



Semiotics of ritual: Cultural meaning in Javanese traditional wedding symbols

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ABSTRACT

Symbolism utilizes symbols to convey a deeper meaning beyond their literal interpretation, which is vital in various cultural practices. In Javanese weddings, symbolism is deeply embedded in various ceremonies and rituals, each containing a deep meaning. These symbols reflect Javanese society's values, beliefs, and traditions, emphasizing harmony, unity, and a sense of tolerance. This study aims to describe and explain the symbols of Javanese traditional weddings in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency. The findings reveal that the Javanese traditional wedding in Pandansari Village consists of three main stages: pre-wedding, the wedding, and the post-wedding ceremony, each with its sub-stages. The pre-wedding ceremony consists of three processions, the wedding has three processions, while the post-wedding ceremony has only one. Moreover, there are more sub-processions with their meanings and philosophies among the processions. Based on the limitations of this study, future research is expected to expand the scope of analysis by examining more symbols from other traditional wedding ceremonies in Javanese and different cultures, and analyzing the meanings of these symbols to gain a comparison and a deeper understanding.



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1. Introduction

Indonesia is the largest archipelago, stretching from Sabang to Merauke, and it is home to a diverse range of cultural tribes, including the Aceh, Batak, Betawi, Dayak, Sundanese, and Javanese tribes. Every cultural tribe has its own local wisdom. Akhsan et. al. (2022) state that local wisdom is knowledge based on the experience of the community from generation to generation. This cultural diversity enriches Indonesia's cultural heritage, making it a distinctive and alluring nation. Additionally, the local wisdom of each tribe plays a significant role in preserving the environment and promoting social harmony. Local wisdom is a distinctive feature of cultural elements. Local wisdom is often considered a product of the ancient period (Trisiantari & Sakti, 2020). Purbandari (2021) explained

that local wisdom serves as the basis for a society to establish normative patterns that manage and organize its social and cultural life system. Local wisdom refers to the knowledge, values, and traditions held by an ethnic group, which are typically passed down from one generation to the next and are closely tied to the group's social way of life. Local wisdom has its own uniqueness; one example is Javanese culture (Aristiyanto et al., 2023). Sholeh et. al. (2019) states that the region has uniqueness and local wisdom, such as folk songs, regional food, traditional houses, traditional dances, traditional ceremonies, and one of the local wisdom still preserved by the Javanese tribe is the traditional wedding ceremony.

The Javanese wedding ceremony is an essential cultural event in Java, Indonesia. The ceremony has deeply rooted traditions and customs that reflect the rich cultural heritage of the Javanese people. Priyatiningih (2023) explained that Javanese weddings are known for their intricate rituals and adherence to age-old traditions. In addition, Wahyuningtyas et. al. (2024) explained that Javanese wedding ceremonies are more than mere unions of two individuals; they are a fusion of families, a reflection of ancestral beliefs, and a demonstration of respect for the intricate societal hierarchy that governs Javanese life. Moreover, Print et. al. (2022) explained that traditional Javanese weddings are rich in cultural heritage and symbolism, with each ritual and ceremony holding deep meaning within the broader context of Javanese culture. In addition, Fahrian & Farani (2023) mentioned that symbols can take the form of verbal expressions and non-verbal data, such as symbols. Moreover, Javanese traditional marriage is also inseparable from various rituals that have meaning in each symbol, such as *Pasang tarup* or *terop*, *Siraman*, *Midodareni*, *Ijab ceremony*, *Panggih*, or *temu manten*.

Understanding the significance of Javanese wedding ceremony symbols is essential, not only in efforts to preserve and record Javanese cultural heritage, but also in fostering an understanding and appreciation of Javanese culture. Preserving and recording cultural heritage is crucial for safeguarding traditions from extinction. This recording and preservation can also be a reference for future generations in understanding history and cultural identity. In addition, efforts to foster an understanding and appreciation of Javanese culture can be made by increasing awareness of the traditions that are applied in everyday life. Thus, Javanese culture will remain relevant and preserved, especially in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency.

Pandansari is a village in the Poncokusumo Sub-district, Malang Regency, East Java province. The people of Pandansari Village are mostly descendants of the Tengger-Javanese tribe. This can be seen from the fact that most residents of Pandansari Village use the Tengger-Javanese language in their daily interactions, in addition to other languages. However, many teenagers in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency, are only familiar with the process of the Javanese traditional wedding ceremony and believe that it is merely a custom in marriage, without understanding the meanings and symbols contained in each stage of the ceremony.

