

Islamic Symbolism in the Marriage Customs of the Mandailing People: A Study on Religious Meanings and Rituals

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Abstract

This research aims to explore Islamic symbolism in the practice of Mandailing traditional marriage. This study uses a qualitative method with a research location in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency. Primary data were obtained through interviews with village heads, traditional leaders, religious leaders, bride and grooms, and local communities, while secondary data were obtained from relevant literature. The results of the study show that traditional symbols such as *panaek gondang*, gates, *ulos*, *burangir*, and *upa-upa*, reflect Islamic values such as sincerity, compassion, prayer, blessings, and social and spiritual ethics in married life. This symbolism shows the harmonization between customs and sharia, thus making Mandailing traditional marriage a space for integration between cultural values and Islamic teachings.

Keywords: *Simbolisme; Islam; Pernikahan Adat; Mandailing*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi simbolisme Islam dalam praktik pernikahan adat Mandailing. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan lokasi penelitian di Desa Ampung Padang, Kecamatan Batang Natal, Kabupaten Mandailing Natal. Data primer diperoleh melalui wawancara dengan kepala desa, tokoh adat, tokoh agama, pasangan pengantin, dan masyarakat setempat, sementara data sekunder diperoleh dari literatur yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa simbol-simbol adat seperti *panaek gondang*, *pintu gerbang*, *ulos*, *burangir*, dan *upa-upa*, mencerminkan nilai-nilai Islam seperti keikhlasan, kasih sayang, doa, restu, serta etika sosial dan spiritual dalam kehidupan berumah tangga. Simbolisme ini menunjukkan adanya harmonisasi antara adat dan syariat, sehingga menjadikan pernikahan adat Mandailing sebagai ruang integrasi antara nilai-nilai budaya dan ajaran Islam.

Kata Kunci: *Simbolisme; Islam; Pernikahan Adat; Mandailing*

Introduction

Symbolism in Islam is an inseparable element of the religious life of Muslims. It is not just an outward representation, but it holds a depth of spiritual, social, and moral meaning. Within the framework of Islamic teachings, symbols have the power to connect human beings with transcendental dimensions, strengthen social cohesion, and instill ethics in the order of social life. Symbols are not only communicated through verbal language, but also through ritual acts, sacred objects, and procession structures that are passed down from generation to generation. In this context, symbols become a living language—bringing religious teachings to life in the daily space of the people (Nasution et al., 2021).

In the realm of marriage, Islamic symbolism is manifested concretely in the various stages and elements that accompany the procession. A marriage contract, for example, is not just a contractual statement between two individuals, but a sacred bond that contains theological, social, and legal dimensions. The phrase "ijab qabul" pronounced in the contract is a symbol of the divine agreement, which links the bride and groom in the framework of the sacred covenant before Allah. The marriage sermon contains moral and spiritual messages that remind couples of their shared responsibility in navigating the household. Meanwhile, the dowry given is not just a form of material gift, but a symbol of respect for the dignity and dignity of women in Islam (Putra, 2021).

Other symbols are the prayers and scriptures recited during the wedding procession. The reading not only serves as a complement to the ceremony, but also carries the meaning of asking for blessings, guidance, and protection from Allah SWT. Thus, each symbolic element in Islamic marriage has a layer of meaning that is interconnected between divine and social values. These practices not only show compliance with the sharia, but also reflect the way Muslims ground religious teachings in the context of their culture and social relations (Dewi et al., 2022).

The Mandailing traditional wedding tradition is one example of local cultural practices that show the close intertwining between Islamic religious rites and local customs (Herawati et al., 2023). Although based on customary norms, the Mandailing wedding procession places Islamic teachings at the heart of the series of ceremonies. Islamic elements such as *ijab kabul*, the recitation of holy verses, and marriage advice from religious leaders are inseparable elements of the entire traditional procession that is carried out from generation to generation.

The uniqueness of Mandailing traditional weddings lies in the harmonious integration between Islamic symbols and traditional symbols. The use of *ulos*, *marsomba* (ritual of respect), and the pinning of traditional titles to the bride, are combined with the solemnity of the implementation of the Islamic marriage contract. This reflects an adaptive cultural transformation, where religious values are lived in a distinctive symbolic form and inherited through social and family structures (Ritonga & Roisuddin Ritonga, 2024).

