



Symbolism as Guidance to Live a New Life in Javanese Culture (a Semiotic Analysis)

Avi Meilawati

Yogyakarta State University

Abstract

Ideas, human behavior activities, and objects is a form of culture as the result of human thought. Those three forms are giving birth to an indigenous culture or tradition in the community. *Tingkeban* ceremony is one of the traditional Javanese ritual performed on women who are pregnant in her 7 months. The ceremony is believed to be the requirement before birth, contains hope for the children, mother, and families will be given the ease and safety up to the time of delivery.

These hopes are realized in the representation of objects and expressions to the tools, equipment, and procession at the *tingkeban* ceremony. Hopes and advices on *tingkeban* ceremony are aimed at father, mother and newborn babies in hope that the family can be a superior happy family, and prosperous. In general, the balanced family, happy, prosperous, will deliver a child that grow well too. From this little family, a system of the larger society, even the country will also be systematically balanced and peace.


A. Background

Culture is the result of the human mind that is actualized through varieties and colors in evolving life of human, flowing to fill the needs of life. Cultural output is realized as the result of the thoughts, observations and experiences over time, even from the summary of the unborn society, through the stories and relics of the past, of course.

One form of cultural product is a traditional ceremony, which is the result of knowledge, the result of thoughts that inspires people to make a criteria or a space to enjoy it, outside of what can be seen, heard, and touched that currently being favored through forms of knowledge called technology. According to Koentjaraningrat (2003), culture has three forms, namely: a) the form of culture as a complex of ideas, values, norms, rules and so on; b) the form of culture as a complex of activity patterns of human behavior in society; c) the form of culture as objects of human handwork.

In the development of science, where the traditional ceremony may have the function of truth, the metaphysics truth, which comes from the belief that arise from each individual and then recognized by the community and make rules which have values and are bound by ethical norms established by society. From the perceived subjectivity, consensus arose that binding is required to indulge the emotions that are not touched by the ratio and the senses. The explosion of emotion needs to be expressed by the symbol embodied through language to be conveyed their entirety. This is consistent with the function of language as a symbolic means, emotive, and affective (thoughts, feelings and attitudes). Fluctuation of thoughts and feelings, creating a symbolic language as a means of addressing the unusual form of real life people. The notion of trust is symbolized by objects and spoken through words.

Learning a language is actually not just learn the structure which are summarized at the level of language, but also need to uncover a civilization beyond the confines of the structure, considering the function of language as well as to represent a flag. This paper will describe



the philosophy of language forms associated with the meaning (semantics) and symbolic (semiotic) that is implied from the body as a form of culture and ceremony as the realization of a symbolized knowledge in a ritual that still lives in the community of Java, namely *tingkeban* ceremony.

Tingkeban ceremony is one of ceremonies to commemorate the humans' life cycle. The ceremony contained a lot of philosophy of life that can be followed as a solution in the global issues. Starting from the life of a small harmonious, balanced, secure, peaceful, and wise family, it is expected that a prosper country will grow, wealthy and prospered. *Tingkeban* ceremony is using a variety of tools and devices that are symbolized by *jarwa dhosok* which is a term in the traditional Javanese society. Tools and equipment are believed to mean more than just an object by its adherents. How a sign reflection as a hope in this ceremony, will be studied further in the next chapter.

B. Study of Theory

1. Language and Semiotics

The concept originated from the concept of semiotic sign (see Halliday, 1992; Blanchard, 1980). Semiotic used as an approach to solve practical problems (Christomy, 2004), exemplified by the discovery of the disease in ancient Greece by showing symptoms as a sign. Semiotic also helps to find a way on how different genres of art shown to achieve a certain effect. Semiotic growing raises its own division in semiotic studies, i.e. logical, structural, phenomenological, pragmatism, and cultural approaches.

Pateda (2001) differentiates semiotic into 9 types. In this paper will be studied cultural semiotic. Cultural semiotic is semiotic that specifically examines sign system prevailing in a particular culture of a society. All-ethnic groups in Indonesia have a culture system containing the processes and activities that are embodied in the system of signs.

