

Exploration of Javanese Traditional Birth Ceremonies: Perspectives on Form, Meaning, and Function

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Article history	ABSTRACT
Upload : May 21, 2024 Revised : May 27, 2024 Accepted : May 28, 2024 Publish : May 29, 2024	In Javanese society, various symbolic actions such as wedding ceremonies, matchmaking, and mutual cooperation can be seen. The stages in this research include the preparation stage, implementation stage, and reporting stage, while the data sources in this research are in the form of words or actions of people who are interviewed or observed. The primary data source is notes from interviews and observations with sources. The offerings in implementing the series of baby birth procedures show that Javanese society hopes for the child's safety. Thus, it can be said that the meaning and function of the implementation of the <i>tingkeban</i> ceremony are: (1) to inherit the ancestral tradition so as not to be plagued by misfortune, and (2) to maintain balance, harmony, happiness, and safety life, which is a condition of peace without disturbance from other creatures or the surrounding environment. Essentially, this tradition asks for safety from God so that the child born is healthy and safe and always receives abundant sustenance.
Keywords: birth ceremonies, Javanese society, Tingkeban Ceremony,	

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity in Indonesia is a precious heritage that needs to be preserved. The word "culture" derives from the Sanskrit word "*buddhayah*," the plural form of "*buddhi*" meaning mind or intellect. Culture encompasses the way of life that is developed and shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation ([Marganingsih, 2009](#)). Culture comprises complex elements such as religious and political systems, customs, language, tools, clothing, buildings, and artworks.

The process of learning culture is seen when someone tries to communicate with people from different cultures and adapts to those differences ([Dwi & Setyawan, 2024](#); [Fransiska, 2017](#)). However, as time passes, people abandon their local customs and traditions, especially the younger generation, who increasingly neglect the culture around them.

The birth of a baby is a process in humans where a mother releases a baby from her body. The birth of a baby in Nganjuk Regency still uses the traditions of *berokohan*, *separasaran*, and *selapanan*. The ceremonial procedures in this tradition are carried out by parents to express gratitude to the Almighty and to ask for the baby's safety. *Berokohan* is done when the baby is 2, 3, or 4 days old with no special *slametan* or *wilujengan*. *Separasaran* is done when the baby is five days old, but the ceremony is simple. *Selapanan* is done when the baby is 36 days old. At this *selapanan* ceremony, the baby's hair is cut for the first time. Usually, the one who cuts is the baby's grandmother. The result of this haircut is then put together with the kalong and umbilical cord that has been removed.

In Javanese society, the ceremonies of *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* babies are still practiced today. This kind of culture includes partially oral folklore. The ceremony of *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* baby is a level that parents must do as a sign of gratitude to the Almighty Creator, in addition to *selametan* so that the baby is always given safety. This sacred ceremony has meaning, purpose, and function that must be known.

The ritual of the *selametan* ceremony at the *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* baby events is a tradition that must be carried out in Javanese society. *Selametan* or life cycle ceremonies have practical meanings, functions, and purposes for the Javanese community. The meaning inherent in the ceremony will provide an understanding of the expectations the perpetrators want for the object. At the same time, the function and purpose are related to the intention or hope for the *selametan* ceremony.

This traditional ceremony has many symbolizations in each ceremonial procession and offering. Each procession and offering undoubtedly aims at the safety of the baby. Therefore, this ceremony must be preserved so that it does not become extinct and the procedure does not change because we have inherited many customs from our ancestors. However, the procession of ceremonies and offerings of *berokohan*, *selapanan*, and *sepasaran* babies has changed due to modern culture and not thinking about its sacredness.

The series of baby birth ceremonies is carried out using a *selametan* ceremony starting from (*berokohan*), a *selametan* when the baby is five days old (*sepasaran*), and a *selametan* when the baby is thirty-five days old (*selapanan*). The series of ceremonies uses offerings that have their meaning, the function of the offerings contained in the series of *selametan* ceremonies, and the purpose of the *selametan* procedures.

This research discusses the symbolism of form, including *kenduri* and prayer, as well as its meaning and function. Form symbolism is expressed through language and non-language, including *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan*.

