

## Symbolic Meaning of Malay Culture in North Sumatra

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to describe a desire and also the purpose of using identity and symbols from Malay ethnicity and culture in the North Sumatra region. The results of research in the field will be analyzed using theory based on social action with research methods that use qualitative as well as quantitative case studies in North Sumatra. Data collection using detailed interview methods and also observations from respondents in North Sumatra. The data analysis used in this research method reveals various symbols of Malay culture in North Sumatra which have messages to convey to the wider community regarding traditions, culture and local wisdom in North Sumatra. Symbols are media that can be used to reinforce a status that has a relationship with power and also the human and natural resources in North Sumatra. The symbol of Malay identity in North Sumatra in the post-reformation era became one of the actions taken by Malay people as a form of existence for the Malay community to show their concern for local cultures in North Sumatra. This action is one of the motives of the Malay ethnicity in North Sumatra to change the potential for relations between ethnic groups in North Sumatra in order to maintain local wisdom and also hold the strategic side in North Sumatra. So that it can increase the value of Malay culture in North Sumatra.

**Keywords:** Malay, Culture, Symbolic.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, culture, tradition and also local wisdom have begun to be eroded by foreign cultures that have emerged in Indonesia. The influx of foreign cultures which began to flourish, especially after the post-reform era, made Malay culture in Sumatra, especially in North Sumatra, indeed threatened. The Malay people began to clean up and present themselves as a form of existence to outsiders, especially those living and living in North Sumatra. This is a form of embodiment of how Malay culture and society still exist in North Sumatra.

Various kinds of policies are one of the goals to show that the culture, traditions and local wisdom of the Malay ethnicity are not extinct. Even though in the midst of the onslaught of foreign cultures and also foreign cultures from Malays, the traditions and local wisdom of the Malay people still exist and are trying to preserve their existence. Various kinds of efforts and methods were carried out by the Malay community, one of which was by showing traditions, culture to symbols that represented the culture and identity of the Malay people in North Sumatra.

This symbolic existence of Malay culture is a form of identity and also a message that the Malay people want to convey to other ethnicities in North Sumatra as well as introducing indigenous cultures from North Sumatra to the younger generation, who currently prefer traditional cultures. foreigners who enter freely without any filter so that they can acculturate and also tolerate culture in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatra.

The initial studies carried out based on the results of this research were revealed by Salam (2012: 72) regarding the identity of the Malay community in the land of North Sumatra who began to be marginalized in their own ancestral land during the globalization era which had begun

to flourish. The influx of foreign cultures and also cultures from outside North Sumatra has indeed marginalized local culture with the arrival of these cultures.

Even in the New Order era, Malay culture began to be eroded by the Javanese culture that entered the Malay community. The transmigration agenda proclaimed by the New Order government became one of the reasons why Malay cultures began to erode with the influx of Javanese culture. According to Salam, the arrival of Javanese culture which was considered as a culture that was only recently recognized by the local community, made Malay culture gradually abandoned by the community. Especially the younger generation who are starting to be eroded by traditions from outside.

The reconstruction of identity in North Sumatra is indeed more influenced by the cultural side and also traditions that are quite thick with cultures from outside. Malay culture, which is the original identity of the people of North Sumatra, indeed few understand and reflect how the Malay people are used to living in a community construction in the local environment.

The shift of power also occurred in North Sumatra. There are quite a few indigenous people from North Sumatra who hold the reins of power and also important positions in local government, especially in North Sumatra to remote areas at the tip of North Sumatra since the new millennium era. The impact of this shift in power has, of course, given a very big influence on Malay culture and traditions as well as local wisdom that exists in the community.

This can be seen through the Malay language, which is usually the language of everyday communication, which is starting to be abandoned. The Batak, Malay, Mandailing and Angkola languages in North Sumatra began to erode with the influx of foreign languages which spread in North Sumatra. English is of course a language that has become an absorption in Indonesian words. Then there is also the influence of foreign cultures such as Korea and also other cultures that have a big influence on the erosion of local traditions in North Sumatra.