Several previous studies have discussed the relationship between Islam and culture in marriage practice, such as Azhari's (2018) study on the Islamization of traditional traditions in Sumatra, and the Nasution study (2020) which traced symbolic changes in Mandailing traditional wedding ceremonies. Another study by Lubis and Siregar (2022) reviewed the meaning of sacredness in the use of the ulos symbol as a marker of family blessing in the context of Islam. However, there has not been much research that specifically highlights the exploration of the meaning of Islamic symbolism in the practice of Mandailing traditional marriage in depth and contextual.

This research aims to explore the values of Islamic symbolism present in the Mandailing traditional wedding procession, as well as understand the meanings contained behind the practice. This study wants to explore how Islamic symbols are articulated through traditional rites and how their spiritual and social meaning is understood by the Mandailing people in the context of marriage.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to explore Islamic symbolic values in the practice of Mandailing traditional marriage in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency. Primary data in this study was obtained through *in-depth interview techniques* with various key informants, namely Village Heads, traditional leaders, religious leaders, couples who have married according to custom, and community members who are considered to understand well the structure and symbolic meaning of Mandailing traditional marriage.

Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained through literature studies of various relevant written documents, such as theses, theses, dissertations, scientific journal articles, books, and information contained in credible websites. All of these secondary data are used to enrich perspectives and support field findings in understanding the historical, theological, and cultural context of the Mandailing traditional marriages studied.

The data analysis technique is carried out by the data triangulation method, which is by comparing and consolidating information obtained from various data sources and data collection methods. This step aims to improve the validity and reliability of the research findings. The analysis process includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Results and Discussion

The Wedding Process and Traditional Symbolism of Mandailing

According to Nasution, the traditional marriage ceremony of the Mandailing tribe consists of eighteen stages (Haidir & Hezbollah, 2025), namely:

1. Stages of *Manyapai Boru*

Before the traditional Mandailing wedding ceremony is carried out, it would be better if *the bayo pangoli* (male) knows the figure of *boru na ni oli* (female) that he wants to love or more precisely is still in the process of approaching a woman, as for the Mandailing term *manyapai boru*. A man who expresses his feelings to a woman he likes is called a *manyapai boru*.

2. Boru Mangaririt Stage

Sinaga said that *mangaririt* comes from the word *irit* which means to choose, so *mangaririt* means to choose a potential life partner. Parents will invite close family to talk about marriage when two lovebirds have loved each other and are planning to get married. Next, the envoy is appointed to visit the girl's parents' home if the family congregation can accept or approve of the child's intentions.

3. Patobang Hobar or Patua Hata Level

After *the mangairirit boru* there are no problems in its implementation, then the next stage is *patobang hobar*. The purpose of *the hobar* is to continue the conversation to the previous goal. The male family will come back to the woman's family home to ask and propose to the child from the female family. At this stage, the courtship between boys and girls has been officially carried out.

4. Manulak Sere Stage

Manulak sere is handing over a shipment from the man's family to the woman's family. The amount of the delivery is determined at the *hobar patobang* event. In the process of *manulak sere* the male family will bring the agreed *boban trunk* to the woman's family home. In addition to *the boban stems*, they also bring *silua* (souvenirs) in the form of *beautiful tungkus* (wrapped rice) with leaves and side dishes. This shows generosity towards the woman's family in the hope that the goal will be achieved. In this *manulak sere*, usually the male family brings *silua* and *the beauty of tungkus* along with the side dishes only with a tightly closed rantang so that it is easy to carry and not spill.

1. Stage of Eating Disorders

Before the marriage contract, parents and family members feed *boru* which will be made which is called *mangalehen mangan pamunan* (farewell meal). At the beginning of this feeding event, the bride-to-be invited her playmates to eat together. Eating a parting means not only parting outwardly, but also leaving youth and family responsibilities behind and forming one's own family. In accordance with the development of the times, the *mangalehen manganese* event was enlarged, not only attended by the family but also included elements of *daliha na tolu* and *harajaon* in the event and the food served was the same as that served at *pangupa*. What distinguishes the *mangalehen mangan* event from the *mangupa* ceremony is that the food served must be eaten until full. That's why this *mangan mangalehen* ceremony is also called *mambutongi mangan* which means eating as much as you want.

2. Marriage Contract

After the *mangalehen mangan pamunan* ceremony is over, *boru na ni oli* (women) should not be taken back to the paranak village before undergoing the marriage contract. The marriage contract will be carried out one day after the *mangalehen mangan pamunan* event. So, the paranak group has to wait patiently for the marriage contract ceremony.