The symbolism of meaning is a message or mandate that will be conveyed or informed to communicate to the broader community so that the meanings in it can give a better view of life, as contained in the baby birth ceremony, including *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan*.

The symbolism of function is a means to uphold social order, arouse social compliance, and fulfill a function that is private and individual, which includes *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* baby in Nglegok village, which is located in the south of Blitaran village, Sukomoro Sub-district, Nganjuk Regency. Nglegok village has very few inhabitants and is located far from the city. The reason for choosing this village is because customs in preserving culture are still practiced today. One of them is maintaining the culture of *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* babies. However, the offerings of ancient times are very different from those of today because of the times.

Since ancient times, Indonesian society has had diverse cultures and traditions, including folklore. Folklore is a part of culture passed down from generation to generation in various forms, both oral and through gestures or memory aids ([Suhartati & Indrojarwo, 2016](#)). The objects of folklore research include different ethnic groups such

as Javanese, Sundanese, Buginese, Manadonese, Ambonese, and others. However, this research focuses more on Javanese customs. Folklore encompasses all Indonesians and is not limited to any particular religion ([Danandjaja, 2002](#); [Saddhono & Erwinsyah, 2018](#)).

A symbol is a sign, painting, word, or plan that represents something or has a specific meaning ([Herusatoto, 2000](#); [Yu, 2014](#)). Human culture is full of symbolism, a way of thinking or understanding that follows the basic pattern of symbols or emblems. According to Endraswara ([2013](#)), a symbol is the smallest part of a ritual that contains a specific meaning derived from behaviour or activities in ritual ceremonies ([Nurmalinda, 2022](#)).

The archetypal approach stems from the idea that literature is not only a part of modern society or advanced culture but is also known and possessed by undeveloped societies ([Sebastian, 2014](#); [Sudiada, 2021](#)). The tradition of offerings at sacred places and traditional literature is still widely found and studied with an appropriate approach, namely the archetypal approach. This approach is supported by anthropology, unlike the sociological approach supported by sociology, stylistics by linguistics, and psychology by psychology.

This research uses a cultural anthropology and literary anthropology approach. Cultural anthropology is the study of humans in society, which has evolved into cultural research. In relation to literature, cultural anthropology is divided into verbal and non-verbal studies ([Safitri, 2015](#); [Santi, 2023](#)). The literary anthropology approach focuses on verbal objects and problematizes oral tradition as an essential object, with particular attention to ancient societies and the study of oral literature, myths, and religious systems that often overlap ([Ratna, 2011](#); [Wiles, 2020](#)).

Several studies have been conducted in the past decade that provide valuable insights into traditional Javanese birth ceremonies. However, there are still gaps that can be further explored by integrating findings from previous research.

One recent study conducted by ([Yani, 2023](#)) examines the symbolic meaning of offerings used in traditional Javanese birth ceremonies. This research provides a good understanding of the philosophical and spiritual interpretation of the ceremony's elements. However, there is still a gap in exploring how modern Javanese society understands and negotiates these symbolic meanings, especially among the younger generation, who may have different perspectives. Future research could examine how efforts are made to preserve and disseminate knowledge about these symbolic meanings and how these meanings are adapted or reinterpreted in the context of Javanese society today.

In another study conducted by ([Risidianawati & Hanif, 2015](#)), the dynamics and negotiations between traditional Javanese birth ceremony practices and the modern health care system were discussed. This research provides valuable insights into how these two systems interact and influence each other. However, there is still a gap to explore further how these negotiations occur at the individual or family level and how factors such as socio-economic background, education, or geographical region influence the negotiation process.

Research conducted by ([Setiyawati, 2014](#)) focused on the role of traditional birth attendants in traditional Javanese birth ceremonies in the modern era. This research provides fascinating insights into how conventional birth attendants negotiate their roles and adapt to the times. However, there is still a gap in exploring the perspectives of other parties involved in the ceremony, such as mothers, fathers, families, or modern medical personnel, and how they perceive and interact with the role of the shaman in the current context.

