
Research Article

Function and meaning of “Tolak Bala“(Ward off Misfortune) Ritual in Malay Serdang Indonesia

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Abstract: Annually ritual of Malay “Tolak Bala” (Ward off Misfortune) until today is still practiced in North Sumatra Coastal Area. This study focuses on this ceremony that enacted in Rural Bagan Serdang, District of Pantai Labu. Malay community here still hold the ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) every year. Malays here believe that the ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) has many roles and functions. There medicine or water from the diviner that they believe it will help to cure their diseases. There is also “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual that is implemented naturally, such as herbs from hometown to avoid disease or disorder spirits which can bring disease. Data collection, therefore, showed that the Malay society in Deli Serdang now believes that that ritual only mediation for submission to God (Allah); as a result that the highest powers of prayer in the ritual “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) will depend upon the Almighty God.

Keywords: Function and meaning, ward off misfortune, ritual, Malay society.

INTRODUCTION

Each community has a dynamic change with pass over tradition. It is seen from the ancient societies. The changes in society could be about social values, social norms, patterns of organizational behavior, the structure of social institutions, the layers of society, power and authority, social interaction and so forth.

Social change is defined as the changes that occurred in the structure and functioning of society. Social change within the community will also be followed by a change in culture. This is because people cannot be separated from the culture (Matondang, 2015; Turner, 1987).

Gannep (1909) has reviewed the ritual functions in society. Ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) in Malay community is included in most oral folklore. Partly oral folklore is the folklore whose shape is a mixture of verbal and nonverbal (Danandjaja, 2002: 195). On the implementation of ceremonies required offerings. The offerings are the actualization of thoughts, desires, and feelings of actors to get closer to God. The offerings are also a symbol of discourse that is used as a means for spiritual negotiations on the things unseen. This is done so that the spirits above human strength is not intrusive. By feeding the symbolic to the spirits, the spirits are expected to be docile and willing to assist human life (Endraswara, 2003: 195).

Varieties of cultural richness that grows and develops in a society known, trusted, and are recognized as important elements capable of reinforcing social cohesion among citizens. At least, there are six of significances and functions of local knowledge used in conflict resolution. First, it is as a

marker of community identity. Second, the adhesive elements (cohesive aspect) cross residents, interreligious and interfaith. Third, local wisdom was not coercive, but rather an awareness from the inside. Fourth, local knowledge give color togetherness of a community. Fifth, the ability of local wisdom in changing the mindset and the interrelationships of individuals and groups and put it on fundamental grounds. Sixth, local knowledge can encourage the appreciation, participation while minimizing the destructive elements of solidarity and community integration.

As one of the oral tradition of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual; both in historical as well as the development of time, it seems Malay community cannot be escaped from the tradition in the social changes. A touch of modernization in an increasingly globalized society life attitude led to the emergence of pragmatism in defining the nature of ritual, such as practicality, efficiency, and sustainability. This ritual is a tradition which is existed since the time of our ancestors and passed on to future generations to preserve. This study aimed to describe the procession, as well as shift functions, meanings and symbols in the ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) in Malay community in the District Pantai Labu, Deli Serdang, and North Sumatra Province. Ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) in Malay society, especially in Pantai Labu District is attracted the attention of researchers. Here, there is a change in the function and meaning of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual in Malay society. In addition, the implementation of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual in Malay community ritual meaningful to expel spirits, is still a lot of practice which indirectly is still practiced by the Malay society at large, while

the practice is very contradictory, or contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith.

Based on the above background, the authors are interested to discuss the socio-cultural conditions such as what affects the "Function and Meaning of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual in Malay community in the District Labu Beach, Deli Serdang, and North Sumatra Province”. Sources of data will be obtained from the keepers and cultural ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual in the implementation of the Malay community in the District Pantai Labu, Deli Serdang, and North Sumatra Province.

THE “TOLAK BALA” (WARD OFF MISFORTUNE) RITUAL

Malay community has known the understanding of animism and dynamism since time immemorial. They believe most of supernatural beings which some are good and some are evil. Supernatural beings they make good companions, while for the evil, they try not to disturb the public. For that they perform various ceremonies, in order to remain a good friend, otherwise the evil will not disturb or disastrous. This understanding is based on the belief that supernatural beings can bring happiness and can also be disastrous. Therefore, they are trying to maintain "good relations" with the spirits among others by performing certain rituals or by complying with the provisions of "abstinence forbids" set by customs.