On the architectural side, elements of Malay culture are one side of Indonesia's cultural diversity. However, the architectural side of the building is also affected by a fatal shift due to the influx of outside cultures that are not well filtered. Development from the physical, social and spiritual aspects of the Malay element should be an important aspect in order to develop Malay culture to become better known by the people themselves.

This research and study also focuses on the symbolic meaning displayed by the Malay community in order to display the side of self-identity in the cultural and traditional sector for the Malay community to migrants. The purpose of this research will be to direct the symbolic meaning of Malay culture which turns out to have a deep meaning and understanding for the Malay community. And of course this tradition and culture must be preserved so that the younger generations of this nation do not forget the local local culture where they live and live so as not to be eroded by foreign cultures.

Research in this field uses a social approach to the meaning and significance of Malay culture and traditions to the people of North Sumatra. This communication context has an attempt to convey symbolic messages that exist in every tradition and culture that can make the Malay community in North Sumatra interested in elements of their own culture and traditions.

Max Weber's theory of social action has an orientation to the motives and goals of society. And this theory provides an opportunity for researchers to understand the behavior of the Malay people who have a close relationship between their understanding of the symbolic meaning of Malay culture and the purpose of each of these meanings. According to Max Weber, one of the steps that is quite good and effective is to appreciate the typical form of action with these characteristics. Practically this will enable these researchers to get a reason why the respondents or subjects do or answer this based on Muhlis and Norkholis (2016: 248).

Every social action, of course, has considerations of preferences and also interpretations that are owned by every human being. And what the Malay people have in each culture and their tradition, of course, has an interpretive side to a situation, interaction and also their emotional side which is embodied in a habit, agreement and also ideas that are formed into a tradition and also a culture. . The process of studying tradition and culture has meaning as a lesson in terms of context

as well as meaning. Culture has indeed become a cultural identity that has a pattern of how people are connected to each other and also communicate well.

Culture does have a big enough responsibility for all communicative behavior and meaning on every side that is owned by everyone in the community according to Purwasito (2003; 204). This culture is a symbolic system that has its own meaning. According to Mead, Cooley and also Thomas, there is a theoretical basis which says that humans will do various things on the basis of the meaning given to them by elements of various things that influence their lives.

Knowing and also knowing the symbolic meaning of Malay culture in North Sumatra can certainly get to know more deeply what is contained in every Malay culture that is still maintained by the people in North Sumatra. And this research can be one of the attributes of a large enough contribution to become a useful reference in society and also for the younger generation who want to know their culture more deeply. This research on symbolic meanings in Malay culture in North Sumatra can enrich knowledge which will become one of the inputs for the younger generation as well as knowledge about Malay traditions and culture in the lives of the people of North Sumatra.

### *Literature Review*

People's perspectives regarding their environment and also towards themselves do have a considerable influence in the cognitive framework of thinking and also when acting or affective and behavior which is referred to as connotative. This is also called a paradigm. And this paradigm is a model that exists in the theory of science and also the framework and all the lists that come from a word by showing the definitions and also the conjunctions of these words.

The reality of social life is indeed not a natural reality. But this reality is formed and awakened from a construction result. Based on Matthews (1994) there are 2 quite large traditions on the constructivism side which consist of psychological and social sides. This psychological constructivism has a view on the development of society, especially children when building knowledge within themselves. Meanwhile, social constructivism will be based on community figures in building a much better science.

This psychological constructivism has 2 parts that have a more personal nature which is referred to as personal psychological constructivism. Meanwhile, another characteristic is socio-culturalism or also known as socio-culturalism psychological constructivism. Socio-culturalism constructivism is a combination of personal and social construction. According to Suparno (1997; 43) that this social constructivism stands alone. This constructivist paradigm is an anti-thesis of the notion that uses observation and objectivity when discovering a reality as well as knowledge.