Finally, research conducted by ([Aswiyati, 2015](#)) examines traditional Javanese birth ceremonies in the context of urban communities in big cities. This research provides fascinating insights into how these ceremonies are adapted and practiced in different urban environments. However, there is still a gap to explore further how these ceremonies are negotiated and integrated with dynamic urban lifestyles, as well as how factors such as mobility, cultural heterogeneity, and globalization affect the practice and meaning of these ceremonies.

Literary anthropology is the study of literary works relevant to humans. Literary anthropology is related to cultural anthropology, which includes human works such as language, religion, myths, history, law, customs, and art, especially literature ([Yani, 2023](#)). Each region has different customary procedures, such as the *mitoni* ceremony, village cleansing, *berokohan* for babies, *sepasaran* for babies, and *selapanan* for babies.

Baby birth ceremonies such as *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* are sacred rituals believed by Javanese society to protect babies from danger ([Kusumawati, 2011](#); [Yuniartin, 2023](#)). However, some people start to forget or replace these rituals. These ceremonies are part of partly oral folklore and a form of gratitude to God, as well as for the safety of the baby.

The *selamatan* ritual in the *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan* ceremonies for babies is an essential tradition for Javanese society, with significant meanings, functions, and goals ([Fauziah et al., 2017](#); [Sutara, 2021](#)). The symbolization in every procession and offering is intended for the baby's safety and, therefore, needs to be preserved so that it does not become extinct or changed. However, some elements of these ceremonies have changed due to the influence of modern culture ([Purwaningsih et al., 2022](#); [Widyaningrum & Tantoro, 2017](#)).

The author is interested in researching the procedures for baby births, including *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan*, because there are many religious understandings and modern views that contradict local culture, causing Javanese culture to disappear gradually ([Aswiyati, 2015](#); [Saleh, 2017](#)). As time goes by, people start to replace the procedures and *uborampe* (ritual objects) of these traditions because they are considered outdated and incompatible with modern teachings ([Risidianawati & Hanif, 2015](#)).

METHOD

Quantitative research ([Sugiyono, 2016](#)), is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism used to study a particular population or sample. The sampling technique is usually done randomly; data collection uses research instruments, and data analysis is quantitative/statistical with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses.

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research. Bogdan and Taylor (Moleong, 2018) define qualitative methodology as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviour. The researcher chose qualitative research because of its suitability with the research data in the form of observations of baby birth procedures, such as *berokohan*, *separasaran*, and *selapanan*. This research report presents data quotations accompanied by verbal and non-verbal analysis by the researcher, which is called descriptive qualitative research.

The approach has a vital role in research because the approach is the basis for conducting research. According to (Semi, 1993), "The approach is the way researchers view and approach a research object." The research approach helps direct the research toward the desired goals (Kankam, 2020).

The methodological approach used in this research is descriptive research with a symbolism study. Descriptive research aims to investigate circumstances, conditions, or certain things whose results are presented in the form of a research report (Miksza et al., 2023). The archetypal approach arises from the idea that literature is not only a part of modern society or advanced culture but is also known and possessed by undeveloped societies, which still live within the cultural sphere that is known and influences literature as well as the life of advanced societies (Semi, 1993). This research uses an archetypal approach and a symbolism study, focusing on aspects of form, meaning, and function because it is suitable for the research study on the Relativity of baby birth ceremonies in Nganjuk Regency. Everything used for education must contain educational value, including media selection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research was conducted in the Nganjuk Regency area, in Nglegok Village, Sukomoro District, Nganjuk Regency. The data obtained from the sources are shown in the tables below.

Table 1. *Brokohan*

Berokohan Elements	Form	Meaning	Function
<i>Tumpang Buceng Kuat</i>	Conical shape	Symbol of prosperity in human life	So that the baby is always given health
<i>Buceng kuat</i>	Conical shape	Embodiment of prayers uttered by humans that always go up (to God).	For the outpouring of abundant sustenance
<i>Ingkung</i>	One whole chicken	I always worship and pray to God	Ingkung (Whole chicken) So that the baby is always given health
<i>Gudhangan or kuluban</i>	Various kinds of vegetables	Money's warehouse: Wherever you go, you won't get lost	As equipment used and served in the <i>selamatan</i> ceremony
<i>Bayam</i>	Slightly broad leaves are usually used as an ingredient in sambal urap	Tranquility that is identical to the life sought by Javanese people	As a symbol of tranquility in life

