bala ritual in Malay Serdang Bedagai, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, Sumatra Utara Province. Through the Ethnographic method, this study examines the ritual of Tolak Bala performed in Kuala Lama Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency. Ethnography activities are conducted to collect data on a shift in the meaning and function of Tolak Bala ritual of Malay Serdang. The ritual of Tolak Bala of Melayu Serdang Bedagai is a folklore with characters that combines elements of verbal and non-verbal (Yet, 2002: 195). It is also found a kind of presentation that reflects a state of mind, desire, and feelings of the performer to get closer to God. Offerings are also a form of symbolic discourse used as a means for spiritual application; it relates to supernatural things so that the subtle beings that transcend human power do not interfere. With offerings, there is an effort to reject various disturbances of subtle spirits; it is hoped that the spirits will be tamed and can help human life (Suwardi Endraswara, 2003).

As one of the oral traditions, the ritual of Tolak Bala, in terms of history and the development of the times, is not immune to change. The increasingly global touch of modernization in the life of society led to the emergence of pragmatism in interpreting ritual realities, such as practical characteristics, efficiency, and continuity. The implications of modernization on the field of education and livelihood in the District of Pantai Cermin caused the change.

The implementation of traditional and religious ceremonies based on the existence of supernatural powers is still done by some groups of people in Indonesia, either in the form of death ceremonies, thanksgiving ceremonies or slametan, rituals of Tolak Bala, ruwatan, and so on (Alie, 2015). These ceremonies have become a tradition and have been a part of most people's lives that pass down from generation to generation by their ancestors to future generations as a legacy to be continued and defended.

The existence of various rituals and traditions performed has strengthened the existence of religions adopted by the people as various traditions related to the life cycle grow. It becomes strong as it is traditionalized and rooted in the heart of community life, where its core teachings are already included in community traditions.

There are at least six interests and functions of local policy when used in conflict resolution. First, as a marker of a society's identity. Second, the adhesive element (mixed aspect) reduces the expertise, religion, and beliefs of the community. Third, local wisdom is not embarrassing but inward nature. Fourth, local wisdom gives color to togetherness as a community. Fifth, the ability of local wisdom to change the thought patterns and reciprocal relationships of individuals and groups and to lay them on a fundamental foundation. Sixth, local wisdom can encourage the process of understanding and participation of community members while minimizing the elements that damage the unity and integration of the community.

This ritual is a tradition that has been established since the time of the ancestors and passed down to generations to be nurtured. Ritual of Tolak Bala is intended to describe the process, as well as the transition of functions, meanings and symbols in Tolak Bala ritual of Malay Serdang Bedagai. Malay Serdang Bedagai believe that this ceremony is very influential for their welfare. Not only that, the Malay Serdang assume that this ritual has a positive and beneficial impact on their daily lives.

Implementation of Tolak Bala ritual in the Malays in Kuala lama Village, Serdang Bedagai District of Pantai Cermin concern the researchers. There is cultural heritage of Malay Serdang Bedagai undergoing the process of transformation of their cross-cultural foreign Malay land, until there is a change in the function and meaning of a ritual procession of Tolak Bala in Melayu Serdang Bedagai. In addition, the performance of rituals reject the assertion that the practice involves Melayu Serdang Bedagai evil spirits. Up to now there are still many Malays Serdang Bedagai directly or not adopt a general ritual of Tolak Bala. There is an opinion that ritual practices that are not in line with the teachings of Islam and are very contrary to the teachings of the Quran and Hadith must be adapted. Prohibition of ritual practices is contained in the following hadith: "Stay away from all new things (in religion), because all new things (in religion) are heresies, and all heresies are heretics" (HR Abu Dawud, no. 4607; Tirmidhi, 2676; Ad Darimi; Ahmad; and others from Al 'Irbadh bin Sariyah).

(H Sulasman, 2013) argues that culture is a complex that encompasses knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, abilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of society.

