

Symbolism and Cultural Significance of Hena House in Tasik Serai Village, Bengkalis District, Riau Province

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Abstract. This study seeks to elucidate the symbolic meanings and interpretations associated with the henna house dance performed within the village of Tasik Serai. The research methodology employed in this study adheres to a qualitative approach, specifically employing descriptive analysis. The henna house dance typically involves an odd number of dancers. The dance incorporates the symbolic attributes of shawls and bale-bales adorned with flowers and eight candles, which are arranged in a circular pattern around the bale-bale. Notably, a single candle is positioned above the top of the bale-bale. The research methodology employed in this study adheres to a qualitative approach, specifically employing descriptive analysis. The findings of this study reveal that the candles burning within the bale-bales serve as a symbolic representation of fire, embodying the inherent nature of fire as a consuming element. This symbolism is further interpreted as a protective measure, safeguarding the bride and groom from potential dangers.

Keywords: Serai Lake Village, Bale-Bale, Meaning, and Symbols.

INTRODUCTION

Narwoko and Bagong assert that the value or significance of a symbol is contingent upon the specific individuals or groups that utilize it, a concept that is frequently encountered within the cultural milieu of a region (2004:17). Generally, meaning can be interpreted as a connection between the subject and the symbol. Essentially, meaning is primarily established through the relationship between communication symbols (symbols) and the human mind of its users (objects) (Vardiansyah, 2004:70-71).

The henna house dance incorporates specific meanings and symbols. Initially, the Rumah Inai dance was employed in traditional Malay ceremonies by the groom's family to deter potential reinforcements that could disrupt the harmony of their household the following day. This dance utilizes the attributes of a shawl and bale-bale, which are crafted from iron and adorned with flowers and three candles that are illuminated around the bale-bale. The dance is performed either in the yard or within the house, directly in front of the groom, who sits on the aisle. The dance is executed in succession, lasting approximately 30 minutes. The aesthetic appeal of this dance bears implications for both positive and negative brides. According to the Tasik Serai village community, its presentation before the bride and groom is considered auspicious, while its absence can lead to discord and dissonance between the couple.

Royce (1977; 75-76) posits that the maintenance of dance can be achieved through a dual perspective: first, as a product of creativity, and second, within the cultural context of society. Dance as a product is a visual performance that can be studied based on its elements of formation, which are intertwined in a unified style, and external factors that support it, such as makeup, clothing, and musical accompaniment. Second, dance in a cultural context can be analyzed as a contribution to expressing community events within the social relations of dance. This analysis is particularly relevant to the aesthetics of the Henna house dance.

The Henna house dance is typically performed by three, five, or seven male dancers who have recently returned (adolescents) with an odd number of dancers, a tradition observed within the Tasik Serai village

community. The selection of male dancers is rooted in Malay culture, which holds the belief that it is impolite for women to perform in public. Additionally, the Inai house dance incorporates external musical accompaniment. The attire worn by the dancers consists of a cino scissors shirt, resembling the current koko shirt. The color of the shirt and pants is not determined by the residents of Tasik Serai Village, Pinggir District, Bengkalis Regency. Similarly, the attire worn by musicians can be yellow, green, black, or other colors. The dancers wear a kupiah on their heads, which can be white or black.

At the inception of its emergence, the Inai house dance was employed within traditional Malay ceremonies by the groom's family to deter potential reinforcements that could disrupt the tranquility of their household the following day. (Interview with Mr. Adnan on April 30, 2022). This dance incorporates the attributes of shawls and bale-bale, crafted from iron and adorned with flowers and three candles, which are illuminated around the bale-bale. The dance is performed either in the yard or in front of the groom, who sits on the aisle. The dance is executed in succession, lasting approximately 30 minutes.

This dance is presented for the two brides who originate from the Malay tribe. Consequently, the dance elders within the village possess the autonomy to preserve the aesthetic and artistic integrity of the Inai house dance. The art of dance is defined as the movement performed by dancers for the observation of the senses of sight by connoisseurs. The aesthetic appeal of the Rumah Inai dance is evident in its form. The movements incorporated into the Inai house dance include the prayer movement, the shawl movement, the shawl movement while lifting the bale-bale, and the closing prayer movement. Within the bale-bale property, henna is placed, which is subsequently collected by the dancers and presented to the bride and groom upon the conclusion of the Inai house dance performance.