Berokohan Elements	Form	Meaning	Function
<i>Kacang panjang</i>	Long in shape used in <i>gudhangan</i>	As a request to God Almighty to be given a long life	As a symbol of longevity
<i>Cambah</i>	Small in size, used as an ingredient in sambal urap	Humans always spread goodness wherever they are	As a symbol of goodness and the beginning of human creation
<i>Kangkung</i>	Single leaf with a pointed tip Dark green in color	Hope and prayer to always get protection from God	Almighty Symbol of an unhurried life
<i>Bumbu urap</i>	Grated coconut mixed with sambal	Money's warehouse	As a complement to the vegetables
<i>Bubur merah selang putih</i>	Made from sticky rice with two colors	Humans are created from two parents	Always remember both parents

Table 2. *Sepasaran*

Sepasaran Elements	Form	Meaning	Function
<i>Tumpeng buceng kuat</i>	Conical shape	Symbol of prosperity in human life	So that the baby is always given health
<i>Buceng kuat</i>	Conical shape	Embodiment of prayers uttered by humans that always go up (to God).	For the outpouring of abundant sustenance
<i>Inkung</i>	One whole chicken	I always worship and pray to God	Ingkung (Whole chicken) So that the baby is always given health
<i>Gudhangan atau kuluban</i>	Various kinds of vegetables	Money's warehouse: Wherever you go, you won't get lost	As equipment used and served in the <i>selamatan</i> ceremony
<i>Bayam</i>	Slightly broad leaves are usually used as an ingredient in sambal urap	Tranquility that is identical to the life sought by Javanese people	As a symbol of tranquility in life
<i>Kacang panjang</i>	Long in shape used in <i>gudhangan</i>	As a request to God Almighty to be given a long life	As a symbol of longevity
<i>Cambah</i>	Small in size, used as an ingredient in sambal urap	Humans always spread goodness wherever they are	As a symbol of goodness and the beginning of human creation
<i>Kangkung</i>	Single leaf with a pointed tip Dark green in color	Hope and prayer to always get protection from God	Almighty Symbol of an unhurried life
<i>Bumbu urap</i>	Grated coconut mixed with sambal	Money's warehouse	As a complement to the vegetables
<i>Pisang raja</i>	A type of fruit with a yellow peel	In life, we must be able to produce the best results for the family	Always used in offerings, especially for the <i>sepasaran</i> baby birth ceremony
<i>Iwel-iwel</i>	A cake made from sticky rice, so it's sticky and contains brown sugar inside.	Parents hope that the child will later become a devoted child to their parents.	As a welcoming of the child's birth, which is at <i>sepasaran</i>
<i>Bubur merah selang putih</i>	Made from sticky rice with two colors	Humans are created from two parents	Always remember both parents

Table 3. *Selapanan*

Selapanan Elements	Form	Meaning	Function
<i>Tumpeng buceng kuat</i>	Conical shape	Symbol of prosperity in human life	So that the baby is always given health
<i>Buceng kuat</i>	Conical shape	Embodiment of prayers uttered by humans that always go up (to God).	For the outpouring of abundant sustenance
<i>Ingkung</i>	One whole chicken	I always worship and pray to God	Ingkung (Whole chicken) So that the baby is always given health
<i>Gudhangan atau kuluban</i>	Various kinds of vegetables	Money's warehouse: Wherever you go, you won't get lost	As equipment used and served in the <i>selamatan</i> ceremony
<i>Bayam</i>	Slightly broad leaves are usually used as an ingredient in sambal urap	Tranquility that is identical to the life sought by Javanese people	As a symbol of tranquility in life
<i>Kacang panjang</i>	Long in shape used in <i>gudhangan</i>	As a request to God Almighty to be given a long life	As a symbol of longevity
<i>Cambah</i>	Small in size, used as an ingredient in sambal urap	Humans always spread goodness wherever they are	As a symbol of goodness and the beginning of human creation
<i>Kangkung</i>	Single leaf with a pointed tip	Hope and prayer to always get protection from God	Almighty
<i>Bumbu urap</i>	Dark green in color		Symbol of an unhurried life
<i>Pisang raja</i>	Grated coconut mixed with sambal	Money's warehouse	As a complement to the vegetables
<i>Iwel-iwel</i>	A type of fruit with a yellow peel	In life, we must be able to produce the best results for the family	Always used in offerings, especially for the <i>sepasaran</i> baby birth ceremony
<i>Iwel-iwel</i>	A cake made from sticky rice, so it's sticky and contains brown sugar inside.	Parents hope that the child will later become a devoted child to their parents.	As a welcoming of the child's birth, which is at <i>sepasaran</i>
<i>Bubur merah selang putih</i>	Made from sticky rice with two colors	Humans are created from two parents	Always remember both parents