Based on the explanation from Umberto Eco (Budiman, 1999; 7) in Sobur (2004; 255) meaning is a sign vehicle which means a cultural exhibited by other signs that have a semantic side to display independence from the previous sign vehicle. According to Brown, the definition of meaning is a tendency or disposition to use or react to a form of language. There are various kinds of components contained in the meaning that is built from a sentence or word. Still according to Brown, a person will spend years unproductive in unraveling the meaning of a single sentence that is ultimately unfinished and abandoned.

*Symbolic interactionism*, also known as symbolic interaction theory, will focus on problems and attention to the ways humans use to build meaning and structures in society through conversations. This symbolic interaction is a movement of thought within the science of sociology which is built from other aspects based on George Herbert Mead and also his work which is the core of the thought of the Chicago School. The essence of this symbolic interactionism is an activity that is one of the characteristics of humans which consists of the exchange of symbols of meaning and also communication that is in Sobur (2004; 197).

Communication is one of the meanings contained in a culture and tradition. And communication became the theoretical framework that made this research possible. Communication comes from English and Latin, namely *communication* and *communis*.

Communication has a role as conveying meanings, thoughts, ideas to messages to other humans. However, according to Mulyana (2005; 42), communication has a contemporary definition that refers to ways of sharing with these things, such as in the sentences "sharing thoughts", "discussing meaning" to "sending messages."

Communication itself consists of verbal and non-verbal communication. This non-verbal communication is a process of sending messages without using words. While verbal communication is a communication process that sends messages using words. And the symbolic meaning of this Malay culture and tradition is included in the non-verbal communication sector. This is because there is an element without the use of words in conveying messages to the public.

non-verbal communication will use other languages such as gestures, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and the use of objects as an element of two-way communication. Like when wearing clothes, hair and other symbols that make other people understand what you want to convey. Likewise with intonation, emphasis, style of voice, emotion to voice quality can be a factor in communicating non-verbally.

non-verbal communication of course supports the gestural messages that exist on the cultural side and also Malay traditions in North Sumatra. For example, wedding ceremonies, dances to other cultures that display a side of gestures in it. And these gestures that appear have a message to be communicated to the general public. And this message has a function as an expression for responsive and unresponsive, positive and negative feelings to receptive and non-receptive. Likewise with the message agree and reject.

While the symbol is something that is displayed or used to designate something that has the agreement of a group of people in the community. And these symbols have messages from verbal words that have their own meaning. Like the flag to the state symbol which is one of the sign categories that is quite important. While symbolic itself means the message to be conveyed to the public with invisible messages. There is a symbolic meaning that belongs to a culture and tradition in a Malay society.

Language is one way to convey verbal communication. And according to Roland Barthes, who is known as a structuralist thinker, he often practices linguistic models as well as Saussurean semiology. And this is one of the systems that reflects the assumptions of certain societies and cultures based on Sobur's writings (2004: 63).

According to Martin and Nakayama (2007: 81) say that culture or culture is a pattern that is learned from an attitude and also behavior that is spread within community groups. Differences regarding the definition of culture offer flexibility in trying to approach the problem by understanding and analyzing the complexity of concepts from different perspectives, especially on the cultural communication side.

Based on the understanding of Triandis (1994: 4) said that cultural understanding is not only closely related to the biological side of humans. But it also provides information on behaviors that are inborn and do not have to be learned. This definition of culture from Triandis has the role of language as a symbolic system that allows culture to be transmitted between actors from socio-cultural interactions in society.

Meanwhile in the communication sector, there is a mechanism that socializes cultural norms among people who interact horizontally as well as vertically. This horizontal relationship between the community and also the people in their environment. While the vertical relationship is the relationship between the next generation. Cangara (2010: 13) says that communication and culture have a fairly close relationship that will maintain and develop culture which is a part of communication that forms the side of culture and tradition in people's lives.