Every human action as a whole is called a culture, and there is an element of culture. Thus, one of those elements is the belief system that contains rituals (Koentjaraningrat, 1998). Rituals are in many ways interpreted as religious or semi-religious ceremonies in society. Ritual is a form of creation or organization of a relationship between man and his invisible human relationship, man with others, and man's relationship with his environment. They believe in spirits, invisible things refer to rituals that cannot be excused.

(Koentjaraningrat, 1998) states that a ceremony is a system of activities or actions regulated by customs or laws that apply in a society related to various events that usually occur in the society concerned. The performance of ceremonies is often associated with community beliefs called ceremonies or rituals. Ceremony is a principle that results in a clear reciprocal relationship in society, although it adds that in customary ceremonies the term "repulsion" is between Gods or other spirits (Tarimana, 1993).

It is based on the beliefs held by society. It is this belief that encourages humans to perform various actions that seek contact with the supernatural world or the rulers of nature through religious ceremonies and other traditional ceremonies that are perceived by society as critical moments, bringing supernatural dangers, suffering, and disease to humans and plants (Koentjaraningrat, 1998). The implementation of ceremonies as a culture is still done by most groups of people in Indonesia, whether in the form of rituals of death, thanksgiving or to resist evil, and so on. These ceremonies have become traditions and part of daily life in a society inherited from their ancestors to the next generations.

Through Tolak Bala ceremony, people in Kuala Lama Village of Serdang Bedagai get together and create the values of harmony, as well as mutual cooperation. The embodiment of tradition cannot be separated from the role of the supportive community to assert that society has a value system that governs the order of life in society. The cultural value system is an abstract concept that lives in the minds of most people. The cultural value system serves as a guide for human attitudes and behavior in life, so that it serves as the highest behavioral system (Muhannis, 2004: 4).

Cultural rituals that have a function in the life of society will last a long time and will not be easily lost if cultural rituals continue to be used and preserved in the life of society. Humans as social beings cannot walk alone and they depend on each other. These social needs can be channeled into the traditions of the people, and not all traditions continue to survive over time because the traditions that will survive are only those that always and continue to be developed by the people as described above. Therefore, the tradition of Tolak Bala carried out by the residents of Kuala Lama Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, can survive because the locals continue to use and maintain it.

Based on the above background, the researchers are interested to discuss the socio-cultural influences on "Change Function and Meaning of Tolak Bala Ritual of Malay community in the district of Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province". Having identified the problem, the following are the limitations of the problem or the scope of the study in this research: (1) This investigation was conducted specifically in Kuala Lama Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia; (2) This study focuses on the changes and the continuity of the function and meaning of Tolak Bala ritual of the Malays Serdang Bedagai in Kuala Lama Village; (3) This study discusses the effect of discussing the function and meaning of the ritual of Tolak Bala in Kuala Lama Village.

Ritual of Tolak Bala is now an activity or ritual that needs to be preserved as a form of cultural defense that is almost extinct. This ritual is included in some oral folklore. Partially, oral folklore is folklore whose form is a mixture of oral and non-oral elements (James Danandjaja, 2002). In the implementation of customary ceremonies, *sesaji* or offerings are required. Sacrifice is an actualization of the thoughts, desires, and feelings of the performer to draw closer to God. *Sesaji* is also a symbolic discourse used as a means for spiritual negotiation to supernatural things. This is done so that the subtle beings above human power do not interfere. By symbolically feeding the subtle spirits, it is hoped that the spirits will be tamed and help human life (Suwardi Endraswara, 2003).

As one of the oral traditions, the ritual of Tolak Bala, both in its history and the development of its time, it does not seem to be immune from changes. The increasingly globalized touch of modernization in people's lives has resulted in the emergence of pragmatism in understanding the essence of rituals, such as practicality, efficiency, and sustainability. The implications of the touch of modernization on the field of education and livelihood in the District of Pantai Cermin caused these changes.