2. Definition of *tingkeban*

Tingkeban is a procedure performed in the seven-month-old age of woman's pregnancy (Suwarna, 2003). By Javanese society, *tingkeban* also called *mitoni*, which comes from the word '*pitu*' which means seven. *Tingkeban* is only celebrated for the first child pregnancy. Thus, the *tingkeban* ceremony would not traditionally celebrated for the next children in a particular family.

The timing of the *tingkeban* ceremony should be carried out on Tuesday or Saturday, between the hours of 11:00 to 16:00 on odd dates before the full moon, preferably on 7th.

3. *Tingkeban* as Semiotics Target

Prior to classify *tingkeban* as a cultural product, it is better to study the tools and the activity. Seeing from the rules of grammar, both the term can be considered as an element of adjectives and nouns, so it can be applied to arbitrary interpretation. Culture refers to the 'values' and 'custom', while the term cultural product is a complex phenomenon, including the values and customs that shows a systemic unity. Of these limits, the culture more refers to adjectives.

Tingkeban ceremony is a kinetic behavior -artifacts and ceremonies been held- include in cultural entity believed to have a manifested symbol from artifacts or activity forms. Objects are symbolically used as a means of realization of hope on a better situation. Activity conducted is also containing a better attitude learning to future life, considering a new era, the adults' world that should be role models for children and the community.

C. Discussion

1. Symbolism Tools

The equipment in question is all the things that support the progression of *tingkeban* ceremony. Equipments used in the *tingkeban* ceremony symbolize meaning behind the abstract form of equipment. According to Suwarna (2003), there are equipments used in the *Tingkeban* ceremony. The writer will describe the equipments in the text below.

a. *Pengaron* (jars for water *Perwita sari*)

Pengaron derives from compound word '*cepengane wong sakloron*' meaning handle both. A child is the product of the husband-wife relationship which is supposed to run accord-one word, to hone, compass and care to each other. *Ngaron* derives from compound word '*mengane warana*' which means the opened door, means the mother for the first time to open the door out to take care the children.

b. Sacred water *Perwita sari*

Perwita means holy, *sari* means flower. Water of *Perwita sari* means flower's water. It symbolizes the pregnant women should purify their selves physically and spiritually. Flowers used as a beauty symbol to denominate the embryo, so that the children can keep the name of both them selves and their parents. It is used to clean up the mother. The water is collected from seven river. Number 7 adapted to pregnancy period. The water should be taken from the river or old well. It symbolize the baby as the oldest child will protect the sisters. Number *pitu* "seven" contains the hope that the mother will get '*pitulungan*' help.



Picture 1. *Toya Perwita sari*


c. *Sekar setaman*

Sekar setaman is a flower as a mixture of *perwita sari* water. Flowers mixture comprises mixing roses, jasmine, kanthil, and ylang. The four flowers are garden's *queen*. It because the flowers are considered fragrant when in bloom. There are 3 groups of flower choices that are commonly used, namely *mawar*, *mlathi*, *kanthil*, *kenanga*.

(1) rose, jasmine, kanthil derives from the phrase *menapa ingkang binawar saking kedaling lathi, sageda tansah kumanthil ing telenging nala*

(2) rose, jasmine, cananga, derives from the phrase *menapa ingkang binawar saking kedaling lathi, sageda tansah kumenang ing telenging wardaya*

(3) rose, jasmine, *kanthil*, cananga, derives from the phrase *menapa ingkang binawar saking kedaling lathi, sageda tansah kumanthil-kanthil lan kumenang-kenang ing telenging wardaya*



All those three have a view of everything that was said through oral, hopefully become memorable and etched in their hearts.

d. *Nyamping* 7 and white textile

Nyamping is 7 batik fabrics as switch fabric. *Nyamping* motif selection tailored to their meaning.