Huntington in Samovar (2014: 31) states that culture is composed of several important elements consisting of language, religion, traditions and also habits that exist in society. 1) Language has a fairly important role where language becomes a tool of the mind and also a cultural possibility that is widespread in society. 2) Religion has a role that is no less important which has a function as social control so that it cannot be separated from standard behavior in society. 3) Tradition is something that is passed down from time to time and also from generation

to generation that tries to exist in society. 4) Habits are life that is usually carried out in the community.

Based on Thoreau's thoughts, it was stated that culture must be passed down from generation to generation where the culture will be shared like previous generations. And if a culture is to be continued and also preserved, of course it must be ensured whether the preserved culture has symbolic meaning as well as important messages and elements for the community environment.

Charon in Samovar (2014: 44) also adds that this process of cultural relay from generation to generation is a form of social heritage that has views that already exist before future generations are born. And society has a history as well as views that have developed over time so that they can be aligned with future generations so that the process of social interaction can be created. The emotional bond of each generation certainly has a clear relationship between communication and culture. Communication has the role that culture and traditions can be passed on between generations and also makes cultural habits, principles, values and behaviors already formulated.

There are various ways that can be used to interpret and also interpret the symbolic meaning of a culture with the symbolic theories echoed by Mead, La Rossa and also Reitzes (West and Turner, 2008: 98). There are about 7 assumptions that can be the basis of symbolic interaction which has the involvement of 3 major themes that are quite important. These three themes have important meaning for human behavior, the concept of self-knowledge and also the relationship between individuals in society.

Based on Mulyana (2001: 71) that the theory of symbolic interaction is an interaction between humans who use symbols in it which involves verbal and non-verbal communication as well. In the beginning there were no special meanings before finally being constructed in an interpretive way by way of interaction which was finally mutually agreed upon to create the symbolic meaning. According to Harbert Blumer (1969) in West and Turner (2014: 99) that there is an assumption that humans will act based on the meaning given to them by other people. Then the meaning that occurs as a result of the interaction process and also the meaning that is modified through interpretive.

Symbolic interaction which is also a theory from Herbert Blumer (1969) explains the process of creating meaning that occurs between individuals. The process of interaction between human beings. With this symbolic interaction, of course the influence of culture and tradition among the people can be conveyed and channeled easily. Social norms that become a limit in every behavior, will help create meaning that occurs in the social process.

## 2. METHODS

The research method that was carried out and used in this study used descriptive qualitative by describing situations and also events that existed in the environment where the respondents lived. This research has the aim of describing and also explaining and summarizing all kinds of conditions and also situations and phenomena of social reality that exist in society. The people who live in that environment will become the object of research and also seek to draw the side of social reality to the surface which is one of the characteristics and also the character and nature to the model of certain conditions and phenomena based on Bungin (2009; 49).

The research object that determines this research is the values of Malay culture in North Sumatra. This research also uses research subjects consisting of traditional Malay leaders, people in North Sumatra who are especially elderly or respected in the community. With this research it is expected to get a symbolic meaning of Malay culture in North Sumatra.

The unit of analysis of the research data is individuals who have very strong knowledge of Malay customs, traditions and culture, such as leaders and also traditional leaders and community members who are elders or respected. Meanwhile, informants or activist informants who are located around North Sumatra also have a very important role in the research process. According



to Sugiyono (2001: 61) said that *purposive sampling* is a technique of collecting samples taken with several considerations. And the selection of subjects in this *purposive sampling* has the basis of certain characteristics that have views and are known beforehand. This sample unit must be in accordance with predetermined criteria for research subjects and also applied according to the research objectives.

Data collection techniques based on qualitative research require techniques that can choose several data collection techniques when carrying out these research methods. This data collection technique consists of 1) Participatory observation; 2) In-depth interviews with respondents; 3) Life history of the surrounding community and also the respondents; 4) Document analysis; 5) Diary notes from researchers which can be in the form of recording experiences and also impressions from researchers when collecting these data; 6) Media content analysis. These 6 data collection techniques are contained in Bungin (2009: 139).