METHOD

The research approach employed in this study is a qualitative approach known as descriptive analysis. As stated by Arikunto (2002, p. 10), qualitative research does not involve numerical data collection or interpretation. Mulyana (2004, p. 150) further emphasizes that qualitative research seeks to achieve an authentic understanding of the subject being observed. Additionally, Spradley (1997, p. 7) highlights that qualitative research typically employs patterns, including:

1. Repetition: The research process can be repeated to gather comprehensive data.
2. Note-taking: Field data is recorded for subsequent processing and analysis.
3. Analysis: The recorded data is analyzed as needed to gain insights.

The aforementioned expert's thinking is applied to observe the Henna house dance in the village of Tasik Serai, Bengkalis Regency. This research was conducted repeatedly at the research location to ensure the collection of relevant data.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, wherein the data are described through the activities of observation, gathering information, and depiction. The aesthetic research object of interest is the Henna house dance in the village of Tasik Serai, Pinggir District, Bengkalis Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research findings are presented comprehensively and in accordance with the study's objectives. The Henna house dance, a traditional dance originating from the village community of Tasik Serai, Pinggir District, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province, holds significant importance in the village's cultural heritage. It is performed during the bride's wedding ceremony, serving as a symbolic gesture to ward off calamities and maintain harmonious household relations between the bride and groom. The dance is executed by five male dancers, who skillfully manipulate shawls and bale-bale props.

Prior to the commencement of the Henna house dance, the elders, traditional leaders, and the village head engage in a prayer. Subsequently, the village head assumes the leadership role, lighting a large candle in a separate plate and subsequently seven candles placed within the bale-bale.

For the inhabitants of Tasik Serai, a lit candle holds immense symbolic significance during the traditional wedding ceremony. The Malay community in this village holds the belief that the candle on the plate should not extinguish during the performance, as it is interpreted as a harbinger of ill fortune for the bride and groom. This can manifest in various forms, such as divorce, difficulties in conceiving offspring, and so forth. However, a particularly concerning scenario arises when the candle in the bale-bale

extinguishes, symbolizing the withering of the marital bond or the dissolution of the household. This observation was corroborated through an interview conducted with Mr. Adnan on May 5, 2022.

The burning candle in the bale-bale serves as a symbolic representation of fire, believed to emanate from the source of combustion. It is often interpreted as a means of warding off potential dangers that may approach the newlyweds (Interview with Mr. Syarif, May 5, 2022). Subsequently, a dancer commences a performance while adorning a shawl. The dancer then offers a salute to the groom and proceeds with the dance, utilizing the bale-bale. The dancer incorporates a Worship movement, a gesture of respect for the groom executed with a bowed body movement, followed by a Waving movement. This movement involves extending both hands wide open while rocking while swaying with a shawl. Foot movements are stomped in rhythm with the strains of kembango and laughter. This dance typically lasts for approximately two minutes, after which other dancers join in, usually performed by at least three individuals.



Figure 1. The village head, elders and traditional leaders reading a prayer before the dance starts
(Photo : Nora, 2022)



Figure 2. The elders of the traditional organizers are making fresh flour at the Inai House/bale-bale
(photo: Nora, 2022)



Figure 3. The traditional organizers are burning candles in the bale-bale
(photo: Nora, 2022)

Effendy posited that the optimal approach to inheritance implementation should be guided by practical examples that can be readily utilized by the community. This principle is encapsulated in the Malay adage:

Syarak wajib diajarkan

*Adat wajib di turunkan
Pusaka wajib ditinggalkan*

*Berguna pusaka tahu maknanya
Berguna warisan tahu manfaatnya*

*Yang pusaka dipelihara
Yang harta dijaga
Yang milik di titik- titik
Yang warisan dimanfaatkan (2003, hal. 144)*