Malay community held a “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual in anticipation of some of the diseases caused by disorders of supernatural beings. To avoid the disease as an alternative, the Malay community to hold offerings buffalo head and a goat to ask for help in order not to be disturbed. As the implementation process of the Malay community to give the offerings presented by implanting buffalo head in places that are considered to have magical aura (the residence of supernatural beings), as the laying of the offering could be done in the border villages or in places that are considered sacred.

In addition to use buffalo head as a grain, Malay community also install talisman at home and also in the border village as a protector of the village. This protection is based on history when it was known by the Malay society that uses no genie allowed to do evil to others.

But as a talisman to prevent the evil was not entered into the houses, a handler provides protection that tackles the weaknesses of the other evil handlers can be deceived (not seen houses that will be targets of crime) with the talisman. While the talisman in the village is used to fool the evil in order to make visible at all villages that will become target market.

““TOLAK BALA” (WARD OFF MISFORTUNE) RITUAL” RITUAL AFTER THE MALAY SOCIETY CONVERTED TO ISLAM

Islam as the majority religion of Malay community has changed the basic concepts in the implementation of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual. The “tolak bala” (ward off

misfortune) ritual from the familiar animist tradition laced dynamism into a series of ceremonies smelled the teachings of Islam. So at the time of ritual Islam series can be seen the similarities and difference, as the following table:

Table 1. The Comparison between Animism Dynamism Influence and Islam Influence in “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual

No	The Understanding based on Animism Dynamism	The Understanding based on Islam
1.	Buffalo head planted in sacred places, or at the border village of the District Pantai Labu chart.	Buffalo head and bones were thrown into the sea for fish meal and fish with a distance of 10 km northwest of herbal food already smelled.
2.	The implementation of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is asked to help supernatural beings as maintaining the village and protect the Pantai Labu, especially rural communities Bagan.	The implementation of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is not only having recourse to supernatural beings alone. But asking for a help to Allah to protect villages and communities especially the village of Bagan.
3.	The implementation of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is based on many diseases result from the evil supernatural beings.	The ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is made to continue the message of the ancestral Malay society Pantai Labu, from being exposed to diseases caused by the crime of supernatural beings.

The beginning of ceremony of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual belief is in the power of the Malay community beyond human beings. Such creatures are able to influence, change and destroy human life. So that men should keep these creatures from being angry. Although man has been trying to keep up, but errors can occur due to negligence. The creature is called 'ghost of sea' (Interview with Mr. Suyuti in Desa Bagan Serdang District of Pantai Labu Bedagai dated October 21st, 2016) 'ghost of sea ' live and reproduce in the sea.

The fish of the sea can live and breed on the observation and command of 'ghost of sea'. The fertility of the oceans is dominated by the 'ghost of sea'. Similarly, weather problems and the waves in the ocean are based on 'ghost of sea'. Communication between man and the 'ghost of sea' is very important, especially about the fishing. Myth of 'ghost of sea' is related to life before humans occupy coastal areas. Fishes and sea creatures recognize 'ghost of sea' as their king. Willpower is the king's command. The fish in the ocean feel awkward life. When the man came and without realizing their

owners taking direct sea fish, 'ghost of sea' who knew the incident was very angry. Fish cooked in a 'pot' fly and returned to the sea. For months, the fish in the sea is not captured the public of Pantai Labu, until almost everyone in the coastal is experiencing hunger, even including death. At the time of burial, it is turned into fly fishing and back to the sea.

THE TERM OF “TOLAK BALA” (WARD OFF MISFORTUNE) RITUAL

According to the term of “ tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual which consists of two words, namely 'disaster' and 'Rejection', 'Prevent' means the refusal; efforts to avoid, deter, while 'disaster' means the danger came suddenly. So “ tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual ' means an attempt to avoid the danger that comes not from men but supernatural beings and forces of nature which endanger the safety and health or that cause a reduction in revenue.

The spells is refuse the disaster and done individually, in certain areas in Pantai Labu is carried out jointly with the involvement of the various elements of society. For example, the tradition of the shows performance of 'Sea Herbs' located in the village of Bagan District of Pantai Labu. The traditional ceremony is an effort to shore embodiment gratitude of the society in general the fishermen on the sea overflowing obtained results and events held each year. This tradition is basically almost the same as in several other regions in Indonesia. In the event of sea herbs, the diviner recited spells with incense. After that, the diviner come down to sea and sprinkled leaves that have been chopped small. On the other hand, there is a tradition exhaust buffalo heads and bones into the sea prepared by the community that contains the buffalo head, flowers, and food. Sea herb is escorted by about 20 big boats out to sea. The diviner is thrown away the buffalo head and bones into the middle of the sea and reciting mantras. Then do the prayer by religious leaders of many fish and fishermen in order to prosper.