In line with the above problems, this study aims to reveal the "change functions and meanings of Tolak Bala ritual in The Malay Serdang Bedagai, Pantai Cermin District" namely: (1) Knowing the function and meaning of Tolak Bala ritual of Malays in Kuala Lama Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province from ancient times to the present; (2) Analyzing the factors that cause changes in the functions and meanings of Tolak Bala ritual of Malays in Kuala Lama Village; (3) Knowing conservation efforts to preserve the ritual of Tolak Bala of Malays Serdang Bedagai.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative methods are research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of written or oral data from the people observed. Based on the philosophy of rationalism, a valid science is obtained from intellectual understanding and the ability to argue logically. In empirical reality, it is singular (similar to monism positivism), but that reality is not interpreted from a perspective (Muhadjir, 2000). This research was conducted in Kuala Lama Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province.

Qualitative methods allows researchers to organize, critique, and clarify interesting data. Thus, this qualitative research guides researchers to obtain previously unexpected findings and build a new theoretical framework (Suwardi Endraswara, 2003). Type of data in this research is qualitative in the form of texts, symbol and elements related to the Tolak Bala ritual in the Pantai Cermin District and supported by quantitative data. Qualitative data were obtained from the results of observations and interviews. The data used were data on Tolak Bala rituals. The primary data source is the informants. Sources of secondary data are document of study of Tolak Bala ritual in the form of the results of research that have been done by other researchers, books, and also reports related to the Tolak Bala ritual in Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra. The determination of informants in this study was done through several networks, such as information from the community and cultural figures in the study location that had been chosen carefully according to numbers of certain criteria. Instruments in this study are guidelines of interview and cards of data. The research collected data by means of triangulation, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and document/text or mantra study. The process of data analysis began by reviewing all the data acquired through different sources: observation, interviews, recordings, and field notes.

Results and Discussion

Functional structural analysis of Tolak Bala includes context of cultural, situational, social, and ideological. The context of cultural of organizing rituals also affects the texts of mantra used, for example, mantra in traditional medicine rituals will be different from the one for the ceremony of death. The difference is due to the purpose/intention in carrying out the procession in question. In traditional medicine rituals, the text of the mantra used contains a request to God Almighty and or occult beings/spirits asking for long life, sustenance, health, strength, a better life, and to be protected from all obstacles/misfortunes when ritual participants seek necessities of life. That way, we have knowledge that the mantra texts in ritual differ, which depend on what ritual.

Social context refers to social factors that influence or the use of text. These social factors relate to gender differences, ethnicity, social class, age, and so on. The context of social referred to in this study is the people who are involved in a ritual, either as actors, managers, connoisseurs, and even the supporting communities.

The context refers to the use of text, time, and place. Description of the time situation context will result in the implementation and an oral tradition performance in terms of time division that encompasses: time to cast the spell, place of chanting, events in casting spells, performers in casting spells, performer in reciting the healing spell, only the handler can recite the ritual of tolak bala for the treatment of illness, equipment for casting spells, clothes to cast repellent spells for treatment, how to cast the spell.

Researchers have found several chanting functions and the utilization of material elements in the rituals of traditional medicine.

Spell Reading Function

In the ritual of Tolak Bala rejecting the disease, the mantra acts as a connector between God and people who do the ritual, to connect with Prophet Adam and Prophet Muhammad pbuh, as well as with angels, and as a liaison suggestion with occult beings. Chanting the mantra has several

purposes: (1) praying so that Allah SWT can answer the wishes of participants of Tolak Bala ritual, namely to be given health, smooth sustenance, long life, strength, and being protected from all danger and anger; (2) for Prophet Adam and Prophet Muhammad to witness the wishes of participants of the ritual; (3) for the angel to record all the wishes of ritual participants; (4) to prevent the occult beings from becoming a barrier for the participants of ritual in living their lives.