- (1) *Sida mukti*, means the baby can be happy and respected prestige “*mukti*”.
- (2) *Truntum*, means magnanimity of the parents will be imitate “*tumaruntum*” by the baby.
- (3) *Sida luhur*, in order to be a polite and virtuous son.
- (4) *Parang kusuma*, means the baby become a smart child like a machete that is played by the formidable fighters. *Kusuma* is a flower, intended to beautify the name of the child's parents.
- (5) *Semen rama*, in order to have such love of Rama and Shinta to their people.
- (6) *Udan riris*, so that children can make a refreshing and pleasant situation for anyone. Drizzling rain symbolizes a fresh situation, and fertilize.
- (7) *Cakar ayam* means clever child to seek fortune like a hen that is responsible for their children so that needs can be met. Chickens are good at scavenging the land for food symbolize intelligent people seeking fortune.
- (8) *Grompol*, that families will always be together and not divorced (*nggrompol*).
- (9) *Lasem* is vertical patterns reflect the relationship with God.
- (10) *Dringin* is horizontal pattern reflects relationships with others.

Mori is used as a base before changing *nyamping*. *Mori* is a white textile, meaning that mother's heart is clean, not arrogant, and always keep in touch with each other and pray to God.

e. *Ron kluwih*

Kluwih leaf is used as a cushion. *Kluwih* is formed from the word *kaluwihan*, It symbolizes the the family get surplus in various circumstances.

f. Reed and *kapa-kapa* leaf

Reed in a Javanese word is *alang-alang*. *Alang-alang* and *kappa-kapa* leaves contain hope that prospective mother will safe from now till time to born the baby. There are phrase ‘*wiwit saiki nganti tumeka nglairake lan sabanjure ora ana alangan apa-apa*’ that means mother will not experience any barriers to the time of give a birth.

g. *Rujak*


Rujak is like a fruit salad. *Rujak* symbolizes the mother wishes during pregnancy.

h. *Klasa Bangka* “woven pandanus mats”

It symbolizes the human cycle of life and a symbol of man's life on the 4 worlds ‘*catur jagad*’. Four universe through experienced by the human being, i.e. *lokabrata*, *lokapana*, *lokamadya* and *lokabaka* “womb world, birth and grow world, family life, and eternity world”.

i. Yellow coconut

It is a symbol of victory. Born a baby looks like at war. Mother is like the soldier who will go to war wearing yellow coconut leaf.



j. *Kyai Brojol's* sacred creese

Creese is used by the father to help mother born the baby easily. A turmeric embeds at the tip of the creese as a symbol to overcome distress and all diseases. *mBrojol* in Javanese word means the baby born easily.

k. Chicken Eggs

Chicken egg symbolizes the warmth and sturdy womb of the mother. Egg yolk symbolizes blood, and egg white symbolizes a fetal membrane.

l. *Cengkir Gading* “yellow coconut”

The yellow color symbolizes safety of mother and children in the birth process. *Cengkir* “unripe coconut” symbolizes a new generation that is expected to shine, hold parent’s degrees.

m. *Klenthing*

Klenthing is the place to store water. *Klenthing* is a symbol of pregnancy. Water symbolizes a fetal membrane.

n. Chicken & cage

Chicken symbolizes a baby and cage symbolizes the mother's womb. The father kicks the cage so the chickens run out. The procession symbolizes the birth is expected to take place smoothly.

o. *Siwur*

Siwur derives from compound word *ngaosi sing ana ndhuwur* means to serve the Lord. God will reward the child, so that in return, the parents have to devote. In addition, the baby will imitate parent’s attitude that devote to God.

p. *Cendhol*

Cendhol is a kind of beverage. *Cendhol* is made from rice flour. It is poured with milk squeezed. It symbolizes families can get together and coalesce.

2. Symbolism of Foods

Foods in this paper is intended as an offering in *tingkeban* ceremony. Offerings have symbolic meaning associated with the birth process.

a. *Tumpeng 7, tumpeng robyong, tumpeng gundul*

Tumpeng is a cone rice. *Tumpeng seven* symbolizes gestation. It is sprinkled with vegetable side dishes, tempeh, eggs, bacon, peanut brittle, and others. It symbolizes the hope of the family. *Robyong* cone is decorated with banana leaves that have been cut up that looks fully equipped. *Gundul* cone is just a cone, it without any decoration. Cone symbolizes relationship between man and God. The point of cone is the family should not forget to serve their Lord.