THE SYMBOL OF “TOLAK BALA” (WARD OFF MISFORTUNE) RITUAL

The symbol is a sign which contains a meaning. Meaning that reveal is representing an abstract sense, broad and universal. There is symbols can be seen in “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual. Tok Sokbi (75 years) as the handler of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual explains the meaning of the symbols of offerings “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is known as the following discussion:

1) Eaglewood

Eaglewood serves as a symbol invites the ancestral and supernatural creatures.

2) Yellow Sticky rice

Yellow Sticky rice as an offering likened the creature eating a meal like human eats the rice.

3) Animal Offerings

Animal offering is a dish of food to a supernatural being. In

this case, the animals are offered in covering his head, guts and meat. In essence, it is considered as an animal is courtesy of the ancestors (supernatural beings).

4) Flour Fresh

Flour fresh is symbolic of protector of the home, the intent of this fresh flour when the house has been powdered bargain then it is difficult to disrupt or supernatural beings enter the house.

The ingredients of fresh flour that is, as a means of plain flour, from the trees: While becoming a tool for a splash of fresh flour is lime cucumber and lime shampoo if combined into a lotion. Kasai itself is made from finely ground rice and is colored white, red, and yellow. These colors symbolize white as bone, red as meat, yellow as a protector. The essence of these colors is to protect from various dangers.

5) White Clothe

White clothe is the equipment made of fabric consisting of a wide variety of colors, namely red as a symbol of the community, white as a symbol of an employee, black as a symbol dubalang, yellow as a symbol of the kingdom. Safekeeping sling is a device that is coupled to kencono yarn made of palm leaves of kepa. Between the white cloth and plank sling is as protector of the home.

6) Limes

Limes as a sacred symbol is able to clean remove and eliminate the disease. In the event starting reinforcements lemon lime essentially as a symbol banish disease inherent in the home or in human beings.

The treatment of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual for the individual may be an escort, such as wearing a talisman or amulet in the body. Talisman and amulets, which is done in a way, of the verses of the Qur'an to the metal, are believed to have the energy to fend off from reinforcements that may befall. Treatment evasive and opt out is to shy away from anything. Equally there touching or doing something. Talisman and amulets used was protective of power or force that can bring disaster. For examples of individual treatment of “ tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual are touched the dish that did not get eaten, hail before urinating on the roadside, slipping the grass behind the ears when walking in the rain hot, knowing hunch about the "when" can avoid the plagues that could impinge on certain pre-determined period. Festivity where prayer is read starting reinforcements is characteristic of religion that has infused in Malay society. Festivity held in case natural disasters, and also, if something goes wrong. Here the concept of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is based on the concept of gratitude. Sometimes the white pulp (coconut milk) and red (Malacca Sugar) is a dish for the feast of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual earlier. The possibility of the opposite color symbolizes the division of the two reinforcements (pesky) or good fortune. In the old belief, the concept of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual to avoid bad luck or an accident is instituted to some rituals such as herbs village, and offering

ritual in the beach.

When the disaster is occurred, it is more of a ritual performed scheduled. The ceremony was to take care of the welfare of the village medicine residents from unwanted disasters; while honoring the beach or puja beach is commonly done by fishing communities is the guarantee that the plague of any kind can be avoided. Consolidation of elements of the old beliefs with Islam demands is often seen when the two elements are mixed. Prayer and read verses of the Qur'an during a wedding feast was held, in addition to imposing a prohibition (taboo) as well as for owls and sowed salt in every corner of the village. The purpose of the ceremony is to refuse reinforcements to the disaster sail to villagers chart Serdang pumpkin beach districts and possessions they have. In Malay wedding ceremonies are also held ritual bath “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune). Ritual bathing is a “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) bride with flower water 5, 7, or 9 varieties of flowers to make it look fresh and radiant. This activity should be done before the Asri prayer. Bathroom “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) sometimes also called a flower. The purpose of this bath is perfect purity, increasing radiance, and stay away from any disaster.

In traditional proverbs mentioned: Flower bath or shower of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is not just to scent the body but to the soul clean saint, far from jealousy Essence bath of disaster prevent reject any disastrous reject all the wretched refuse of all venomous so away resentment so away all the evil that away the curse and damnation so that Satan not approached so that the devil is not attached to that conclusion begged and intention to be saved the next world. One ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) that we usually encounter again in Bagan Serdang, Pantai Labu is “*sesemahan*” event/ supernatural being.

