

# A Commercialization of Healing Misfortune Treatment of Malay Community in Batubara District

<sup>1</sup>Sutikno

Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al Washliyah

---

## Abstract:

Malay society in Batubara District used a ritual of *Misfortune* as a healing treatment for any kind of disease. *Misfortune* is a kind of cultural treatment for asking protection from God from Misfortune condition. This study was aimed to find out the latest additional role of *Misfortune* Ritual in Malay Society. Modernization and technology have endanger the role of *Misfortune* ritual as cultural value in the life regulation of Malay Society. The worst consequence is the elimination of the implementation of Misfortune Ritual in Malay Society of Batubara District. A qualitative descriptive research design was used to find the latest progress of this one of Malay faith under the implementation of the ritual. This study found that the Ritual Misfortune is not only having a function as healing treatment which used a spell and pray but also provide packaging medicine for commercial.

---

**Keywords:** *Commercialization, Healing Treatment, Malay Batubara*

## Introduction

The traditional of healing treatment is implemented among the society of Malay in Batubara district. This culture is needs to be preserved as a form of cultural preservation. This traditional healing treatment is included in partly oral folklore. Partial oral folklore is folklore whose form is a mixture of oral and elements. The material was being used as medicine contain the value and the power of magic. The spelling and pray also as part of the ritual used in the healing treatment. The differences which is significantly interested to be discussed as scientific research finding is not only the latest function but also the modification used by the society. The original function of this healing treatment is about the part of cultural value. The latest one showed that the treatment was being used as commercial to improve the society financial and income. The condition as a solution for establishing the cultural value and modernization. The modernization was not eliminated this culture but modify it to get a better quality.

The ritual of healing treatment which include in the ritual of Misfortune needs to be preserved as a form of cultural preservation that is almost extinct. This ritual is included in partly oral

folklore. Partial oral folklore is folklore whose form in a mixture of oral and elements.

In the implementation of this traditional ceremonies a media called as *sesaji* are needed. *Sesaji* is a media contain of several kinds material such as flower, food, head of goat, etc. It would be used as the actualization of the thoughts, desires, and feelings of the performer to get closer to God. *Sesaji* is also being a symbolic discourses that are used as a means of spiritual negotiation for the unseen power. The purpose of this ritual implementation is to protect the society from the interfere spirit power. By feeding the spirit, it is expected that the spirit will be tame, and willing to help human life (Endraswara, 2003:195).

The relationship between Batubara community and the universe are quiet good in carrying out their daily lives. Therefore a good harmony between humans and nature is established so well. It can be seen from the daily routine which always be connected each other. The spiritual power also has been believed by the community.

## Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design by taking descriptive data. The object of this study was the implementation of healing treatment by

using *Misfortune* ceremony. 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 that 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: 83-84). This research was conducted in Batubara District, North Sumatra.

Qualitative methods allows the researcher to organize, critique, and clarify interesting data. Thus, this qualitative research guides researcher to obtain unexpected findings and build a new theoretical framework (Endraswara, 2003: 14-15). The type of data in this study is qualitative data in the form of text, symbols and other elements related to healing treatment which implemented Misfortune ritual in Batubara District and supported by quantitative data. Qualitative data were obtained from the results of observations, interviews. The data used were data on the process and result of the commercialization rituals. The primary data source is the informants. Secondary data sources are the document from previous research, books, reports related to the traditional healing using *Misfortune* ritual in Batubara District, 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. The location of research was selected selectively based on a number of certain criteria. The instruments of this research are interview guidelines and data cards. Data collection in this study was done by triangulation, namely; observation, in -depth interviews of document and text or spelling (*mantra*). The process of analyzing data began by reviewing all data obtained through various sources, namely interviews, observations and recordings and field notes.

### **Finding and Discussion**

The analysis of function and structure of Malay traditional healing consisted of cultural context, social context, and ideology context. The cultural context of organizing ritual is influenced by the text of *mantra* used. For example, the *mantra* (spell) used in Misfortune Ritual which is purposed for healing treatment is different from

the *mantra* (spell) used in the burial ceremony. This is caused by the differences in the objectives to be achieved in carrying out the ritual. In traditional healing rituals, the text of the *mantra* (spell) used contains a request to the Almighty God, and supernatural beings or spirits to be given sustenance, long life, health, a better life, strength, and to be kept away from all obstacles when they work. Thus, it can be understood that the use of a *mantra* text in the ritual activities depends on the type of ritual.