Several studies on Javanese wedding ceremony traditions have been conducted, and they have discussed different perspectives. One of the studies was the one carried out by Jumino (2019) entitled "Symbolic Meanings in Marriage Ceremony of Javanese Culture (Semiotic Analysis)". In the study, he mentioned that the Javanese wedding ceremony consists of various symbolic processions during the ceremony. The ceremony starts from wedding preparation, *pasang dekor*, *siraman*, *potong rikmo*, *adol dawet*, *midodareni*, *ijab kabul*, *panggih*, *balang suruh*, *wiji dadidahar kembang*, *sungkeman*, *sindur mayang*,

timbang, tukar cincin, until the wedding reception. Each procession has its symbol and meaning.

Meanwhile, Sutikno et. al. (2022) in their research entitled “Java Traditional Community Wedding Ceremony Tradition in Bandar, Bandar Sub-District, Simalungun Regency,” it is mentioned that Javanese traditional wedding tradition in Bandar generally consists of eleven processions, namely *Peningsetan, Saserahan, Pasang tarub* or *tratag, Malam lamaran, Kerik-an, Ijab kabul, Temu manten, Lempas sirih, Injak telur (wijidadi), Sungkeman* (Muassomah et al., 2022), *Tepung tawar*, and *Marhaban*. The tradition of Javanese ceremonies in Bandar differs from the wedding traditions in Central Java because several traditions or processions have been abandoned.

This study examines the significance of each symbol in the Javanese traditional wedding ceremony, particularly in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency. The analysis focuses on the sequence of the event procession, the symbols used, and the meanings contained therein. In addition, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning of symbols in enhancing readers’ comprehension of the context, messages, and values conveyed through Javanese traditional wedding symbols in Pandansari Village. The findings are expected to serve as a valuable reference for researchers interested in exploring linguistic studies, particularly semantics, within the context of Javanese traditional wedding ceremonies.

2. Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative research design, utilizing primary data sources, including observation and direct documentation, in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency. Additionally, this research utilizes secondary data sources from literature and previous studies. The analysis was conducted by identifying symbols that appear in each procession, such as objects or actions. The symbols were then analyzed for their meaning, both denotatively and connotatively, by considering the cultural context of the local community. This analysis employs both semantic and cultural approaches to comprehend the values embedded in each symbol. Finally, the findings are interpreted to show how the symbols in the Javanese traditional wedding ceremony reinforce cultural values such as purity, harmony, responsibility, and respect for tradition.

3.1. Javanese Wedding Ceremony in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency

The meaning of symbols in traditional Javanese weddings, as discussed in this study, encompasses symbols used in a series of events, including the pre-wedding ceremony, the wedding day, and the post-wedding ceremony. The pre-wedding ceremony is a series of activities or ceremonies carried out by the couple before the wedding is officially held. The wedding is the main event where the wedding procession is officially held. Meanwhile, the post-wedding ceremony is a series of events that follow the completion of the entire wedding procession.

3.1.1. Pre-Wedding Ceremony

The Pre-Wedding Ceremony is a series of processions performed before the official wedding. Apart from being a technical preparation, this ceremony contains symbolic meanings that reflect

cultural and spiritual values, strengthening the relationship between the two families and preparing the bride and groom for married life. The pre-wedding ceremony consists of three series of events: *lamaran* (engagement), *pasang tarub* or *terob* (tent decorations), and *mudun manten* (reaffirming the readiness of the bride and her family).

Lamaran (Engagement) is an official procession in which the man asks for the woman's willingness to marry. The East Javanese community believes the *lamaran* or engagement tradition is a tradition before marriage, and the East Javanese community must follow the traditions in their neighborhood (Alifah & Harianto, 2023). The *lamaran* (Engagement) is the beginning of the commitment to marriage and is usually witnessed by extended family and community leaders. In this process, there is a symbolic handover in the form of *seserahan*, which consists of personal and household items as a symbol of responsibility and readiness to build a household. The *lamaran* procession has three stages: *srah-srahan* (giving goods to the bride), *peningsetan* (ring exchange), and *gethok dina*.