The baby birth ceremonies in Nglegok Village, Sukomoro District, Nganjuk Regency, which include *berokohan* (can be seen in [Table 1](#)), *sepasaran* (as seen in [Table 2](#)), and *selapanan* (as seen in [Table 3](#)), are traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. As Indonesians, we must preserve and conserve this culture as a local heritage that can be a source of pride for the Indonesians.

This research has general and specific objectives. The aim is to understand and describe the processes of baby safety ceremonies, including *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan*. The specific objectives are to represent the forms of the ceremonies, such as *kenduri*, prayers, *aqiqah*, hair shaving, and nail cutting at baby births in Nganjuk Regency. In addition, this research also aims to describe the meanings and functions of these ceremonies.

Berokohan is a traditional Javanese ceremony performed to welcome a newborn baby. It is the first celebration held related to a baby's birth. This ceremony means expressing gratitude and joy for a smooth delivery. *Berokohan* comes from the Arabic

word "barokah," which means 'hoping for blessings.' This ceremony aims to ensure the birth's safety and protect the baby so that it can become a good human being. In this event, close neighbours and relatives usually gather to signify happiness over the baby's birth.

After the baby is five days old, a *selamatan* (prayer ceremony) is held with *kenduri* and *bancakan sepasaran*. *Bancakan* consists of cone-shaped rice with *gudhangan* (vegetable mix) of free-range chicken eggs, *gereh petek*, *jenang putih* (white porridge), and traditional market snacks. Small children are invited for *bancakan*, and after being prayed for, the rice and market snacks are distributed to them. This *sepasaran* event is usually done with *kenduri*; for those with more means, it is done more festively. The essence of the *sepasaran* event is the *selamatan* and announcing the newborn baby's name.

The *selamatan selapanan* is held when the baby is 35 days old, based on the calculation of the baby's birth date according to the Javanese calendar. This ceremony includes *bancakan weton* (birthday *kenduri*), shaving the baby's hair until bald, and trimming the baby's nails. Shaving the baby's hair and nails aims to maintain the baby's health so that the scalp and fingers remain clean.

The series of procedures for baby births, which include *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan*, contains in-depth symbolic studies. These studies aim to understand the symbolism of these traditional ceremonies, including their form, meaning, and function.

CONCLUSION

The baby birth ceremonies in Nglegok Village, Nganjuk Regency, include three main traditions: *berokohan*, *sepasaran*, and *selapanan*. These three ceremonies are Javanese cultural heritages passed down from generation to generation and are essential to be preserved as a source of pride for the Indonesian people. The *berokohan* ceremony is performed to welcome the birth of a baby and express gratitude. *Sepasaran* is held when the baby is five days old, with *kenduri* and *bancakan* to announce the baby's name. Meanwhile, *selapanan* is held when the baby is 35 days old and includes *kenduri*, hair shaving, and nail cutting. The implementation of the *tingkeban* ceremony is (1) to inherit the ancestral tradition so as not to be plagued by misfortune and (2) to maintain balance, harmony, happiness, and safe life, which is a condition of peace without disturbance from other creatures or the surrounding environment. This series of baby birth ceremonies contains an in-depth study of symbolism, reflecting the cultural and spiritual values of Javanese society in welcoming the birth of a child. This research is essential to understand the symbolic form, meaning, and function of each procession and ritual in the baby birth ceremonies in Nganjuk Regency as an effort to preserve local cultural heritage.

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