The contents of the betel leaf and its meaning are:

Mr. Adnan explained the following symbols:

- 1) Betel: Represents low self-esteem and a tendency to prioritize the needs and well-being of others.
- 2) Chalk: Symbolizes a pure and sincere heart. However, under certain circumstances, it may become more aggressive and angry.
- 3) Gambir: Its bitterness embodies fortitude and tenacity of character.
- 4) Areca nut: Symbolizes the offspring of an individual with good character, high rank, and honesty.
- 5) Tobacco: Symbolizes the heart of someone who is steadfast and willing to make sacrifices in all aspects of life.

The meaning of plain flour:

The underlying purpose of the plain flour program is to convey a message of congratulations.

1. Ingredients:

- 1) Cleaned Rice: A Symbol of Purification
Cleaned rice, which undergoes a thorough physical and mental purification process, represents the removal of impurities and decay. It symbolizes the cleansing of both the body and the mind.
- 2) Turmeric Rice: A Symbol of Generosity
Turmeric rice, soaked in turmeric water and then dried, embodies the concept of unbroken sustenance, endless lineage, and endless marwah. This dish is often associated with generosity and abundance.
- 3) White Rice: A Symbol of Purity and Prosperity
White rice, on the other hand, is associated with purity and prosperity.
- 4) Aromatherapy and Its Symbolism
Water infused with a mixture of ground rice, patchouli leaves, jenjuang leaves, and pandan leaves, along with burning coals and incense placed on a plate, is believed to promote heart conditioning. Ground henna is considered a symbol of harmony, while patchouli leaves and jenjuang leaves, commonly referred to as an antidote to demons, are believed to repel evil and instigate the devil.

Malay traditional expression in Tenas Effendy:

*Yang disebut tepung tawar
Menawar segala yang berbisa
Menolak segala yang menganiaya
Menjauhkan segala yang menggila
Mendinding segala yang menggoda
Menepis segala yang berbahaya*

2. The process of implementing the Henna house dance:

- 1) Before the Rumah Inai dance performance, the traditional stakeholders and the village head convene face-to-face. The village head presents tepak betel as a customary requirement for the opening words. The purpose of this gathering is to seek permission to commence the Rumah Inai dance performance, a series of traditional Malay wedding ceremonies held in the village of Tasik Serai.
- 2) Traditional stakeholders also burn incense, which is placed in a bowl believed to possess the essence of fire, symbolizing the ability to dispel distress. The traditional leaders continue reciting prayers while holding plain flour ingredients in the bowl.
- 3) The dancers commence their performance, utilizing scarves as props. They previously made a gesture of respect to the groom and customary officials.

- 4) Upon the first dancer's movement, they proceed to sit cross-legged, awaiting the traditional head to light a candle placed in the bale bale/House of Henna. The candle serves as a symbol of illumination, as elucidated by W. Dillistone, who emphasized the significance of candles, torches, and lanterns as lighting devices and their role as divine symbols.
- 5) Once all candles are lit, the dancers offer a salute to the groom and continue their dance performance within the bale bale/House of Henna.
- 6) As the dancers move with the shawl and bale bale, the traditional holders begin offering fresh flour by throwing or sprinkling turmeric rice towards the bale bale/henna house. This gesture is a request for divine blessings, seeking protection for the bride and groom from the Almighty.

In an interview, Wayan Dibia emphasized the transformative power of dance, asserting that it can create an environment conducive to social interaction and entertainment. Dibia further explained that dance performances encompass diverse meanings, with entertainment being one of them.

In light of this, the Henna house Dance, which previously served as a deterrent to reinforcements, has evolved into a form of entertainment. This transformation is evident in the enthusiastic participation of the local community, including spectators and dancers involved in the Henna house Dance. While the Henna house Dance primarily functions as entertainment, it retains its spiritual significance, particularly in the form of the Rumah Inai dance, which is deeply rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs.