Material Elements

The symbols in question are tools to symbolize 12 months in a year, as a means of offering/sesaji to occult beings, symbolize a fortress that safeguard ritual participants against disturbances (from evil spirits), as a liaison symbol between the participants of ritual and Nabi (Prophet) Adam, symbolize the holiness of Prophet Adam and Prophet Muhammad, as a sign for the ritual to be performed or not, and as a symbol of the use of equipment that used to seek for and gain necessities of life.

System of value in the Ritual of Tolak Bala treatment of Malay Serdang Bedagai.

Social Values. This type of Tolak Bala ritual to cure the disease can be attended by the representation of a family/one family member. That kind of situation can be considered as a factor that help create a value order within the scope of a family that allows the formation of cohesiveness and cooperation between all family members. If a group of people gather together to reach the same goals, it can create emotional bonds between them and bring out an awareness of the importance value of other people for themselves.

Social value is related to various forms of social relations, responsible attitudes toward groups, affection, true attitude, and willing to participate and sacrifice in social life. Social value will appear in someone if he/she feels the need for the importance of others for his/her existence.

Pedagogical and Psychological Values. The arrogance shown by a group or an individual is caused by many factors, but the point is that he forgets about the nature of himself as a human who has shortcomings. Humans who are aware of this, make various efforts to become big-spirited beings and recognize others as equal to themselves by means of formal and non-formal education.

In the non-formal path, an individual is initially introduced to his/her family and community environment where he/she lives. Through these environments, he/she recognizes and learns the order of values that has to be firmly held as an individual in the life of a society. Social activities can help a person understand this value, one of which is ritual of traditional healing. As explained in the previous chapters, the owner learns the tradition about God's power over His creatures and other abstract powers (beyond the normal/five human senses) in the ritual. Thus, the owner of the tradition cannot be arrogant. Pedagogical values are also called educational values; they provide ideas/inspiration for fulfilling human needs by learning from the applied principles or rules.

Religious Value. In the ritual mantra of Tolak Bala, religious values can be seen in the following excerpt of the mantra: "It's not me who has an antidote, Allah bargained Muhammad Bargain, the king of the Prophet Kabul thanks to *Lailahaillallah Muhammadurrasullulah*".

Lines 1 and 2 in the mantra fragment above describe a spell caster that his legs and arms do not have the power to grant the request of the person who reads it. The one who has that power is God Almighty. Line 4 is a request that is conveyed by the mantra reader to God Almighty as the ruler of nature who can grant human requests.

The sound of this mantra provides evidence that the ritual mantra of Tolak Bala to cure the disease in Pantai Cermin Malay community does not only contain requests related to the needs in daily life, but also requests for ritual participants to be given strong faith. This can cause a human being to always obey the teachings of his religion.

Intellectual Value and Intelligence Value. Although the ritual of Tolak Bala is originally from the Malay community of Pantai Cermin that cannot be separated from the belief in the existence of occult beings, the ritual also requires the owners of tradition to logically understand the position of God and occult beings in their lives. The occult being in the ritual is positioned not as the sole determinant of the wishes desired by humans, but only as a supporting substance.

Thus, the aspects contained in the ritual of rejecting reinforcements include social aspects, religious aspects, and economic aspects.

Shift in the Meaning and Function of the Tolak Bala Ritual in Pantai Cermin Malay Serdang Bedagai. According to the commodification theory, the shift in the meaning and function of the ritual of Tolak Bala leads to a sequences of actions, manufacture products related to demand that induce the commodification of Tolak Bala ritual, functions of its production, variants of shapes made by the handler and product marketing to consumers of the Tolak Bala ritual.

Some people in Pantai Cermin still believe in the ritual of Tolak Bala for the treatment of diseases through the handler, as the task of treatment is entirely entrusted to the handler from generation to generation. Richard Winstead clarified this situation through statements in his book "The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi" as follows.