Semah is a ceremony with supernatural nature that dwells in a region. This activity is carried out by the experts called Bomo (witch), with supernatural beings do “*penyemah*” event watchman no longer interfere with human activities that are in the area. One of the traditional leaders of Malay, in Bagan Serdang, *sesemahan* stated that ritual performed by bringing offerings of food staples such as rice, eggs, coconut and other rituals. When starting reinforcements, only a few of community was allowed to see. It is feared the sort possessed by spirits because it's not strong souls. Usually children and women were not included in the ritual *sesemahan*. Ritual *sesemahan* in Bagan Serdang is usually performed during the manufacture of the bridge. Malays believe that there are spirits guards at the bridge. By performing the ritual *sesemahan*, the Malays hope spirits bridge watchman does not disturb the people who pass through the bridge. Ritual *sesemahan* is also done wither when their vehicle crashed into an animal or when the car carrying the bodies of people wilt. It aims to disappear pesky and also eliminates the fear for the rider.

The ceremonies of *Upah-upah* ritual concept is the same with the purpose of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual. *Upah-upah* ceremony is performed by the sheikh or the sacred

area of the village. Based on the results of the interview with one of the village leaders, Bagan Serdang, Pantai Labu District said that *Upah-upah* ceremony is done to evoke the spirit that has lost someone. But at this time the ceremony of *Upah-upah* is not only done to people who have lost the spirit of life but also to every person to life more calm and excited or passionate. In the *Upah-upah* ceremony usually served foods or materials provided such as saffron rice, chicken of the tail, and burn incense.

In the ceremony of *Upah-upah*, it is implemented a chicken that has been baked and accompanied by saffron rice inserted into a tray or large plate, underneath saffron rice and roasted chicken above it. After that, the sheikh or the sacred offerings in that area was raised above the incense had been burned. Then the offerings were played over head while reading a prayer or advice. Based on the function and purpose, the ritual of *Upah-upah* can be divided into 4 types as follows:

1. *Upah-upah celebration* is achieved, namely *upah-upah* is implemented as a form of gratitude because they ideals, intent, expectations, or demand is reached. For example, *Upah-upah* for children who are already achieving success in work, succeed and graduate from school, or successful in other businesses.
2. *Upah-upah* to heal the sick, it is the ceremony that are conducted as a form of gratitude for convalescents expectations have been achieved. The ceremony of this type is generally executed someone who recovered from certain chronic diseases.
3. *Upah-upah* survived, that wages are implemented as a form of gratitude for survivors of a natural disaster or disturbance of people. For example, the ceremony is for someone who is escaped from the disaster.
4. Special *Upah-upah*, that ceremony are held when someone through a certain phase of life. For example, for someone who was circumcised, married, or sworn assume a position.

The management of *Upah-upah* is for a big event series includes the following activities:

1. All of the guests, including speaker of *Upah-upah*, commonly called the *pengupah* is entering the implementation of activities. Generally they sit in the circle or rectangular.
2. Then the people who will be *Upah-upah* are asked to sit cross-legged in the middle of the circle or take part circle, facing the audience.
3. Material in this ceremony which had been prepared placed in front of people who will be hired by closed shawl.
4. *Upah-upah* is entered in the big event, the procession led by a protocol that can communicate well to convey intent and desire in question.
5. The event was opened by the protocol and then people who have a home or livelihood convey a few words to the audience with the intention of communicating the purpose of the event.
6. Next is the main event, namely the delivery of the sentence

of *Upah-upah*. *Sipengupah* (a master of ritual) takes a standing or sitting position to deal with people who would be *Upah-upah*, and materials were among them. The position of *sipengupah* is standing or sitting beside people who would be *Upah-upah*. It depends on the condition of the room.

7. *Sipengupah* chanting words, it is usually a verse of the prayer and the advice. The ceremony of *Upah-upah* is growing rapidly until at Desa Serdang District Pantai Labu so it has become a culture in the area.

CONCLUSION

It concludes that “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is a way to avoid the misfortune or evil or calamity. The “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual is still held in the village of Bagan Serdang District of Pantai Labu, Deli Serdang majority ethnic of Malay. In the execution of this ritual of “tolak bala” (ward off misfortune) ritual, there is sharing of ritual bath or *sesemahan* which aims to deny or escape from calamity or disaster. Ceremony of *Upah-upah* is an event with the aim to generate excitement in live. Based on the purpose and function of *Upah-upah*, it is divided into four types: 1. *Upah-upah* celebration 2. *Upah-upah* to heal sick 3. *Upah-upah* survivors 4. Special *Upah-upah*.

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