



The Meaning of Symbols in The Sedekah Bumi Tradition

Holina*, Dwi Wahyuni

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang
email: pascaholy.uinsgd@gmail.com, dwiwahyuni@uinib.ac.id

Abstract : This article provides an explanation of the meaning of symbols in the Sedekah Bumi tradition in the village of Air Putih Ilir, Musi Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra Province. The research method used in this study is case-study qualitative research. The data were obtained through observation, interview, and documentation techniques, then analyzed by dialogue on Barthes's semiology theory and empirical data obtained at the research location. This article shows that Sedekah Bumi has been carried out continuously from one generation to the next. Sedekah Bumi is also called Sedekah Puyang Tumamia or Puyang Burung Jauh, which is a sacred figure to the villagers of Air Putih Ilir. Sedekah Bumi is a tradition that is carried out after harvesting rice as a form of gratitude to God Almighty. Apart from that, Sedekah Bumi is also meant to ward off disaster and become a medium to strengthen ties between the residents of Air Putih Ilir village. The meaning of symbols in the equipment for the Sedekah Bumi tradition is: first, incense is used because it is thought to speed up the answering of prayers because the spirits of the dead are pleased with the fragrance of incense. Second, heirlooms that are sacred to the residents are sacred objects that have a symbol of struggle from their ancestors. Third, lemang gives a symbol of the life of a society that is so palpable but has a white and sincere heart in it. Fourth, Padi Arang symbolizes the bad nature of humans that must be abandoned.

Keywords: Barthes's Semiology; Meaning of Symbols; Sedekah Bumi; Tradition.

Abstrak : Artikel ini memberikan penjelasan tentang makna simbolik tradisi Sedekah Bumi di desa Air Putih Ilir kabupaten Musi Banyuasin, Sumatera Selatan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui teknik observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi, selanjutnya data dianalisis dengan mendialogkan teori Barthes's semiology dan data empiris yang diperoleh di lokasi penelitian. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa Sedekah Bumi telah dilaksanakan secara terus menerus dari satu generasi ke generasi. Sedekah Bumi juga disebut dengan sedekah Puyang Tumamia atau Puyang Burung Jauh yang merupakan tokoh keramat oleh penduduk desa Air Putih Ilir. Sedekah Bumi menjadi upacara adat yang dilaksanakan sesudah memanen padi sebagai perwujudan rasa terima kasih kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa. Selain itu, Sedekah Bumi juga dimaksudkan untuk menolak malapetaka serta menjadi media memperkuat tali silaturahmi antara penduduk desa Air Putih Ilir. Makna simbolik dari perlengkapan tradisi Sedekah Bumi yaitu: pertama, kemenyan digunakan karena dianggap mempercepat dikabulkannya doa karena roh-roh yang sudah meninggal senang dengan wangi-wangian kemenyan. Kedua, benda pusaka yang dikeramatkan oleh penduduk sebagai benda keramat yang memiliki simbol perjuangan dari leluhur. Ketiga, lemang memberi simbol sebagai kehidupan dari masyarakat yang begitu kerasa tetapi ada hati yang putih dan tulus di dalamnya. Keempat, padi arang menyimbolkan sifat jelek dari manusia yang diharuskan untuk ditinggalkan.

Kata Kunci: Semiologi Barthes; Makna Simbolik; Sedekah Bumi; Tradisi

INTRODUCTION

Culture and communication are two related things. This is because culture becomes behavior in communication, which in turn determines communication, develops, maintains or inherits a culture. In Levi-Strauss' view, culture has become a form of symbol manifesting intellectual creations cumulatively which are then channeled through art, belief, language and family relations (Mulyana and Jalaluddin, 2005).

Culture is viewed with multiple interpretations that are not limited to dances, customs and artistic creations. Culture is a very complex whole encompassing arts, beliefs, customs, behavior, knowledge, rules, and all the habits and abilities acquired by each individual as an element of society. Culture is the result of the thoughts of humans who are social beings. Culture in each region has its own customs and norms which differ both in terms of cultural aspects, symbols or symbols used to interact and communicate (Wanulu, 2016).

Therefore, there is no society that does not have culture, and vice versa, there is no culture without society as a vessel and supporter (Soerjono, 2005). In a society then an assessment appears that the existing methods are the best way to solve a problem. A society with a tradition aims to make human life rich in culture, historical values and create a harmonious life. Apart from that, there are also rules and norms in certain societies which are heavily influenced by traditions that already exist and develop in society. (Muhammad S, 2015).

Studies on the Sedekah Bumi tradition have been widely carried out in various focus studies, such as those

on the dimensions of theology (Nugroho, 2018), education (Siregar, Fikri, dan Khorinnisa, 2021; Merina, Qodariah, dan Pratama, 2023), law (Putri, 2023), tradition change (Taufiq, Rosyad, dan Kuswana, 2023), and nature conservation (Lestari dan Firmansyah, 2018). Different from existing studies, this article provides an explanation of the meaning of symbols in the Sedekah Bumi tradition in the village of Air Putih Ilir, Musi Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra Province.