Srah-srahan (giving goods to the bride) procession is part of the *lamaran* (Engagement), where the man hands over items to the woman's family. The contents of *srah-srahan* (giving goods to the bride) can include clothes, jewelry, rice, coconuts, and money. Each item has a symbolic meaning, such as prosperity, fertility, and hope for a prosperous life for the bride-to-be. Then comes the *peningsetan* (ring exchange) procession, which means "*singset*" or binding rope (See Figure 1). This procession is marked by the embedding of a ring by the groom's mother to the bride-to-be, as a symbol of the bond and commitment of both parties to continue to the level of marriage (Anindika & Mustika, 2018). And finally, the procession of *Gethok Dina* (choosing the day to get married) determines a good day for marriage. In Javanese culture, this determination is based on the calculation of the Javanese calendar, known as *weton*, which is believed to influence the couple's future household luck (Mijianti, 2023). Besides, *weton* is also used to determine the right time for Javanese people to perform certain rituals or ceremonies (Ratnasari, 2023), and *weton* is to find a good day, or "*hari joyo*", which is considered the most appropriate for the bride and groom's marriage (Suseno, 2024)



Figure 1. Peningsetan Procession

Pasang Tarub or *Terob* is a traditional decoration installed at the *tratag*'s entrance (guest tent), made of yellow *janur* and woven young coconut leaves (*bleketepe*). On the right side of the door is a banana plantain, and on the left side a banana *Pulut* complete with its bunch. A *cengkir* (young coconut stacked on one level) is also installed for completeness. The bride's father installs the tarub two days before the event. *Tarub* serves to inform the neighborhood that the family will hold a wedding and to beautify the venue. The yellow *janur* symbolizes the hope for blessings and prosperity for the bride and groom.

Mudun Manten (reaffirm the readiness of the bride and her family) is a tradition carried out the night before the wedding, where the groom and his family come to the bride's house. The purpose is to ensure the bride's readiness and strengthen the family's commitment to the marriage. This procession symbolizes recognition, respect, and responsibility in building a home life and maintaining good relations with the family.

3.1.2. The Wedding Day

The wedding day is the main day in a series of wedding ceremonies where the marriage contract or *Ijab Qobul* procession is officially held. In Javanese tradition, this day marks the culmination of the entire wedding ceremony and typically includes several traditional processions, such as *Ijab Qobul* (the Wedding Vows), *Panggih* Ceremony (the Wedding Reception), and *Unduh Mantu* (Welcoming the bride).

Ijab Qobul (Wedding Vows) is a ceremony where the bride and groom take vows before the *penghulu*, their parents, the bride's guardian, and guests to formalize their marriage both religiously and legally. Usually, the groom's parents are represented by family elders. In this procession, the groom's parents are represented by family elders. In this procession, the bridegroom also hands over from the groom to the bride, which can be in the form of money, gold, or other items, as agreed upon Breliana et. al. (2017) (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Ijab Qobul* Procession

The *Panggih* Ceremony (Wedding Reception) is a Javanese traditional procession that marks the first official meeting between the bride and groom after they have become husband and wife. The event has 11 processions comprising submission of *Sanggan* (The groom's wedding gifts), *Balangan Gantal* (throwing rice), *Kembar Mayang* or *Kembang Mayang* (Rohmaniyah et. al., 2023, Natsir et. al., 2022), *Mecah Tigan* or *Ranu Pada* (stepping on eggs), *Junjung Derajat* (Helping to stand), *Ngunjuk* (Drinking Mineral Water or Coconut Water), *Sinduran*, *Pangkon*, and *Tanem Jero*, *Kacar - Kucur*, *Dhahar Kalimah* or *Dulangan* (feeding each other), and *Sungkeman* (kneeling). Submission of *Sanggan* (The groom's wedding gifts) is a gift from the groom to the bride, symbolizing the husband's responsibility in fulfilling his wife's physical and mental needs. *Balangan Gantal* (throwing rice) is a procession of throwing *gantalan* (betel leaves filled with spices) at each other, as a symbol of love and hope to keep bad disturbances away in the household (See Figure 3). *Kembar Mayang*, also known as *Kembang Mayang*, is a decorative pair of *janur*. It symbolizes the tree of life, protection, and hope that the new household can provide benefits and happiness. *Mecah Tigan* or *Ranu Pada* (stepping on eggs) is the procession of washing the groom's feet by the bride after the man steps on an egg (Anugrah, 2016).