Picture 2. *Tumpeng*

b. Turtle eggs

It is made from dyed red chicken eggs. It symbolizes the hope that the family have a bold attitude, unwavering, wealth, independent as turtle eggs that hatch themselves after mother turtle laying eggs left in the sand.

c. *Jenang projot*

Jenang projot is a porridge. It symbolizes the baby will be born quickly and smoothly like a porridge.

d. *Clorot*

Clorot is made from rice flour, coconut milk, brown sugar, and with a little salt. *Clorot* symbolizes the family rays as the sun illuminates through the life. So, the life can be useful.

e. *Sekul punar*

Sekul punar is yellow colored rice. *Punar* means to make the child's birth shining brightly. The birth of baby brings a light and happiness to the life.

f. *Jenang*

Jenang is porridge made from rice flour.

(1) *Jenang abang* symbolizes blood, birth. *Abang* means red.

(2) *Jenang putih* symbolizes marrow, which means purity.

(3) *Jenang abang putih* symbolizes the union of loving parents that strengthen the blood and bone marrow.

(4) *Jenang palang putih* symbolizes taste and intention (men: act and perceive).

(5) *Jenang palang merah* symbolizes the sense and intention (women: felt, and then perform the action).

(6) *Jenang baro-baro merah* comes from the word "*anggone mbabar wong loro*" that means child of togetherness. It symbolizes women.

(7) *Jenang baro-baro putih* symbolizes male. It means the results of spousal agreement.

(8) *Jenang sumsum* is a symbol of strength.

(9) *Jenang lare* symbolizes that there will be birth of a human child. *Lare* means child.



Picture 3. Jenang

g. Pring sedhapur

Pring sehapur symbolizes fence to family safety. Pring is bamboo. Language manners of pring is *deling* meaning *Kendel lan eling*, so that in the pregnancy periods the woman must be brave and always remember God.

h. Babon angrem

A hen cooked in a whole. It means that when a mother is pregnant and is ready to give a birth. It symbolizes the struggling of the mother.

i. Pasung

Pasung in the form of cone molten wrapped with banana leaves. It symbolizes male genitals.

j. Kupat plethek

Kupat plethek is intangible a cleaved diamond. It symbolizes the female genitals.

k. Apem

Apem derived from the Arabic word 'afuwun' which means to be sorry. The mother apologized to her husband and parents as a sign of devotion and sanctity.

l. Cenil and klepon

It is a snack made of glutinous rice that has high adhesion. It symbolizes that the family is united.

m. Srinthil and thiwul

It is a simple traditional food. Life is meant to be simple, not extravagant and not dissipate. Srinthil means the intention that the family should always get along. They always become one.

n. Long beans, chilies, cabbage, bean leaves

The vegetables symbolize fertility.

o. Sekul gurih

Sekul gurih is rice cooked with coconut milk symbolizes that the family will not lack of food.

p. Woh-wohan

Who-wohan derived from the word *woh* which means the results. It means that a couple's relationship has brought results in the form of the child as a family genealogy binder.

3. *Tingkeban* ceremony process

Forms of movement in the *tingkeban* ceremony are full of valuable sage advice for prospective sustainability of this new family someday. This advice is intended for the fathers and the mother in fostering good family, good parenting, as well as a good citizen in the community.

a. Sungkeman

Sungkeman is derived from the word *sungkem*. Sungkem symbolizes devotion to the mother's parents, contains an apology and request approval.

“Rama, Ibu, kula ngaturaken sungkem pangabekti, nyuwun pangapunten sedaya kalepatan kula, saha kersaa paring pangestu dhumateng jasad kula kekalih.”