Like the culture in Air Putih Ilir Village, which has a tradition called Sedekah Bumi. Sedekah Bumi have been carried out continuously from one generation to the next which has become a traditional ceremony to be carried out by the community. Sedekah Bumi is also called Sedekah Puyang Tumamia or Puyang Burung Jauh which is a sacred figure for the people of Air Putih Ilir Village. Sedekah Bumi is a manifestation of gratitude to God Almighty. Sedekah Bumi is also carried out so that it can ward off disaster and become a medium in strengthening friendship ties between residents.

In each Sedekah Bumi procession there has been an interaction between each individual based on the symbols that exist at each stage of the traditional ceremony. The process of the relationship can be referred to as a way to mutually influence the attitudes or activities of the residents. Meanwhile the symbolic nature of symbolizing something, in each process of the traditional ritual in the Sedekah Bumi tradition tries to convey the messages contained therein and have a specific

purpose from the perspectives and views of the people of Air Putih Ilir Village since ancient times.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article is the result of research conducted by observing the phenomenon directly and interviewing informants who are considered capable of providing information regarding the meaning of symbols in Sedekah Bumi tradition. Data collection with documentation is also carried out to enrich the necessary data and information. The primary data source for this research was obtained through structured interviews with informants consisting of traditional leaders, community leaders, and the younger generation of Air Putih Ilir village. Secondary sources are obtained from analyzed sources and studies that are relevant to the discussion of the Sedekah Bumi tradition.

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman namely collecting data, reducing data, presenting data and drawing conclusions. Data analysis was carried out by dialogue the theory of Barthes's semiology and empirical data obtained in the field. In Barthes's semiology, denotation represents the initial level of the signification system, whereas connotation signifies the subsequent level. In this instance, denotation is more closely associated with a literal meaning. Barthes sought to eliminate and reject this oppressive denotation as a response. According to him, only connotations exist. These connotations are observed within myths, which then

reveal the historical aspect of the myth (Barthes, 1988).

To interpret the sign in the context of Sedekah Bumi, it is done using a semiotic data analysis mode that relates to the meaning of signs and symbols in language. According to Barthes, the agreement of a symbol doesn't actually exist on its own, but there is a historical trajectory that goes beyond and shapes the agreement of the symbol. The crucial idea is that words or signs can primarily be assigned to conceptual categories, and these categories represent important aspects of a theory that needs to be tested. The significance of this concept is to reveal the frequency that appears in the text (Barthes, 1988).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sedekah Bumi Tradition: History, Purpose and Procession

Sedekah Bumi is also known as Sedekah Puyang Tumamia or Puyang Burung Jauh which is a sacred figure for the people of Air Putih Ilir village. Puyang Tumamia, who has the title of Burung Jauh, is seen by the villagers as a powerful person and until now his tomb is sacred. Puyang Tumamia or Puyang Burung Jauh is so sacred to the villagers, he is a figure who was born not the same as normal humans in general, he was found by an old girl named Puyang Rabi'ah who lived in this village in front of his house and was cared for by Puyang Rabi'ah. Based on an old folklore (*barai*) that one day when Puyang Rabi'ah was weaving at her house, suddenly she heard the sound of a baby crying, then Rabi'ah picked up the baby and brought her into her house. The baby

was named Tumamia, the baby was considered a biological child by Puyang Rabi'ah, although he did not know where the baby came from.

The first Sedekah Bumi was carried out because of the disaster experienced by the village of Air Putih Ilir, namely an outbreak of vomiting disease. At that time all the villagers were sick with vomiting and many of the residents died as a result of this disease.

Seeing the situation that was happening, the caretaker of the village did meditation and received wangsit or instructions from Puyang Tumamia. So that residents are asked to carry out Sedekah Bumi which is carried out after the rice harvest by making food in the form of *lemang*. Since then, the event has been carried out by residents of Air Putih Ilir Village until now. The Sedekah Bumi was then considered by the villagers of Air Putih Ilir as a way of rejecting reinforcements and as a form of gratitude to God Almighty as well as to strengthen the ties of society between the villagers. This is because after all the processes of this tradition have been completed, the residents will visit or visit each of the neighbors' homes.

This *lemang* is used by the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village as a staple food during the event. *Lemang* is made from glutinous rice and then mixed with palm sugar and bananas cooked using bamboo. Therefore, until now, *lemang* has become a symbol of Sedekah Bumi. This is the reason why the Sedekah Bumi Tradition is also known as Sedekah Melemang.