Figure 3. *Balangan Gantal* Procession

It signifies the wife's devotion and readiness to face the challenges of domestic life. *Junjung Derajat* (Helping to Stand) is carried out by the groom helping the bride to stand (Astuti & Marvelia, 2019). This ceremony means that wherever the groom or husband is, the bride or wife must also be beside him, which means that the wife must accompany the husband wherever he goes and must provide support or pray for all the purposes of the husband's departure, such as work or others. *Ngunjuk* (Drinking Mineral Water or Coconut Water) is a traditional practice where the bride's parents offer a drink to the bride and groom as a form of acceptance and blessing. *Sinduran*, the abbreviation of "*isin*" and "*mundur*"; *isin* means shame, and *mundur* means shame to retreat or give up when facing trials in marriage (Rahmatullah, 2024), is the procession of bringing the bride and groom to the aisle with a *sindur* cloth wrapped around them, symbolizing unity and parental guidance in living a new life. *Pangkon* and *Tanem Jero* is the procession of the bride and groom sitting on the aisle with

the guidance of the bride's father, which means they are ready to become an independent couple (Natsir et. al., 2022). *Kacar-Kucur* depicts the husband's responsibility to provide a livelihood and the wife's sincere acceptance. The handover to parents means family supervision in the household economy. *Dhahar Kalimah* or *Dulangan* is a practice of spoonfeeding between husband and wife as a symbol of togetherness, mutual love, and harmony. *Sungkeman* (kneeling) is a procession of asking for blessings and apologies to each other's parents as a form of devotion and respect before starting a household life. Each procession is laden with the values of responsibility, love, devotion, and blessings from the family, which forms a strong foundation for building a household in accordance with Javanese tradition.

Unduh mantu (Welcoming the bride) means 'picking up the bride' or 'welcoming the bride-in-law'. This tradition is typically performed after the *panggih* ceremony, during which the newlyweds and the bride's family visit the groom's house with various offerings. This is a way for the bride's family to show respect and honor to the groom and his family. In this sense, *Unduh Mantu* (Welcoming the bride) can be considered as a series of wedding events where both families come together in a more relaxed and informal setting. This event holds great significance for both families, as it not only brings together the bride and groom but also reunites both sides of the family. Although similar to the *panggih* ceremony, *Unduh Mantu* (Welcoming the bride) has a simpler ritual.



Figure 4. *Unduh Mantu* Procession

Rituals in *Unduh Mantu* (Welcoming the bride) include *sinduran* and *sungkeman* (Kneeling), meaning unity and parental guidance in living a new life, as well as a form of devotion and respect for parents (See Figure 4).

3.1.3. Post-Wedding Ceremony

Sepasaran manten (Gratitude Ceremony) is a post-wedding ceremony held approximately one week after the marriage contract (Triani & Irawan Suntoro, 2018), following the *bongkar* (dismantling) of the *tarub*. In this event, the bride and groom host a *kenduren*, a meal with family, relatives,

and neighbors, followed by a joint prayer for the safety and blessing of the household. In addition, there is also *a form of mutual aid*, known as *ater-ater*, which involves distributing food to neighbors as a means of strengthening kinship and social relations between the two families.

4. Conclusions

This study describes and explains the symbols used in traditional Javanese wedding ceremonies, especially in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency. A Javanese traditional wedding in Pandansari Village consists of three main processions: the pre-wedding ceremony, the wedding, and the post-wedding ceremony. Each procession at the wedding represents a specific symbol with its own meaning and philosophy, making it always interesting to discuss. In these three aspects, there are several parts, such as the pre-wedding ceremony, which includes the *Lamaran* (engagement), *Pasang Tarub* or *Terob*, and *Mudun Manten*. The wedding day consists of *Ijab Qobul*, *Panggih Ceremony*, *Submission of Sanggan*, *Balangan Gantal*, *Kembang Mayang*, *Mecah Tigan*, *Junjung Derajat*, *Ngunjuk*, *Sinduran*, *Pangkon*, and *Tanem Jero*.

After all, this study is imperfect. No matter how detailed the traditional Javanese wedding in Pandansari Village, Malang Regency, is, it is depicted and explained. Therefore, there is always room for improvement in this study. This study focuses solely on the Javanese traditional wedding in Pandansari village, specifically on the symbols in each procession and their meanings. Given these limitations, further analysis is necessary to enhance the understanding of symbols in Javanese traditional ceremonies by exploring symbolism in other Javanese traditional ceremonies or the cultural traditions of other ethnic groups in Indonesia.

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