Social context refers to the social factors that influence the ritual running or the use of the *mantra* text. These social factors related to the differences in gender, social class, ethnicity, age, and so on. The social context in this study include the people who are participated in the ritual. The participations can be as actors, managers, connoisseurs, and even the supporting community. Situational context related to the time, place, and the use of *mantra* text. The description of the situational context related to the time situation. It will be seen in the implementation, performance of an oral tradition in terms of time division which includes: time to cast the spell, place of chanting, events in casting spells, performers in casting spells. The performer in reciting the healing *mantra* /spell is only *pawang* (the handler) allowed to recite the *Misfortune* ritual for the healing treatment of illness. The next part of situational context include the equipment for casting spells, clothes to cast repellent spells for treatment, how to speech *mantra* (the spell).

### **The elements function used in healing treatment of Batubara Malay Community**

Researcher found several functions of reciting the *mantra* and the use of material elements in malay traditional healing ritual.

#### **1. The function of reciting the *mantra*.**

In the implementation of Misfortune ritual as the traditional healing treatment of batubara malay community, the *mantra* (spelling) has the following functions; as a connector between ritual participants and God, as means of connecting to Prophet Adam and Prophet Muhammad, as a connectors with angels, as a connector with supernatural beings.

The purpose of reciting the *mantra* are; (1) it is expected that Allah SWT can grant the request of the participants of *Misfortune* ritual, namely to be

given health, smooth sustenance, strength, long life, and kept away from all anger and danger; (2) for Prophet Adam and Prophet Muhammad to be witnesses at the request of the ritual participants; (3) for the angel to record all what the ritual participants wanted; (4) It is aimed that the supernatural beings do not become a barrier to ritual participants in carrying out their lives.

## 2. Material Elements

The process of healing treatment which implement *Misfortune* ritual uses materials as the media. The materials used symbolized several meaning of life. The symbols meaning in the materials are as follows.

1. Banana: As a tool to symbolize time that 1 year consists of 12 months.
2. *Bunga rampai* (kinds of flowers): means of offering to supernatural beings.
3. *Dupa* symbolizes a fortress that protects ritual participants against outside disturbances (evil spirits).
4. *Mantra* (spell) as a liaison symbol between the ritual participants and the Prophet Adam.
5. Coconut water symbolizes the holiness of Prophet Adam and Prophet Muhammad.
6. Cigarette as a sign of well or not the ritual is being performed.
7. *Beras kuning* (yellow rice) as a symbol of equipment used to find necessities of life.

The values in the implementation of Malay healing treatment

### 1. Social Values

The traditional healing treatment which implement *Misfortune* ritual is followed by one family member. This situation is one of the supporting factors that creates a social value under the scope of the family that allows the formation of cooperation and cohesiveness between them. When a group gathers with the same goal, it can create emotional bonds among the family members. The situation will lead an awareness of the importance of other people to themselves. Social values are oriented to various forms of social relations, responsible attitude towards groups, affection, loyal attitude, and willing to sacrifice and participate in social life. Social value will appear in a person if he feels the need for the importance of others for his existence.

### 2. Psychological and Pedagogical Values

The arrogance shown by an individual or group 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 make themselves into 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 first introduced to the family and community environment in which he lives. Through these two environments, he can also recognize the order of values that must be firmly held as an individual in group life. An understanding of this value is formed through various social activities, one of which is traditional healing rituals. As explained in the previously, the ritual teaches the owner of the tradition about God's power over His creatures and other powers that are abstract (beyond the reach of the five human senses). This can allow the owner of the tradition to not be arrogant. Pedagogical values are also called educational values, they can provide inspiration or ideas for fulfilling human needs by learning from the principles or rules that apply.

### 3. Religious Value

In applying Misfortune ritual, the *mantra* (spell) used for healing treatment contain a religious value. It can be seen in the following excerpt of the *mantra*.

*Bukan aku nan punya*

*Penawar Tawar Allah tawar*

*Rasulullah Kabul berkat*

*Lailahailallah..*

*Muhammadurasulullah.*

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. But the one who has that power is God Almighty. In line 4 in the form of 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 healing treatment in Batubara

Malay community does not only contain requests related to the needs of daily life, but also contains requests for ritual participants to be given strong faith. This can cause a human being to always obey the teachings of his religion.

4. Intellectual Value and Intelligence Value

The implementation of traditional Malay healing treatment cannot be separated from the spiritual values. Malay community in Batubara district always balance the life aspect from natural atmosphere and spiritual atmosphere. It was found from the life activity uses the part of spiritual function. The *malay batubara* community having a strong faith of the ancestor spirit which taking part of caring and protecting the nature. However, this ritual also leads the owners of the tradition to use their minds to understand the position of God and supernatural beings in their lives. The supernatural being in this ritual is only positioned as a supporting substance, not as the sole determinant of the request desired by humans.

The aspects contained in *Misfortune* ritual include religious aspects, social aspects, and economic aspects. The current situation of malay traditional healing treatment is not only related to the religious aspects and social aspects, but also economics aspects. The reality showed that the community has commercialized this ceremony of healing treatment as an income. The change in the function and meaning of *Misfortune* ritual leads to a series of actions, manufacture or processing that produce products related to the demands that cause the commodification of the ritual. The production functions consist of variants of forms produced by the handler and marketing product to consumers of ritual *Misfortune* whose aimed to get healing treatment.

Some people in Batubara district still believe in *Misfortune* ritual for the treatment of diseases through the handler, as the task of treating treatment is entirely entrusted to the handler from generation to generation. This situation is also clarified by Richard Winstead's statement in his book "The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi" as follows.

The Malays of the Peninsula often use different names for magicians in general (*pawang*) and those (*bomor*) who practice medicine only, and in Perak and Kelantan different names are given to the ordinary magician (*pawang*) and the shaman (*belian*). (Winstead R, 1951:11)

There are some instruments used during the malay healing process which implement *Misfortune* Ritual. The instruments will be collected in a big plate and it will be called as *sesajian* (presenting offering). In the form of offerings consisting of yellow bamboo, white cloth, mineral water, young coconut, sulfur, kaffir lime, salt, turmeric, *jerangau*, *ingu*, *jadam*, pepper, incense, bananas, various flowers and white rice.

Malay community have changed the position of this healing treatment from cultural value into commercial value. There are several aspects that cause the change of *Misfortune* ritual function. The change of *Misfortune* ritual function and meaning including an open attitude, community creativity, mass media, and the economy, as explained in the following table.

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 changes in function and Meaning of healing treatment by implementing *Misfortune* ritual include:

1. External Factors  
Technological and Media, Educational, Economic
2. Internal Factors  
The absence of cultural transmission from the older generation to the younger generation. The absence of knowledge of the younger generation about *Misfortune* ritual

3. Tradition Factor

The impact and meaning of changes in *Misfortune* ritual of healing treatment in Malay community in Batubara District, include:

1. Impact  
Social Impact, economic impact, cultural impact
2. Meaning:  
The meaning of religion, the meaning of solidarity, the meaning of peace. The impact and the change meaning of *Misfortune* ritual include, commercialization and the disappearance of cultural identity.

### Cultural Preservation

Inheritance strategy and revitalization efforts to *Misfortune* ritual as a step in the inheritance strategy carried out by Batubara Malay community towards the existence of the *Misfortune* ritual, namely in an effort to (1) empower, (2) Documentation and (3) development.

### Conclusion

The *Misfortune* ritual is basically carried out by Batubara Malay Community who have the same lineage as *Pantai Labu* Malay community. The *Misfortune* ritual has aimed of asking for healing or strength in the treatment of various medically incurable diseases. To ask for a request for salvation, it is manifested in the form of a religious ceremony/ritual. The *Misfortune* ritual has many values and meanings related to the life of Malay community which in its implementation process requires a relatively long time.

Along with the times, *Misfortune* ritual has changes due to the intersection of local culture (*batubara* Malay) and modern culture (global). The intersection impact to the value shifting of *Misfortune* ritual from sacredness to profanation. The ideology of capitalism that enters the realm of traditional values of Batubara Malay community also influences the ideology of the Batubara Malay community itself for a cultural value that can be used as a commodity. It is certainly worth selling so that *Misfortune* ritual has shifted, giving rise to the practice of commodification.

The factors that cause the commodification of *Misfortune* ritual in Batubara Malay ethnicity are 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 according to the context of modern society that utilizes cultural products.

The finding of this study contained; (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) A social context to remember oral traditions in the form of poetry and social symbols that are often used in the ritual of *Misfortune* ritual in Batubara District, North Sumatra Region (5) *Misfortune* ritual to be used as goods / services that are worth selling.

### References

3. Barker, Chirs. (2005). *Cultural Studies, Teori dan Praktik (terjemahan)*. Yogyakarta: PT. Bentang Pustaka.
4. Daeng, Hans. (2000). *Atropologi Budaya*. Nusa Indah.
5. Danandjaja, James. (2002). *Folklor Indonesia*. Jakarta: Temprint.
6. Endraswara, Suwardi. (2003). *Metodologi Penelitian Kebudayaan*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
7. Fairclough, Norman. (1995). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
8. Giddens, A. (2003). *Masyarakat Post Tradisional*. Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD.
9. Havilan, William A, (1993). *Antropologi II, alih bahasa, R.G. Soekadijo*, Jakarta : Erlangga.
10. Hoed, Benny H. (2004). *Semiotik dan Dinamika Sosial Budaya*. Jakarta: FIB-UI
11. Koentjaraningrat. (1987). *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
12. Koentjaraningrat. (1993). *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
13. Muhadjir, Noeng. (2000). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif Edisi IV*. Yogyakarta: Rake Sarasin.
14. Turner, Bryan S. (1992). *Max Weber: From History to Modernity*. London: Routledge.
15. Winstedt, R. O. (1951). *Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi, revised ed.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.