The Sedekah Bumi tradition has become a manifestation of culture which is then inherited and made into a culture by

the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village. The Sedekah Bumi tradition cannot just exist in society but has been carried out by predecessors consistently passed down to the next generation. The reason why this tradition continues to live and is always carried out by the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village is because there is a belief in this tradition and it has become an obligation to be carried out every year. Sedekah Bumi is carried out so that Air Putih Ilir Village avoids all disasters and provides safety to the village community.

The Sedekah Bumi process *first* begins with a meeting of traditional leaders, with village and community leaders discussing the right time for implementation. Once agreed, it will then be announced through the mosques in Air Putih Ilir Village. The Sedekah Bumi tradition is usually carried out after all the people have finished harvesting the rice and is carried out during the afternoon after the Zuhur prayer until the afternoon.

When the day of the Sedekah Bumi tradition has been determined, all residents of Air Putih Ilir Village prepare all the media needed to carry out the Sedekah Bumi tradition. One day before the event, the villagers were busy preparing bamboo together to make *lemang*. The bamboo that is usually used to make *lemang* is young bamboo. Then the bamboo is cleaned and put in *lonco* (a layer of young banana leaves to be used as a separator between the bamboo and glutinous rice so that the glutinous rice does not stick to the bamboo). While in the forest, apart from looking for bamboo, the community also looks for wood to use for burning *lemang*. The wood is then arranged in a cooking area and attached to

sendayan (bamboo used to clamp cooked *lemang*).



Picture 1. Young Bamboo

Next is the process of filling glutinous rice into bamboo which is then filled with coconut milk and salt which is called *lemang asin*. Glutinous rice mixed with coconut milk and granulated sugar and brown sugar is called *lemang manis*. Glutinous rice mixed with coconut milk and mashed bananas plus grated coconut is called *lemang pisang*.



Picture 2. The Process of Putting Lemang into Bamboo

Then after all the bamboo is filled, the next process is to arrange the *lemang* in the kiln. After cooking or the *lemang* has been conical then the *nguce* procession is carried out (setting aside the coals in the *lemang*).



Picture 3. Burning of Lemang

In the next stage, the four leaders or heads of descent from each resident are called the *empat tumbang* (village elders). Each *tumbang* provides *punjung ayam* arbors using different types of chickens. The chickens used in this *punjung* are a *ayam plangas kuning*, *ayam biring kuning*, *ayam putih kuning* and *ayam kumbang*.



Picture 4. *Punjung Ayam*

The Sedekah Bumi Tradition is carried out in two different places. One is in Puyang Tumamia's grave and the other is in the caretaker's house. The event began with a pilgrimage to Puyang Tumamia's grave while bringing offerings such as *padi arang*, *kemenyan*, blood, feathers and *ayam biring kuning* feet, then prayers were carried out by *tumbang* (traditional leaders). After all the processions at Puyang Tumamia's grave were completed, they went to the caretaker's house and prayed together with the community and ate *punjung ayam*.



Picture 5. *Prayed Together*

The highlight that everyone has been waiting for is the *berebot lemang* which is held at the caretaker's house.



Picture 6. *Berebot Lemang*

The Meaning of Symbols in Sedekah Bumi Tradition Equipment

In the Sedekah Bumi tradition, several tools are used in processes that have meaning, for example: *kemenyan* is an item used to perfume the room when carrying out a pilgrimage. However, the view of the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village is that burning incense can cause their prayers to be answered because the spirits of the deceased will be delighted by the sweet aroma of incense.

Heirlooms are items that have been considered by the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village as sacred in the form of *keris* and *kujur* which are symbols of the

fighting spirit of the population, self-defense and family honor in society.

Lemang is a very important food and must be present in this procession. *Lemang* is used as a symbol that in the life of every human being who is so hard there is a clean and sincere heart in the body, this picture can be seen from the raw material for *lemang* which is made from sticky rice which is then stuffed into bamboo. The hard bamboo then covers the *lemang* which means the hard life of a human being but inside there is a soft glutinous rice which means a clean and sincere heart inside his body.

Padi arang is a symbol of the evil side of every human being who must be abandoned and throw away bad luck. So that the charcoal rice will be left in the Puyang Tumamia grave.

The Meaning of Symbols of human action in The Sedekah Bumi Tradition

In the Sedekah Bumi tradition, human action is a symbol. These symbols are in the form of the actions of the Air Putih Ilir village community which are carried out in the following Sedekah Bumi procession: giving alms, charity has a goal in the Sedekah Bumi tradition, which is to repel reinforcements or to keep disasters that have occurred so that they do not come again in the future. Alms are also intended as a form of gratitude for all the sustenance given by God Almighty. Charity for the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village to reject all the dangers that will occur and also as a form of gratitude to God Almighty for the abundance of sustenance that has been given to them.

Praying together, praying to God Almighty has the aim of asking for help and protection. During Sedekah Bumi, prayer is a very important process step and

cannot be released during the Sedekah Bumi tradition. Prayers that are carried out jointly are believed by the residents of Air Putih Ilir Village to be easily answered by God Almighty. The prayer that is offered has the goal of being kept away from all calamities and dangers that will occur or are happening so that life becomes peaceful.

The *Berebot leman* is an activity that symbolizes an action carried out with the aim of sharing with fellow human beings. The *Berebot leman* is the peak event or the last procession of the Sedekah Bumi tradition. The *Berebot leman* was carried out at the caretaker's house in the village of Air Putih Ilir which was led directly by the caretaker. The *Berebot leman* procession is based on the belief that exists in the Air Putih Ilir village community that whoever the resident gets the *leman*, the resident will receive a lot of fortune in the future and if the resident cannot get the *leman*, then the resident's sustenance will be the same as sustenance what you get now.

CONCLUSION

The Sedekah Bumi tradition is a tradition of the people of Air Putih Ilir village, Musi Banyuasin regency, South Sumatra province which has the aim of manifesting gratitude and rejecting disasters that have been carried out since the time of our ancestors and then passed on from generation to generation. The motivating factor for carrying out the Sedekah Bumi tradition is that the residents are worried about a disaster in the form of an outbreak of vomiting disease that attacks all residents of Air Putih Ilir village, and to prevent this disaster, the residents of Air Putih Ilir village carry out Sedekah Bumi based on inspiration from Puyang Tumamia.

In addition, Sedekah Bumi is carried out every year after the rice harvest is also intended as a manifestation of gratitude for all the blessings that God has given in the form of agricultural products to the people of Air Putih Ilir village. Sedekah Bumi is carried out in two different places, namely at the Puyang Tumamia grave and then continued at the caretaker's house which ends with a *leman* fight which is awaited by all the people.

The meaning of symbols in the Sedekah Bumi tradition gives meaning as a communication medium to explain the meaning of the equipment used by the people of Air Putih Ilir village, such as *kemenyan*, heirlooms, *leman*, dan *Padi arang*. The people of Air Putih Ilir village jointly form a construction in building a meaning of symbols through the objects around them that can be used as a means of carrying out the Sedekah Bumi tradition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albi, A., & Johan, S. 2018. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (E. D. Lestari (ed.)). CV Jejak.
- Barthes, R. (1988). Semiology and Urbanism. *The Semiotic Challenge*, 191-201.
- Faisal, S. 1990. *Penelitian Kualitatif: Dasar-Dasar dan Aplikasi*. Ya3.
- Jalaluddin, R., & Mulyana, D. 2005. *Komunikasi Antar Budaya*, Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Lestari, E. D., Noor, A. S., & Firmansyah, A. (2018). Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Dalam Pelestarian Budaya Lokal Di Dusun Wonosari Desa Tebang Kacang. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan*

- Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa (JPPK)*, 7(9).
- Merina, M., Qodariah, L., & Pratama, C. A. (2023). The Sedekah Bumi Tradition as an Effort to Improve Local Wisdom Education for Generations of the Nation. *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities*, 6(2).
- Nasution, Muhammad Syukri Albani, dkk. 2015. *Ilmu Sosial Budaya Dasar*. Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Nugroho, H. (2018). Dimensi teologi dalam ritual sedekah bumi masyarakat Made. *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Humaniora*, 4(1), 24-49.
- Nugroho, O. C. 2016. "Interaksi Simbolik Dalam Komunikasi Budaya (Studi Analisis Fasilitas Publik Di Kabupaten Ponorogo)". *ARISTO*, 3(1), 1-18.
- Putri, S. A. (2023). Tinjauan Terhadap Tradisi Sedekah Bumi dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam. *Jurnal Dinamika Sosial Budaya*, 25(1), 156-160.
- Setianingsih, A., & Apriadi, D. W. (2021). "Makna Simbolik Tradisi Dawuhan Dusun Ngiliran Desa Ngiliran Kecamatan Panekan Kabupaten Magetan". *Jurnal Integrasi Dan Harmoni Inovatif Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 1(4), 408-418.
- Siregar, H. S., Fikri, M., & Khorinnisa, R. (2021). The Value of Islamic Education in the Sedekah Bumi ritual. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 13(3), 2049-2060.
- Soekanto, S. 2005. *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar*. Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Pustaka.
- Taufiq, A. M., Rosyad, R., & Kuswana, D. (2023). Dampak Tradisi Sedekah Bumi terhadap Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Blitar, Jawa Timur. *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas*, 3(1), 117-130.
- Wanulu, R. (2016). "Makna Interaksi Simbolik Pada Proses Upacara Adat Cume dan Sampua Suku Buton di Samarinda". *EJournal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 4(3), 265-279.