3. Level of Pasahat Mara (Surrender of Safety)

According to Nasution, at the *pasahat mara* (handing over safety) event, *bayo pangoli* (groom) and *boru na ni oli* (bride) sat in the *pantar back and forth*. After they were advised, all their luggage was placed in the middle of the *pangkobaran (pantar bolak)* which was interpreted as *pasahat mara* (handing over safety) *boru na ni oli* and luggage to *bayo pangoli* and his family (was full responsibility).

1. Stage of the Boru Massacre

After the *pasahat mara* ceremony was over, a woman who had been proposed officially changed her status from her father's family to her husband's family. Therefore, she was made or officially departed to her husband's family. *Horja pabuot boru* is a ceremony carried out to make this departure. This *horja* is carried out in the place of a woman's family whose size depends on the status and ability of her parents.

2. Tahap Mangalo-Alo Boru Don Manjagit Boru

After *bayo pangoli* and *boru na ni oli* arrived at *bayo pangoli village* in Mandailing Godang, they were greeted with an event called *mangalo-alo boru*. If the bride and groom come from far away with a vehicle, it is not immediately dropped off in front of the house, but must be paraded approximately 500 meters before arriving home. They were greeted with a traditional welcoming procession consisting of drums, pencak silat, yellow umbrellas, spears, swords, and rows of the groom's family to the door.

3. Marpokat Stage Haroan Boru

At the *bayo pangoli family's house*, the event is called *haroan boru*. On the other hand, on the other hand, the *Boru na ni oli* event is called the *Boru Festival*. The male family (*suhut*) invites all family members to *marpokat* (deliberation) before the appointed day to hold *horja godang* (traditional party). In the *marpokat* (deliberation) *Suhut* said that he intended to carry out the *horja godang* and hoped for help from all parties so that the party could take place well. This *marpokat* explains who enters the *mangalap boru* group, who receives, who is responsible for consumption, art, invitations and other things related to *horja*. Then the *Pataon Stage of the Customary Rulers and the Sisolkot Commune*. Long before this eye, the *suhut* party had invited the traditional kings and their entire families known as "*patoan tondi dohot badan*". They perform *manyurdu burangir* which means giving betel nut as a sign that this traditional invitation will be carried out on this *horja*. For one family, this invitation is called the *sabagas*.

4. Panaek Gondang Stage

Gondang (drum) in Mandailing is not only *gondang tortor*, but there are also part-time gondang *Part-time gondang* is used to enliven the party

and *gondang tortor* is used for welcoming *boru* and *manortor*. Then the *Ni Horja Eye Stage* is a party at the *bayo pangoli* (male) house. *Uning-uningan* (drums) are sounded after the guests start arriving. Kings who came in turn were invited to the *manortor*.

1. The Stages Of Bringing The Bride To *Tapian Raya*

After the completion of the *traditional markobar* event, before the bride and groom were hired and given titles, a *marudur* (procession) was held to go to *Tapian Raya* to perform the *marpangir* ceremony for the bride and groom. Bathing and *bathing* symbolically to wash away the time of girls and young people. After that the *Mangalehen Gorar Stage* is to give a title to show that the couple has given up their youth and lived a family life. This is the name that will be used to call the person concerned, especially during traditional ceremonies.

2. The Stage of *Mangupa* and Teaching *Poda*

Mangupa is to give words of hope to the bride and groom by asking Allah SWT that they are healthy, happy, and given good and halal sustenance during their life in this world, as well as being given good offspring, and giving advice to the two bride and groom which is called *teaching poda*.

3. Tahap *Mangoloi* in the game

Mangoloi na loja is a communal meal (serving the tired) which means serving those who have worked hard with all their energy and mind to complete the feast. *Mangoloi na loja* can be done in the same place for both men and women. Currently, *mangoloi na loja* can be said that this joint meal event is the dissolution of the committee and a thank you for all the hard work of the family in the implementation of *horja godang*.

4. The Stage of *Marulak Ari*

Marulak ari is a visit to the home of the parents of *boru na ni oli* (bride) for the first time after all the traditional party ceremonies are over. *Marulak ari* is usually held a week after the party. The noble values contained in the implementation of traditional ceremonies are symbolically expressed as mandates and messages. This value can be used as a reference and guideline for the bride and groom as well as their families and the community around them. Traditions and ceremonies become mere ceremonies or even grand and elaborate ceremonial systems if one does not try to understand the deep and sublime meaning behind those symbols. In the end, the procession and ritual are just an art performance.