Pawang is the name for magicians in general for the Malays of Peninsula, and bomor are those who practice medicine only; while in Perak and Kelantan, the ordinary magician (pawang) and the shaman (belian) are called by different names (R. O. Winstedt, 1952).

The Process of Making Tolak Bala Rituals

In this case, the researcher reveals the production of the ritual of rejecting reinforcements in terms of the products of the offerings consisting of white water, yellow bamboo, sulfur, white cloth, young coconut, turmeric, kaffir lime, ingu, salt, pepper, jerangau, bananas, jadam, incense, white rice, and various flowers.

Aspects of the Causes of Changes in Function and Meaning of Tolak Bala Ritual

There are several aspects that cause the ritual of rejecting reinforcements to change in function and meaning, including an open attitude, mass media, creativity of the community, and the economy as described in the following table 1.

Table 1
Aspects of the Ritual of Tolak Bala that Change in Function and Meaning

Number	Item Changes	Past	Now	Aspects that change
1	Transformation of Values	Do not prohibit	democracy	Open attitude
2	Invention	monotonous	various	people's creativity
3	Globalization	There isn't	growing	mass media
4	Livelihood	-Farming -fisher	Varied	Economy

Factors of Shifting in Function and Meaning of Tolak Bala ritual for disease treatment include: (1) External Factors, Technological and Media Factors, Educational Factors, Economic Factor; (2) Internal Factors, that is the nonappearance of cultural transmission from old generation to young generation. The absence of knowledge of younger generation about the ritual of Tolak Bala is caused by many factors.

Traditional Factor. The impact and meaning of changes in the ritual of Tolak Bala treatment for disease in the Pantai Cermin Malay community include: (1) Social Impact, Economic Impact, and Cultural Impact; (2) Meaning, The meaning of religion, the meaning of solidarity, and the meaning of peace.

The impact and meaning of the commodification of the rejection of reinforcements ritual includes: Commercialization of the ritual of rejection of reinforcements and the disappearance of cultural identity.

Cultural Preservation. Inheritance strategy and revitalization efforts to Tolak Bala ritual as a step in the inheritance strategy carried out by the Pantai Cermin Malay community towards the existence of the ritual of rejecting reinforcements, namely in an effort to (1) empower, (2) documentation and (3) development.

Conclusions

The ritual of Tolak Bala is basically carried out in Pantai Cermin Beach Malays Serdang Bedagai which is similar to the one in Labu Beach Malays. The Tolak Bala ritual of has the purpose of getting healing treatment or strength in various medically incurable diseases. Religious ceremony/ritual is a manifested form of asking for salvation. The ritual of rejecting reinforcements has meanings and values related to the life of the marine society which in its implementation process requires a relatively long time.

Along with the times, the ritual of rejecting reinforcements underwent shifting caused by the intersection of Malay Pantai Cermin culture and global modern culture that led to shifting of ritual from sacredness to profanization. The ideology of capitalism that enters the realm of traditional values of the Pantai Cermin Malay community also influences the ideology of the Pantai Cermin Malay community for a cultural value that can be used as a commodity that is certainly worth selling so that the ritual of rejecting reinforcements has shifted, giving rise to the practice of commodification.

The commodification of the Tolak Bala ritual in Pantai Cermin Malay ethnicity is caused by the attitude of the people who are open to new things through cultural contacts that lead to acculturation, resulting in the paradigm of the community changing based on the context of modern society that uses cultural products.

Practically, this study is very useful in particular for reasons as follows: (1) re-recognizing oral traditions, especially the almost extinct spells; (2) implementing and perpetuating the local wisdom of the ancestors as the basis for survival; (3) understand the spells, especially those contained in the oral tradition; (4) this study is also useful in a social context to remember oral traditions in the form of poetry and social symbols that are often used in the ritual of rejecting reinforcements in Kuala Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province (5) (rejecting reinforcements ritual) to be used as goods/services that are worth selling.

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