Picture 4. Sungkeman

b. Siraman

Siraman is a process to splash water from the old family to the mother. Spray event conducted by the proponents of the family. They called *pepundhen, sesepuh, atau pinisepuh* who are respected elders. After they spray the mother is expected to be able to educate children and happy families as it has been achieved by his predecessors. Water for spray is named *perwitasari* which symbolizes the sanctity of the mother.

d. Sesuci

Sesuci is the process when the mother lifted her hand to receive the stream of water from a pitcher being poured by his father. Sesuci means the mother in order to eliminate bad deeds that can bring shame to the family.

e. *Pecah Pamor*

Pecah pamor is a process when *kendi* will be broken. Pecah pamor means the family will have a child as a successor to the family as a symbol of maturity proceeds (Poerwodarminto, 1937) by mixing love of parents.

f. Brojolan

At this event eggs are launched at the front of the mother. The mother uses a cloth. It means that the pregnant mother will be covered by blood and marrow of healthy, so baby can birth easily.

f. Sigaran

The father broke yellow coconut to know the sex of his child. In this procession, there is a myth that if the father miss in jab the coconut, the child will born as a male, and if the father succeed in jab the middle of the coconut, the child will be born as a female.

g. Nyampingan

The mother's cloth is changed with the patterned fabric selected; any changes requested are answers to seven times instead nyamping. It is believed that the mother and the family will get the gift in accordance with patterns of the fabric.



Picture 6. Nyampingan

h. Luwaran and Simparan

Luwaran means to eliminate any distress by cutting the yellow leaf that is strapped to the belly of the mother. Simparan is done by father by kicking klenthing containing water and kicking chicken cage chicken until the chicken off the cage. Its meaning is that the gestation until delivery will run smoothly.


i. Wiyosan

Wiyosan is a process use Cengkir gadhing dropped from the chest mother of her stretched cloth, and then catch by the mother of the husband. Wiyosan symbolizes the birth of the baby.

j. Kudangan and Bubukan

Kudangan and bubukan symbolizes grandmother hold the grandchildren, and then put them to sleep. It is intended to imply affection relationship harmony.

k. Kembulan



The mother and fathers sat down and ate together. *Kembulan* symbolizing peace and harmony of the couple.

l. Kukuban

Kukuban symbolizes the process to be completed until the end. Clothes that had been used is cleaned and be putted on the bed as a sign of the work has been completed.

m. Organize

Organize the competing equipment or tools that have been used. The point is that the family is becoming the place to look for the good, so that what belongs to can be useful to society.

n. Rujakan

It is the top event symbolizes indulgence foods of pregnant mother.


D. Conclusions

Ideas, human behavior activities, and objects is a form of culture as the result of human thought. Those three forms are giving birth to an indigenous culture or tradition in the community. *Tingkeban* ceremony is one of the traditional Javanese ritual performed on women who are pregnant in her 7 months. The ceremony is believed to be the requirement before birth, contains hope for the children, mother, and families will be given the ease and safety up to the time of delivery.

These hopes are realized in the representation of objects and expressions to the tools, equipment, and procession at the *tingkeban* ceremony. Hopes and advices on *tingkeban* ceremony are aimed at father, mother and newborn babies in hope that the family can be a superior happy family, and prosperous. In general, the balanced family, happy, prosperous, will deliver a child that grow well too. From this little family, a system of the larger society, even the country will also be systematically balanced and peace.

Reference

- Bakker. 1984. *Filsafat Kebudayaan : Sebuah Pengantar*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.
- Blanchard, Marc Eli. 1980. *Description: Sign, Self, Desire: Approaches to Semiotics*. Davis: University of California.
- Chrystal, David. 1992. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- Christomy, Tommy. 2004. *Semiotika Budaya*. Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian Masyarakat dan Budaya Universitas Indonesia.
- Danandjaja, James. 1986. *Folklor Indonesia*. Jakarta: Grafiti Press.
- Endraswara, Suwardi. 2003. *Metodologi Penelitian Kebudayaan*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Halliday-Ruqaiya Hasan. 1992. *Bahasa, Konteks, dan Teks: Aspek-Aspek Bahasa dalam Pandangan semiotic Sosial*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Mohamad Goenawan. 1989. *Catatan Pinggir*. Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti.



Pateda, Mansoer. 2001. *Semantik Leksikal*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.

Poerwadarminta. 1937. *Baoesastradjava*. Batavia; J.B. Wolters-Groningen.

Pringgawidagda, Suwarna. 2003. *Upacartingkeban*. Yogyakarta : Adicita.

Suriasumantri, Jujun. 2003. *Filsafat Ilmu Sebuah Pengantar Populer*. Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan.