

RELIGI

JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

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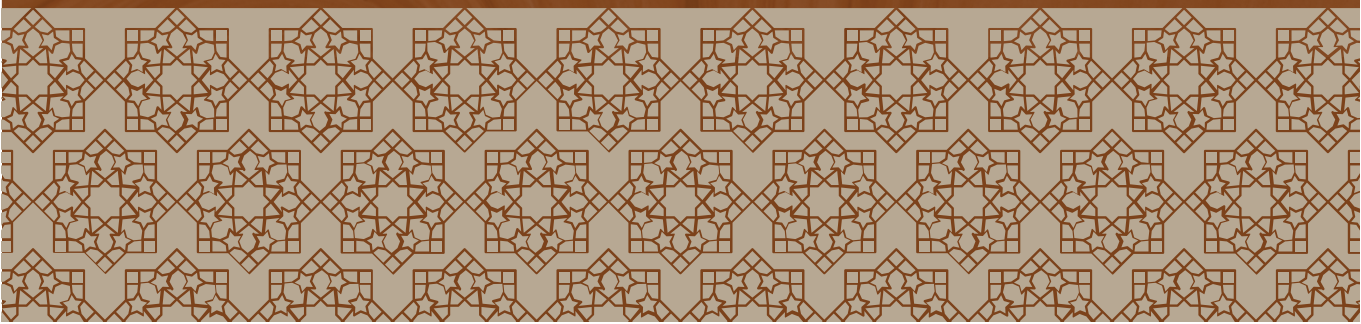
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RELIGIOUS-CULTURAL ACCULTURATION IN DECORATED BATHING OF MUSLIM TRADITION IN THE MALAY COMMUNITY, TALAWI DISTRICT, BATUBARA REGENCY

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Abstract

The tradition of bathing with ornaments is one of the wedding customs of the Malay Muslim community in Talawi District, Batubara Regency, which is still maintained to this day. The continuity of this tradition indicates the interaction between Islamic values and local culture that shape the community's social practices. This study aims to analyze the forms of religious and cultural acculturation, symbolic meanings, and social functions contained in the bathing with ornaments tradition. The study used a qualitative method with a field study approach through observation, interviews, and documentation, supported by literature review. The research analysis uses acculturation theory to understand the process of acceptance, adaptation, and preservation of local cultural elements in the lives of Muslim communities without losing their religious identity. The results show that the bathing with ornaments tradition functions as a rite of passage that marks the change in social status of the prospective bride and groom towards married life. This tradition also contains symbols that represent the values of purity, responsibility, moral readiness, and hopes for the formation of a harmonious family. Although not part of the pillars or legal requirements of marriage in Islam, the community interprets this tradition as a means of strengthening religious values, preserving Malay cultural identity, and strengthening social solidarity. The research findings show that the relationship between religion and culture in the tradition of decorative bathing takes place through a harmonious acculturation process, so that local traditions remain sustainable without conflicting with the principles of Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Decorative bathing tradition; Ritual transition; Integration of religion and culture

Abstrak

Tradisi mandi berhias merupakan salah satu adat pernikahan masyarakat Muslim Melayu di Kecamatan Talawi, Kabupaten Batubara, yang masih dipertahankan hingga saat ini. Keberlangsungan tradisi tersebut menunjukkan adanya interaksi antara nilai-nilai Islam dan budaya lokal yang membentuk praktik sosial masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk

menganalisis bentuk akulturasi agama dan budaya, makna simbolik, serta fungsi sosial yang terkandung dalam tradisi mandi berhias. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi lapangan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, yang didukung oleh studi pustaka. Analisis penelitian menggunakan teori akulturasi untuk memahami proses penerimaan, penyesuaian, dan pelestarian unsur budaya lokal dalam kehidupan masyarakat Muslim tanpa menghilangkan identitas keagamaannya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tradisi mandi berhias berfungsi sebagai ritus peralihan yang menandai perubahan status sosial calon pengantin menuju kehidupan berumah tangga. Tradisi ini juga mengandung simbol-simbol yang merepresentasikan nilai kesucian, tanggung jawab, kesiapan moral, dan harapan terhadap terbentuknya keluarga yang harmonis. Meskipun bukan bagian dari rukun maupun syarat sah pernikahan dalam Islam, masyarakat memaknai tradisi ini sebagai sarana penguatan nilai-nilai religius, pelestarian identitas budaya Melayu, dan penguatan solidaritas sosial. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hubungan antara agama dan budaya dalam tradisi mandi berhias berlangsung melalui proses akulturasi yang harmonis, sehingga tradisi lokal tetap lestari tanpa bertentangan dengan prinsip-prinsip ajaran Islam.

Kata kunci: Tradisi Mandi Berhias; Ritus Peralihan; Integrasi Agama dan Budaya.

INTRODUCTION

In the life of Muslim society, religion and culture cannot be understood as two independent entities, but as two elements that interact with each other in forming a system of values, identities, and social practices of society. This relationship is evident in Malay society which since the process of Islamization has experienced an encounter between Islamic teachings and local traditions that have developed before.¹ The entry of Islam into Malay territory does not necessarily eliminate the culture that has lived in the community, but takes place through a process of adjustment and integration that allows elements of local culture to be maintained as long as they do not conflict with the basic values of Islam.² This process gave birth to various traditions that show the connection between religion and culture in the daily life of the Malay people.

One of the traditions that is still practiced to this day is the tradition of embellished baths in a series of wedding customs of the Malay Muslim community in Talawi District, Batu Bara Regency. This tradition is carried out after the wedding procession as part of a series of customs that mark changes in the social status of the bride and groom. In its implementation, there are various symbols, traditional equipment, advice delivered by the bridal midwife, and values related to domestic life. The presence of these elements shows that the tradition of decorated bathing not only functions as a ceremonial ritual, but also as a medium for conveying social, moral, and religious values that are passed down from one generation to the next. Therefore, this tradition is interesting to study

¹ Handika Purnama, Islamic Law, customs, and state law in marriage of the Malay community in Pekanbaru Riau: Validity, ethics, and administration of marriage. *Al-Ahwal*, 14(1). 2021, p. 2.

² Robi'ah, & Astafi, R. Religious values in the tradition of Kumbo Taman Bath in the Bengkalis Malay marriage custom. *EKOMA: Journal of Economics, Management, Accounting*, 3(3). 2024. p. 121.

as a phenomenon that shows the relationship between religion and culture in the life of the Malay people.

In the study of religious anthropology, the relationship between religion and culture is often explained through the concept of acculturation. Acculturation is the process of meeting two different cultural systems so that it results in adjustment and integration without losing the basic identity of each interacting element.³ In the context of the Malay Muslim community, acculturation can be understood as the process of accepting and adjusting elements of local culture with Islamic values which then form distinctive social practices. Through this process, various symbols, rites, and traditions acquire new meanings that are in accordance with the religious life of the community. Thus, the tradition of decorated bathing can be understood as a form of acculturation that shows how Malay culture is maintained while being given legitimacy through Islamic values.

A number of previous studies have discussed the tradition of bathing in Malay society in various regions. Several studies examined the tradition of bathing in Lalat Regency,⁴ traditional bathing tradition in Medang Deras,⁵ as well as the tradition of kumbo bathing in the Bengkalis Malay community.⁶ Other research also shows that Malay marriage customs have a close relationship with Islamic teachings through the principle of sharia joint customs, sharia with Kitabullah joints. However, much of the research still focuses on describing the implementation of the tradition and its symbolic meaning. Studies that specifically analyze the tradition of decorated bathing as a form of acculturation between Islamic teachings and Malay culture, especially in the Malay community in Talawi District, are still relatively limited. These limitations indicate that there is a space for study that needs to be further researched to understand the form, process, and meaning of acculturation that develops in the tradition.

³ Sri Lestari & Yuyun Yunita, Syncretism of Islamic Culture and Local Culture of the Archipelago in Strengthening Community Relations. *Ri'ayah: Social and Religious Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 01, 2025. p. 95; Roni Ismail, "Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan Integratif: Studi atas Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan Ambon", *Living Islam*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2020; 451-469; doi: <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v3i2.2458>; Roni Ismail, Abidin Wakano, dan Genoveva Leasiwal, "Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan Berbasis Kearifan Lokal: Studi Pela Gandong di Ambon", *Living Islam*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Tahun 2022; 93-108. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v5i1.3012>.

⁴ Putri Seftrin and Yusra Dewi Siregar, "Berdimar Tradition as a Marriage Culture of the Malay Community in Stabat Langkat Regency," *Philosophy: Publications of Communication Sciences, Design and Tourism* 1, no. 4 (2024): 73–81.

⁵ Nurhaliza, Dardanila, and P. Ritonga, "Pepatah-Petitih in the Tradition of Bathing in Malay Traditional Marriage in Medang Deras District: An Anthropolinguistic Study," *Tambusai Education Journal* 8, no. 1 (2024): 10175–10198.

⁶ Robi'ah and Riki Astafi, "Religious Values in the Tradition of Bathing Kumbo Taman in the Bengkalis Malay Marriage Customs," *EKOMA: Journal of Economics, Management, Accounting* 3, no. 3 (2024): 120–128.

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of field research. Research data were obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews⁷ with traditional leaders, religious leaders, bridal midwives, and the community involved in the implementation of the tradition of decorated bathing, and supported by documentation⁸ and literature studies. Data analysis was carried out in a descriptive-thematic manner to identify the forms of acculturation, symbols used, and social and religious meanings that developed in the tradition. Theoretically, this study uses Religious Theory as a Symbol System proposed by Clifford Geertz⁹ to understand the symbolic meaning contained in the tradition of ornamental bathing as well as Victor Turner's Theory of Rite of Transition to explain the function of the ritual as part of the process of social transition in people's lives.¹⁰ Based on this description, this study asks three main questions, namely: how to acculturate between Islamic teachings and Malay culture in the tradition of decorated bathing in Talawi District; how the symbols and rites in the tradition of decorated bathing are interpreted by the Malay Muslim community; and how the tradition of decorated bathing plays a role in maintaining cultural identity while representing Islamic values in people's lives.

OBJECT OF STUDY EXPLANATION

The object of study in this study focuses on the tradition of decorated bathing in a series of wedding customs of the Malay Muslim community in Talawi District, Batubara Regency, as a social practice that shows the relationship between Islamic teachings and local culture. In the life of the Malay Talawi community, customs and religion are not separated as two independent systems, but are integrated in a unity of values that form a pattern of social behavior. The tradition of decorated bathing, which is carried out after the procession descends from the wedding, not only serves as the closing of the traditional series, but also as a symbolic space that contains social and religious values. The implementation involves ritual elements such as the use of water and traditional equipment, the presence of a bridal bath midwife as the director of the procession,

⁷ Interviews are understood as a form of interaction that involves the exchange of various aspects, such as rules, responsibilities, feelings, beliefs, motives, and information between the parties involved. Through this process, researchers can get an overview of the actual conditions in the field so that the problems being researched can be identified and analyzed more precisely. Read in F. Firdaus, et al, *Economic Research Methodology* (Aceh: Muhammad Zaini Publishing Foundation, 2021), 45.

⁸ Documentation is used as a complementary data source in the study, where the researcher collects and interprets secondary data in the form of photographs, notes, voice recordings and documents related to the focus of the study.

⁹ In Nurus Syarifah & Zidna Zuhdana Mushthoza, Clifford Geertz's Interpretive Anthropology: A Case Study of the Religious Societies of Balinese and Morocco, *Humanis*, 14(2). 2022, 69.

¹⁰ Dalam Rina Rehayati, M. Ridwan Hasbi & Martius, An Exploration of Local Wisdom: Rites of Passage in Malay Culture in Riau and Palembang, *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 6(9). 2023. 114.

as well as accompanied by the chanting of Malay songs such as Lancang Kuning. In addition, in the procession there was also the delivery of advice and advice to the bride and groom which contained the values of married life based on the principles of sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah. Thus, the tradition of decorated bathing not only functions as a ceremonial activity, but also as a means of inheriting moral, social, and religious values to members of society.

In this study, the tradition of decorated bathing is understood as a practice that represents a form of acculturation between Islamic teachings and Malay culture that develops in people's lives. The acculturation can be seen from how elements of local culture are maintained as part of the identity of the Malay community, while Islamic values are integrated into the meaning, purpose, and implementation of the tradition. This process shows the interaction and adjustment between local culture and religious teachings without eliminating the basic characteristics of each. Therefore, this study not only describes the form and implementation of the tradition of decorated bathing, but also analyzes how the symbols, rites, and practices contained in it represent the process of religious and cultural acculturation, as well as how these traditions function as a medium for preserving Malay cultural identity as well as a means of actualizing Islamic values in the lives of the people of Talawi District, Batu Bara Regency.

DEFINITION OF ACCULTURATION & TRADITION OF DECORATED BATHS

Etymologically, the term acculturation comes from Latin *acculturatio* which refers to the process of meeting and interacting between two or more cultures. The word acculturation in English is, *Acculturate* Which means: adapting (to new cultural customs or foreign customs).¹¹ In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI), acculturation is defined as the mixing of two or more cultures that meet and influence each other, as well as the process of entering foreign cultural elements into a society that is accepted and processed without eliminating the existing cultural personality.¹² This understanding shows that acculturation is a social process that allows interaction, adjustment, and integration of various cultural elements in people's lives without losing their basic identity.

In anthropology, the concept of acculturation is understood as a phenomenon that occurs due to direct and continuous contact between groups with different cultural backgrounds. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits define acculturation as cultural change that arises as a result of the ongoing interaction between culturally different groups of

¹¹ In Ilimyah al-Amri & Muhammad Haramain. Islamic acculturation in local culture. *Curiosity*. 11(2). 2017. 193.

¹² Language Development and Development Agency, Dictionary of the Great Indonesian Language (KBBI) Online, entry "Acculturation", accessed 8 June 2026.

people.¹³ In line with that, Koentjaraningrat stated that acculturation is the process of accepting and processing new cultural elements into the local culture without eliminating the original cultural personality of the community.¹⁴ Thus, acculturation not only indicates the presence of cultural encounters, but also describes the process of adjustment and integration that allows various cultural elements to coexist in people's lives.

In religious studies, acculturation is understood as the process of interaction between religious teachings and local culture that takes place dynamically in people's lives. Religion does not exist in a social space separate from culture, but rather interacts with values, traditions, and social practices that have developed before. Through this process, religious values can be accepted and expressed through local symbols, rites, and traditions without having to eliminate their basic characteristics. In the perspective of sociology and religious anthropology, this phenomenon shows the way societies build common ground between different value systems without letting go of the identity that has become part of their lives. This process takes place through social and cultural adjustments that develop naturally in daily life, so that existing cultural elements are maintained along with the presence of new values that are considered relevant. From this process, various traditions, social practices, and religious expressions are formed that have distinctive characteristics according to the context of the supporting community.¹⁵

In the process of acculturation, local culture is not abolished or replaced by new cultures that come, but rather is integrated and harmonized with the values brought by that culture. Through the interaction that takes place gradually, cultural elements that have taken root in people's lives are maintained as long as they do not conflict with the accepted teaching principles. Therefore, acculturation does not always produce an entirely new cultural system or form of religiosity, but rather gives birth to a variety of contextual social and religious expressions as a result of the encounter between local culture and religion. This phenomenon shows that religious values can develop in society through cultural mediums that have been known and inherited from generation to generation.

In the context of this study, the acculturation process can be seen in the interaction between Malay culture represented in the tradition of decorated bathing with Islamic teachings that develop in the life of the Malay Muslim community. The tradition of decorated bathing is still maintained as part of the cultural heritage and identity of the Malay community, but various elements in it have undergone adjustments so that they are in harmony with Islamic values. These adjustments can be seen in the meaning, purpose of implementation, and symbols used in the tradition. Thus, the tradition of

¹³ Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38, no. 1 (1936): 149.

¹⁴ Koentjaraningrat, *Introduction to Anthropology* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2015), 202–203.

¹⁵ "Your Majesty's Majesty, *Sociology of Religion* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2011), pp. 65–78.

decorated bathing is a real example of how local culture and Islamic teachings can interact harmoniously without eliminating the main characteristics of each, so that the two can coexist and strengthen each other in the social life of the community.

Based on this framework, this study views the tradition of decorated bathing as a form of cultural expression that represents the ongoing acculturation process between Malay culture and Islamic teachings in people's lives. This tradition is not only maintained as a cultural heritage that is inherited from generation to generation, but is also interpreted as a means of conveying religious, moral, and social values related to domestic life. The presence of Islamic values in the implementation of the tradition of decorated bathing shows that customs and religion are not placed as two elements that contradict each other, but as complementary parts in shaping the identity of the Malay Muslim community. Therefore, the tradition of decorated bathing can be understood not only as a ceremonial practice, but also as a medium for cultural preservation as well as the actualization of Islamic values that live in the social life of the community.

In the study of sociology and anthropology, tradition is understood as a social practice that is inherited from generation to generation and functions to transmit values, norms, and cultural symbols in people's lives.¹⁶ Tradition is not just a repeated habit, but is part of the social structure that regulates the patterns of relationships and rites of life. According to KBBI, tradition is a custom that is passed down from generation to generation and continues to be practiced in society.¹⁷ Faishal emphasized that tradition is a legacy of the past that continues to be preserved and has the potential to continue in the next generation,¹⁸ while Koentjaraningrat views culture as a whole system of ideas, actions, and human works that are studied and inherited in a sustainable manner.¹⁹ In the context of Malay society, the position of tradition becomes more complex because it is bound to normative principles. "Shari'ah Joints, Kitabullah Joints," which emphasizes that customs are carried out as long as they do not contradict the teachings of Islam.²⁰ This principle shows that the relationship between custom and religion is integrative, so that customary practices, especially in marriage, not only function as cultural expressions, but also as a medium for internalizing religious values in social life.

¹⁶ Zeki Hilal ikhsan, *The meaning of the tradition of reading surah al-mulk (the study of living qur'an in pptq 'aisyiyah) ponorogo*. (Thesis, Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari State Islamic University, Ponorogo, 2025). 112.

¹⁷ Language Center of the Ministry of National Education, *Great Dictionary of Indonesian Language* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2005), 28.

¹⁸ Muhammad Faishal, *Religious Diversity of the Batu Bara Malay Community*. (Dissertation, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, 2020). 132

¹⁹ Koentjaraningrat, *Introduction to Anthropology*, (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2009), p. 144.

²⁰ Miza Almutasya Billah, et al. The influence of Islam on Malay culture in Riau. *Journal of Building the Ummat: Building and Fortifying the Ummat*, 8(2). 2025. 14.

One of the practices that represents this relationship is the tradition of embellished baths in a series of traditional Malay weddings, which is also known as kumbo baths, garden baths, or baths in various regions (Robi'ah & Astafi, 2024).²¹ Essentially, this practice is the closing of a series of customs that mark the transition of the status of the bride and groom from single to domestic life, so that from an anthropological perspective the ritual can be understood as a rite of transition in the liminal phase as proposed by Victor Turner. In Talawi District, Batubara Regency, a decorated bath was carried out after the procession came down from the wedding involving the bride, bridal midwife, family, and the community. The results of the interviews show that the tradition of embellished baths is interpreted as a symbol of “purification of the heart” that represents mental, moral, and spiritual readiness, not as a theological process of the remission of sins for both brides.²² Sociologically, this practice functions as a mechanism of social legitimacy for changes in the status of the bride, strengthens family solidarity, and becomes a medium for the transmission of the values of domestic life.²³ This kind of interpretation is in line with the findings of Alamsyah et al.'s study on Malay marriage customs which states that the series of pre-marriage processions not only functions as a social tradition, but also as a means of internalizing Islamic values in family life.²⁴ Thus, decorated baths are understood as part of Malay wedding customs which function as a marker of social transition as well as a symbol of readiness to build a domestic life, which enriches the social and spiritual meaning of marriage without being part of the harmony or legal requirements in Islamic law.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRADITION OF DECORATED BATHING IN THE COAL MALAY TRADITIONAL WEDDING SERIES

The tradition of decorated bathing is one of the important stages in the series of Malay traditional weddings in Talawi District, Batubara Regency, which is loaded with symbolic values, moral messages, and socio-religious meanings. Based on the results of observations and interviews with traditional actors and bridal midwives, this procession is generally carried out in the afternoon, although there are no absolute binding customary

²¹ Robi'ah, R., & Astafi, R. Religious values in the tradition of Kumbo Taman Bath in the Bengkalis Malay marriage custom. *EKOMA: Journal of Economics, Management, Accounting*, 3(3), 2024. 120–128.

²² Results of an Interview with Kholijah (Community leader about decorated baths. Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 25, 2026 at his house).

²³ Larasati, H., & Rukmana, L. Perspective of the Sadu community on the tradition of Safar bathing in Air Hitam Laut Village, Tanjung Jabung Timur. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic History and Culture*, 6(1). 2025. 19.

²⁴ Ahmad Gifari Alamsyah, Andhika Nugraha, Muhammad Reza, Hasan Sazali, & Maulana Andina Dalimunthe. Malay culture and the influence of Islam in wedding ceremonies at tanjung balai, preface: *Journal of Education, History, and Social Sciences*, 6(2). 2022. 413.

provisions regarding the time of its implementation. This flexibility shows that what takes precedence in this tradition is not the formal aspect of time, but rather the symbolic meaning contained in it. The entire series is guided by two bridal midwives who play a role in directing the procession while ensuring that each stage takes place in accordance with traditional procedures that have been passed down from generation to generation. The presence of two bridal midwives reflects the society's view that marriage brings together not only two individuals, but also two families and the wider social environment.²⁵ Thus, decorated bathing is not simply understood as a ceremonial activity, but as part of a system of meaning that lives in the social structure of Malay society.

The implementation of the procession began with the bride and groom sitting side by side on chairs that had been prepared in the courtyard of the house. This parallel sitting position symbolizes togetherness and readiness to live a married life together. The bride wears traditional clothes such as *baju kurung* as a symbol of Malay female politeness, while the groom wears clothes that still meet the elements of propriety. Around them, the main equipment has been prepared in the form of water in a round shaped container, flower water, green betel nut *mayang* that is still closed, loose from the weaving of coconut shoots, and coconut ledges.²⁶

The next stage is the use of betel nuts. Each bridal midwife holds a green betel nut and directs it to the mouths of the bride and groom. Next, the water that has been prepared is poured through the betel nut *mayang* until it flows into the mouth of each bride and groom. At the same time, the bride and groom hold a loose-off end made of woven coconut shoots. After the water enters the mouth, the bride and groom simultaneously pull the loose end while spraying water towards the loose that has been bound until it comes loose. This procession is interpreted as a symbol of letting go of the old status from single to a new life as a married couple.²⁷

After the procession, the stage continued with the breaking of the betel nut. Before being broken, the *mayang* is rotated over the head of each bride and groom three times while accompanied by the recitation of the prayer. Next, the *mayang* is patted until it is open, then thrown to the ground in sequential movements, namely from the back of the bride's body to the front, then back to the back, and at the final stage it is thrown forward with a greater distance until the areca nut flowers scatter. This series of movements is carried out in a directed manner as part of traditional procedures that

²⁵ Interview Results with Ratna (Bridal Midwife in a decorated bath, Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 21, 2026 at her house).

²⁶ Interview Results with Ratna (Bridal Midwife in a decorated bath, Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 21, 2026 at her house).

²⁷ Interview Results with Sabariah (Bridal Midwife in a decorated bath, Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 23, 2026 at her house).

have been inherited from generation to generation. The next stage is the use of coconut laundry, which is rubbed on each bride's body three times. At this stage, the bride midwife conveys advice and prayers related to family life, such as the importance of listening to each other, appreciating, and maintaining the harmony of the marital relationship.²⁸ After the fuscation process is complete, the coconut lantern is then broken and thrown forward as a symbol of letting go of bad things and the hope for a better domestic life.

The core stage of the bathing procession is carried out by pouring water that has been mixed with flowers such as roses, jasmine, ylang, and cempaka and other fragrant flowers, onto the bodies of the two brides and groom alternately. At this stage, the bride midwife again conveys advice that contains moral messages, such as the encouragement to solve household problems properly, not to commit violence, forgive each other, and live according to religious teachings, this is witnessed by the family as a form of social recognition for the change in the status of the bride and groom.²⁹

After finishing the bath, the bride and groom were dried and directed to enter the house to continue the next stage. At this stage, a long cloth is used equipped with rice or rice placed on the edge. In current practice, rice is often replaced by rice due to limited availability.³⁰ In addition, a betel nut was also prepared which contained various equipment such as betel, thread, candles, and glass. The bride and groom then eat betel nut, followed by tying a thread as a symbol of bonding which is then released using a lit candle as a symbol of illumination in domestic life.

As a final stage, the groom walks first while holding the bride's hand towards the room. Before entering the room, the bride and groom were directed to walk on a long cloth that had been prepared by the bride midwife. The cloth is stretched to the front of the door of the room, with the ends folded to resemble the size of the bride's two feet as the last footing. After reaching this part, the bride and groom are asked to step on rice or rice, and in some executions old coconuts are added, which have been placed separately on a certain container. The stomping process is carried out using the right toe of each bride and groom alternately according to the direction of the bridal midwife. This stage is interpreted as a symbol of hope for prosperity, welfare, and the sustainability of domestic life that will be lived.

²⁸ Siti Nurhaliza, Dardanila, Parlaungan Ritonga. Proverbs-Petitih in the Tradition of Bathing in Malay Traditional Marriage, Medang Deras District: An Anthropolinguistic Study. *Tambusai Education Journal*. 8(1). 2024. 10175-10198.

²⁹ Interview Results with Sabariah (Bridal Midwife in a decorated bath, Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 23, 2026 at her house).

³⁰ Interview Results with Ratna (Bridal Midwife in a decorated bath, Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 21, 2026 at her house).

After all these stages were carried out, the bride and groom then entered the room as the closing of the series of decorated bathing processions. This tradition is not mandatory and does not determine whether marriage is legal or not, but it is still maintained as part of the cultural heritage that has social and symbolic value in the life of the Malay Batubara community.

SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE MATERIALS AND TOOLS OF THE DECORATED BATH TRADITION

Each material and tool used in the tradition of decorated bathing has a symbolic meaning that reflects the cultural values of the Malay Coal community. This meaning is not only related to expectations for domestic life, but also describes people's views on fertility, unity, purification, and well-being. One of the main elements in this procession is the betel nut mayang which is used in a closed and green state. Based on the results of interviews with the bridal midwife, the color green symbolizes fertility, life, growth, and new hope, while the condition of the mayang that is still closed is interpreted as a symbol of a household that is still in the early phase, still fresh, and still in the process of growth.³¹ Thus, in the context of marriage, mayang pinang is the symbol of the beginning of a household journey that is expected to develop harmoniously and sustainably. The act of turning the mayang over the head before it is solved is also understood as a form of strengthening hope and a symbol of readiness to enter a new phase of life.³²

In addition, the use of loose-release made of woven coconut shoots has a symbolic meaning as a form of letting go of the old status to the new status. The loose held by the bride and groom before the water-spraying procession depicts two individuals who previously lived independently, then symbolically relinquished that status to enter life together as husband and wife. The two bonds that were originally fused and then detached when pulled together become visual representations of the transformation of identity and responsibility in the social structure, so that marriage is understood not only as a personal union, but also as a customarily and socially recognized change in status.

In its implementation, the water used in this procession is placed in a container known as gebuk, which is a round water container traditionally made of pottery and decorated with woven young coconut leaves.³³ The water is then mixed with various types of fragrant flowers such as roses, jasmine, ylang, and cempaka, which symbolically

³¹ Interview Results with Sabariah (Bridal Midwife in a decorated bath, Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 25, 2026 at her house).

³² Siti Nurhaliza, Dardanila, Parlaungan Ritonga. Proverbs-Petitih in the Tradition of Bathing in Malay Traditional Marriage, Medang Deras District: An Anthropolinguistic Study. *Tambusai Education Journal*. 8(1). 2024. 10175-10198.

³³ O.K. Gusti bin O.K. Zakaria. *The Principles of Marriage Customs of the Malay Tribe of East Sumatra*, USU Press. 2018. 99

symbolize the purification of birth and mind, the fragrance of good name, and the beauty of morals. Water as a source of life not only functions physically, but also represents spiritual renewal and purity, while fragrant flowers symbolize the hope that home life will bring tranquility and have a positive impact on the surrounding environment.³⁴

The symbolic meaning is also seen in the use of coconut longings that are rubbed onto the bride's body before being broken. In practice, this process is accompanied by prayer and advice, which shows that physical symbols in Malay customs are always connected to spiritual values. Coconut longing was chosen because it has clear water, which symbolizes clarity of heart and mind in living a married life. The breaking of the coconut cling in the direction of the front is interpreted as a symbol of the disposal of bad things and the hope that all obstacles can be removed.³⁵ Furthermore, the rice and rice stepped on by the bride and groom before entering the room symbolize prosperity and well-being. Rice as the main symbol in Malay agrarian society represents a source of life and the sustainability of sustenance, so the act of stepping on it contains the hope that the households built will always be endowed with economic sufficiency.

In addition, the use of betel nut and its equipment, such as betel, thread, glass, powder, and candles, also contains a deep symbolic meaning. Betel symbolizes respect and acceptance, thread symbolizes bonding, candles as a light of life, and glass as self-reflection. The procession surrounding the betel nut and the release of threads with the help of candles shows the presence of a symbol of strengthening bonds as well as illumination in living family life.

ACCULTURATION OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS AND MALAY CULTURE IN THE TRADITION OF DECORATED BATHS

The tradition of adorned bathing in the Malay Muslim community in Talawi District shows that there is an acculturation process between Malay culture and Islamic teachings that takes place in the life of the community. In this context, acculturation is understood as the process of interaction, adjustment, and integration of Islamic values into cultural practices that have been inherited from generation to generation. This process does not eliminate the Malay cultural identity inherent in the tradition of decorated bathing, but rather provides a new meaning and orientation that is in line with Islamic teachings. Thus, the tradition of decorated bathing is still maintained as part of the cultural heritage of the Malay community, but its implementation is within the framework of Islamic

³⁴ Salszhabila. (2024). The tradition of rose water cucur in the perspective of 'urf in West Kalimantan. *The Proceedings of the 8th Borneo Undergraduate Academic Forum*. 2024. 171

³⁵ Wahyu Nurcahyono, et al. Cultural Da'wah through the Tradition of Walimatul Aqiqah: A Study of Symbolic Communication in the Lampung Community. *Anida: Actualization of the nuances of da'wah*. 25(1). 2025. 149—168.

values that live in the social life of the community. Principle *adat berandi syara'*, *syara' berandi Kitabullah* It is a normative foundation that emphasizes that every traditional practice must be in harmony with Islamic teachings, so that the continuity of tradition remains within the sharia corridor.

The acculturation is seen concretely in every stage of the decorated bath procession, especially in the delivery of advice by the bridal midwife. The advice conveyed is not only ceremonial, but contains religious values that function as prayers as well as guidelines for the bride and groom in living a married life. The expectations conveyed generally refer to the concept of the family of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* as explained in the Qur'an. Ar-Rum [30] verse 21, which affirms that the purpose of marriage is the creation of peace (*Lithuania*), as well as the presence of love (*Mawaddah*) and affection (*Rahmah*). In the understanding of the Malay Muslim community, the concept of *Sakinah* It is not only interpreted as external calm, but also inner firmness in facing domestic life. Meanwhile, *Mawaddah* is understood as love accompanied by commitment and responsibility, while *Rahmah* It reflects compassion that breeds empathy, care, and mutual forgiveness.³⁶ Therefore, the delivery of advice in the procession of decorated baths shows how Islamic values are integrated into cultural traditions so that these traditions become a means of internalizing religious teachings in the social life of the community.

The acculturation process is also reflected in the use of symbolic elements contained in the procession of decorated baths. Water as the main element in rituals not only serves as a means of external cleansing, but is also interpreted as a symbol of self-purification and a source of life. This meaning is in line with QS. Al-Anbiya [21] verse 30, which explains that Allah made all living things from water. Based on this understanding, the use of water in the tradition of decorated bathing is seen as a symbol of hope so that the domestic life that will be lived by the bride and groom will always grow, develop, and obtain blessings.³⁷ Symbolically, the watering procession also reflects the hope that the bride and groom will be able to cleanse themselves of various negative traits and prepare themselves to enter a new phase of life. When water is combined with fragrant flowers, the symbol is further enriched with the meaning of moral fragrance, which is the hope that couples will be able to maintain family honor, build harmonious relationships, and bring peace to domestic life.

The acculturation between Malay culture and Islamic teachings is also reflected in the meaning of various traditional equipment used in the decorated bath procession.

³⁶ Kurtianto Pradana Putra, Suprihatin, Oni Wastoni. The meaning of *sakinah* in Surah al-Rum verse 21 according to m. Quraish syihab in tafsir al-mishbah and its relevance to the purpose of marriage in the compilation of Islamic law. *Maslahah*, 12 (2) 2021. 15-32.

³⁷ Muhamad Djamaluddin, et al. Water in a Religious and Cultural Perspective. *Journal on Education*, 7(2). 2025. 8733-8740.

The coconut kelongkong, for example, is understood as a symbol of useful life, because all parts of the coconut have a useful value in the life of the Malay community. This symbolizes the hope that the household that is built is productive, mutually supportive, and provides benefits. Rice and rice symbolize sustenance and blessings, as well as contain moral values through Malay expressions “*The more content, the more bowed,*” which is in line with the concept of *tawadhu’* in Islam. Meanwhile, the green mayang areca nut symbolizes fertility and new life, as a symbol of the beginning of the phase of the household which is expected to develop harmoniously and give birth to a pious and pious generation. The detached procession is interpreted as a symbol of the transition of status from single to married life, which in Islam is affirmed through the marriage contract as *Mitsaqan Ghalizha* As mentioned in the Qur’an Surah An-Nisa verse 21, this concept shows that marriage is a firm and responsible covenant, thus requiring emotional, moral, and spiritual readiness. This meaning is strengthened by the hadith of the Prophet who states that divorce is the most hated halal matter by Allah,³⁸ So that marriage is understood as a commitment that must be maintained with seriousness.

The community’s view of the relationship between customs and Islam is also affirmed through the testimony of local religious leaders, who stated that the tradition of decorated bathing does not contain elements that are contrary to the sharia as long as it is not accompanied by deviant beliefs, but only contains prayers and advice. He emphasized that the validity of marriage is still determined by the marriage contract, not by the traditional procession. In addition, he also associated this practice with the rules of fiqh which states that customs can be used as legal considerations as long as they do not contradict the nash.³⁹ A similar view was conveyed by Mr. Jamal who emphasized that the tradition of decorated bathing is a form of expression of Islamic values in the context of local culture. According to him, as long as the tradition is understood as a symbol and not as a special worship, then there is no contradiction with the teachings of Islam. He also emphasized that Islam does not abolish customs, but directs them to remain in harmony with the principles of monotheism and the values of goodness.⁴⁰

Based on this description, it can be understood that acculturation in the tradition of decorated bathing does not show a conflict between customs and religion but rather customs and Islam go together. Traditions are maintained as cultural heritage, while Islamic teachings provide a framework of values that guide their meaning. Thus, the practice of decorated bathing in Talawi District reflects the form of religiosity of the

³⁸ Siswanto. Understanding the meaning of Mi Tsagan Ghali Zan in the Qur’an. *Tafakkur; Journal of Qur’an Science and Tafsir*. 2 (1). 2021. 27.

³⁹ Results of an Interview with Hamida (Religious Leader, Direct Interview in Talawi District, on January 28, 2026 at his home).

⁴⁰ Results of an Interview with Jamaluddin (Religious Leader, Direct Interview in Talawi District, on February 1, 2026 at his home).

Malay community which is not only manifested in formal worship, but also in cultural traditions that are loaded with moral and spiritual values, without changing the position of the marriage contract as a determinant of the validity of marriage in Islam.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS MEANING OF DECORATED BATHS

For the Malay people of Batubara, the decorated bath is not understood simply as a series of customs after marriage, but as a social event that contains collective, emotional, and religious meanings. This tradition presents a space for togetherness when extended family, relatives, traditional leaders, and the surrounding community gather to witness and pray for the new life of the bride and groom. In this context, marriage is not seen only as a personal relationship between a man and a woman, but also as a social event that involves the recognition and acceptance of society for the change in the status of the bride and groom. Therefore, decorated baths are interpreted as a form of social legitimacy for the formation of new households in the structure of Malay society.

As stated by one of the traditional leaders in Talawi: *“This beghias bath is like tando that the bride and groom have been accepted as husband and wife in the midst of the family and society. So it’s not only religiously valid, but also culturally and socially recognized.”*⁴¹ The statement shows that people view the importance of social recognition in domestic life, so that this tradition is a means of strengthening family relationships, strengthening social solidarity, and providing moral support for newly married couples.

In addition to having a social meaning, decorated baths also contain a religious dimension that lives in the meaning of the Malay Coal community. This tradition is not positioned as a religious obligation or a determinant of the validity of marriage, because people understand that the validity of marriage in Islam lies in a marriage contract that fulfills the harmony and requirements of sharia. However, the decorated bath is seen as a medium for delivering prayers, advice, and Islamic values packaged through cultural symbols. These values are reflected in the various advice of bride midwives regarding the importance of building a family that is *Savage, Savage, Savage*, as Allah says in QS. Ar-Rum verse 21, this verse becomes the normative basis for society in interpreting domestic life as a space of peace, affection, and spiritual responsibility. Therefore, the advice conveyed in the procession of decorated baths is not just a traditional expression, but a means of internalizing Islamic values culturally. In practice, religious teachings are present in a form that is close to people’s daily lives, so that this tradition serves as an educational and reflective medium for the bride and groom before entering domestic

⁴¹ Results of an Interview with Kholijah (Community leader about decorated baths. Direct interview in Talawi District, on January 25, 2026 at his house).

life. Thus, the decorated bath shows how Malay customs become a social space to revive Islamic values without making it a ritual of worship that stands outside the sharia.

In the development of contemporary society, especially among the younger generation, decorated baths are still maintained even though they have undergone adjustments in the form of their implementation. The younger generation tends to understand this tradition in a more flexible and practical way, but still considers it important as a symbol of Malay cultural identity. One of the Generation Z informants in Talawi stated: *“In my opinion, customs like decorated baths are good because it is a symbol and identity, right. It may not be as detailed as it used to be, but the meaning is still important, so that we know the origins and values that are inherited.”*⁴² This view shows that the younger generation does not reject traditions, but rather reinterprets them to remain relevant to modern life. On the other hand, community leaders still view the decorated bath as an important part of the Malay Batubara identity that must be maintained. One of the community leaders asserted: *“If this custom disappears, the next generation will no longer know who they are. So even though this era has changed, the custom of polulah is changed so that the characteristics of the Malay customs do not fade.”*⁴³

Thus, the decorated bath not only functions as a ceremonial tradition, but also as a space for the inheritance of values, cultural identity, and religiosity of the Malay Batubara community. This tradition is still alive because it is interpreted continuously as a means of prayer, a moral reminder, a strengthening of social relations, and a symbol of Malay culture rooted in Islamic values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, the tradition of decorated bathing in the Malay Muslim community in Talawi District shows that there is an acculturation process between Malay culture and Islamic teachings that takes place in harmony in the community's life. This tradition not only functions as a series of marriage customs, but also as a means of conveying religious, moral, and social values related to domestic life. Various symbols, traditional equipment, and advice conveyed in the decorated bath procession contain meanings that are in harmony with Islamic values, so that the tradition is maintained as a cultural heritage as well as a medium for internalizing religious teachings. These findings show that the religious diversity of the Malay community is not only expressed through formal worship, but also through cultural practices that are alive and inherited from generation to generation in the social life of the community.

⁴² Interview Results with Fitri Khairani (Generation Z. Direct interview in Talawi District, in February 2026 at her home).

⁴³ Results of an Interview with Hamida (Religious Leader, Direct Interview in Talawi District, on January 28, 2026 at his home).

Theoretically, this study confirms that the tradition of decorated bathing represents a form of acculturation between Malay culture and Islamic teachings, where elements of local culture are maintained without losing their basic identity, while Islamic values provide a framework of meaning and orientation in their implementation. The acculturation can be seen in the process of adjustment and integration of values that allow customs and religion to coexist and strengthen each other in forming the socio-religious identity of the Malay community. Thus, the tradition of decorated bathing cannot be understood solely as a cultural practice, but also as a space for the inheritance of values, strengthening social solidarity, and the formation of religious awareness in people's lives.

However, this research is still limited to the study of religious and cultural acculturation in the context of the Malay community in Talawi District. Therefore, further research can be directed to a comparative study of Malay marriage traditions in various regions, analysis of changes in the meaning of traditions in the younger generation, as well as studies on the transformation of local traditions in the midst of the development of digital technology, social media, and cultural modernization. This follow-up study is important to understand how local traditions continue to survive, adapt, and be reinterpreted by Muslim communities in an ever-evolving social context.

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