Symbolism and Meaning of Mandailing Wedding Traditional Rites Islamic Perspective

The following are the symbols used in the Mandailing traditional wedding process (Nst & Lubis, 2024), namely.

1. *Panaek Gondang*

One of the important traditional traditions in marriage is the *panaek gondang* at the traditional marriage ceremony in Mandailing, which is carried out as a symbol to give encouragement and advice to the bride and groom. In addition, *panaek gondang* at the traditional wedding

ceremony in Mandailing is the main suggestion for relatives to convey their prayers and hopes so that the newlyweds live happily and safely when entering the marriage gate. In line with the principle of *mawaddah wa al-rahmah* in Islam. The accompaniment of gondang music is a medium to convey advice and prayers, as well as marriage sermons in Islam which contain advice on virtue and prayer of blessings.

2. Gate

At the *siriao* (traditional marriage ceremony), this gate is made in front of the yard of the house. This gate usually consists of two bamboo pieces decorated with young coconut leaves with the inscription *horas tondi madingin sayur matua bulung*, which is a prayer and hope that the event and all those present will be given blessings, safety, glory, welfare and longevity. reflects the spirit of *barakah* in Islam, which is to ask for goodness and safety for all processions and invited guests.

1. Kain adat (out)

According to the Batak proverb "*Ijuk pangihot ni hodong, Ulos pangihot ni holong*" which means if the palm tree binds fronds on the stem, then ulos binds affection to each other. The Mandailing people consider ulos as a sacred symbol because it is a representation of blessing, affection, unity, and communication. Ulos woven cloth is always used in every Mandailing traditional ceremony. The Islamic concept of the importance of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* in the household. The use of ulos as a symbol of affection is a manifestation of the value of unity and mutual respect in the marriage bond, according to the principles of *ta'awun* and *ukhuwwah*.

2. Burangir (betel leaf)

Burangir is very important in the Mandailing custom because it shows that the work carried out is according to custom. To invite customary kings or hold customary assemblies, *burangir* is required. In the traditional language of *burangir* it is called *napuran*. in line with the importance of intention and pleasure in Islam. Just like an invalid marriage contract without *ijab qabul*, the use of *burangir* symbolizes social legitimacy that strengthens legal and moral aspects.

3. Upstairs

Upa-upa refers to cooked food that is stored in a certain container. Each foodstuff symbolizes a certain variety of meanings of hope for the person who gives it. In addition, the *upa* is used as a prop for traditional marriage ceremonies. This *upa-upa* food ingredient has the following symbols: White rice. White rice is considered a symbol of planning and a sign of sincerity. Rice requires a long process and hard work to get to the plate. Starting with waiting for a good month to sow seeds, hoeing, planting, weeding until harvesting, and pounding rice into rice to be used as rice. White is a symbol of sincerity.

Chicken eggs are the king of *pangupa*. In cooking, both *pangupa na menek* (small *mangupa*) and large *mangupa* eggs must be present. The egg is encased in the skin, and the contents are white and yellow. The egg whites protect the yolk completely. The eggs are boiled first (3 eggs)

and then the skin is removed. Eggs are used as a symbol of prayer to pray for the soul and body to remain united, safe and healthy. The yolk represents gold. If you want to taste pangupa eggs, you must be with the yolk, and when you take the yolk, keep it from falling so that you can get a lot of sustenance.

Salt (*sira*) is a symbol of strength. Water is a symbol of sincerity. In doing something, you must have a clean and sincere heart. Fish is a symbol of dynamics and unity. Shrimp as a symbol of life strategy, its character is a forward and backward movement. Back-and-forth movements are only valid under the most favorable circumstances and conditions. After the free-range chicken, the chicken always crows to wake people up to carry out dawn prayers and make a living.

Conclusions

The traditional practice of Mandailing marriage contains religious values and narratives that are in harmony with the principles of Islamic teachings. This harmony is reflected in traditional symbolism which is full of spiritual meaning and the rites of religious ceremonies carried out during the wedding procession. Symbols such as ulos, burangir, and the form of upa-upa, not only function as part of cultural traditions, but also represent Islamic values such as compassion (*rahmah*), responsibility, sincerity, and blessings (*barakah*). Meanwhile, rites such as panaek gondang and the giving of prayers are concrete forms of integration of religious values in local cultural practices. Thus, Mandailing traditional marriage is a form of harmonization between ancestral traditions and Islamic teachings in forming a household that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*.

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