Beyond its entertainment value, the Henna house Dance serves as a powerful tool for fostering community cohesion within the Tasik Serai village. The local community's participation in the Henna house Dance demonstrates their willingness to extend invitations to neighbors, relatives, and even individuals from non-Malay ethnic backgrounds, promoting a sense of camaraderie and friendship.

3. The form of presentation of the Rumah Henna dance performance:

1) Dance moves

According to Soedarsono (1997:94), motion is a rhythmic bodily movement executed at a specific location and time. Consequently, it can be characterized as a limb of the human body, such as fingers, wrists, feet, head, hips, and so on, that can move independently.

The movements of the Rumah Henna dance are characterized by their simplicity, as they are performed sequentially. Unlike walking, the steps do not involve bending over and stretching both arms, resembling the wings of an eagle. The movement lacks a precise count and is synchronized with the rhythm of laughter and bebano. Consequently, each dancer develops a unique style of movement. The Rumah Inai dance comprises four distinct parts. The first part involves a prayer movement, followed by movements performed with the shawl, and then movements performed with the shawl while lifting the bale-bale. The final movement concludes with a prayer motion.

2) Dancer

The Rumah Henna dance performance typically lasts approximately 30 minutes and involves a group of adult male dancers, typically ranging from 3 to 7 individuals (odd numbers). Odd numbers are considered auspicious in Islamic teachings, as exemplified by the practice of praying five times, which yields a reward of 27 times, and the fact that there are seven days in a week and nine planets in the solar system. This suggests that Malay customs are deeply rooted in Islamic principles. (Interview with Mr. Adnan, a traditional elder) The dance is performed in succession, with two dancers concluding the performance. The selected dancer must be an adult male over the age of 25 who possesses emotional control and can execute the Rumah Inai dance effectively. As explained by I Wayan Dibia, adult dancers possess greater mental maturity and more stable emotions, enabling them to exercise better control during dance performances.

3) Music

Sumaryono categorizes music in dance into two distinct components: internal and external music. Internal music originates from within the dancer's body or limbs, while external music is produced by musical instruments played by musicians to enhance and support the dance performance.

4) Clothing

The attire worn by dancers and musicians adheres to a specific set of rules. The color and pattern of the clothing and pants are strictly limited to black, yellow, green, or red. The Teluk Belanga shirt, characterized by its checkered weasel neck pattern, is a distinctive feature. It is a loose-fitting shirt with chest buttons. The shirt and pants can be paired with a black headband.

Dancers also wear a side cloth made of songket cloth, which is worn from the waist to the knee. The color of the side cloth is not specified, and a sarong can be used as a substitute if songket cloth is unavailable..

5) Property

In the house dance, henna utilizes the properties of the shawl and bale-bale. The selection of the shawl's color is arbitrary, as its primary function is aesthetic appeal. Yellow is commonly chosen due to its association with Malay grandeur. Bale-bale are containers or spaces filled with henna-decorated flowers and candles.

6) Time and place of presentation

The Rumah Inai dance performance is held at the bride's residence, specifically in the living room. The dancer stands in front of the groom, and the audience, seated on the room's periphery, observes the performance. This dance is typically performed during the evening hours.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Henna house dance, formerly a traditional dance performed in front of the groom by Gegading (companion), was a custom in Tasik Serai Village, Pinggir District, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. It was believed to have adverse effects on the bride and groom. Traditionally, it was performed during the candlelight show in the bale-bale, and if someone died or did not survive, it was thought to bring unhappiness to the household, potentially leading to divorce or the absence of offspring.

However, the dance has evolved in its function, now serving as a tribute to the groom, akin to a king's day celebration. The dance involves an odd number of male dancers, typically three or more, who perform sequentially. The dance concludes with two dancers performing simultaneously. The bale-bale property is utilized in this dance. The attire worn by the Chinese/koko scissor dress is of utmost importance, as it is distinct from Malay clothing. Permission is required from the dance elders, traditional leaders, and the village head for the performance of this dance. In the Rumah Inai dance, when both bride and groom are Malay, the traditional customs are followed. However, in cases where only one of the bride and groom is Malay, specific adjustments may be necessary to ensure the dance's cultural integrity.

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