This qualitative research has many important issues regarding the validity of testing the results of the research. Many of the results of this qualitative research are doubtful about their truth and validity due to the following factors which consist of; 1) the subjectivity of the researcher becomes one of the most dominant things in the research; 2) The research tools used in this research are interviews and also observations where there are still many weaknesses in it when presented openly and also without control in these observations; 3) Qualitative data sources that are less credible and can have a significant influence on the accuracy of the research according to Bungin (2007: 253).

Based on Bungin (2001: 132) data analysis in a study will take place simultaneously with the data collection process. And there are 3 stages of the water model consisting of data reduction, data presentation and also verification. And the three stages will take place simultaneously.

Symbols are one of the needs for every human being who has a mind and also death according to Susane Langer (Mulyana, 2005: 92). It is increasingly emphasized that symbols are one of the needs of symbolization and also the use of symbols that can make a difference between other humans and other living things. From the form of cultural symbols and traditions, it will certainly produce communication that can become a process of interaction between people from different cultures and traditions.

And the process of communication and interaction can be expressed in symbolic meanings in the culture and traditions of the Malay community in North Sumatra. In a series of cultures and traditions, a science and analytical method will emerge that will examine every non-verbal communication that has meaning in that tradition. The science of semiotics in Barthes' term which is described as "semiology", appears in research analysis data.

In Barthes' view, the concept of myth has a different meaning in general. And this myth according to Barthes is a communication system and also the message to be conveyed. And myth is the development of connotations that are formed in people's lives (Sobur, 2004: 71). Myth is how culture will understand aspects of reality and also natural phenomena. Myth according to Barthes' view is different from most myths in Indonesia. Myth is a social product that has a domination which is also synonymous with the connotation of an ideological operation. Semiotic analysis tries to dig deeper into the symbolic meaning of every element of Malay culture in North Sumatra.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Observation as well as data collection techniques turned out to have a very important role in this study. The researchers explored every meaning contained in Malay cultures in North Sumatra. For example, a traditional wedding ceremony held in a district in North Sumatra, which presents procedures by prioritizing culture and tradition. The researchers saw the procession of eating rice face to face which was held from beginning to end. A culture and tradition of Malay art in North Sumatra which is still carried out by the community.

Interviews were also conducted as part of the process of gathering information regarding information from informants or respondents who knew enough of the symbolic meaning of the ceremony. This Malay cultural marriage custom is one of the traditional ceremonies and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation and has the meaning of binding an oath between 2 people who want to get married. In ancient times, there was no courtship. So that the bride and groom are brought together to eat rice face to face.

There is a symbolic meaning of the wedding ceremony, namely the efforts of the groom who intends to propose to the bride. And as a symbolic form, a rice eating ceremony is held face to face. This wedding ceremony is quite rare in North Sumatra, which is one of the hereditary cultures. Even the next generation of the nation does not know the culture and customs.

It was recorded that around 69.7% said that they did not know the form of the ceremony. As well as the meaning contained therein and why the ceremony was carried out, many do not know the symbolic meaning of the ceremony. While 30.3% said they knew about these ceremonies and traditions. However, 17.9% of the respondents who said they knew about the ceremony, did not know the symbolic meaning of this form of the ceremony of eating rice face to face. While the rest know the meaning and symbolic meaning.

There are several symbolic meanings in the tradition of eating face to face at a wedding ceremony. Like the sitting of the bride and groom, which in fact must be arranged in such a way because there is a symbolic meaning in it. The bride will sit to the left of the groom by kneeling. While the groom will sit cross-legged. The symbolic meaning of the sitting posture of the bride and groom is politeness and respect given to husbands.

While the guests also sat around the bride and groom. There is a symbolic meaning of sitting the guests. For female or female guests, they will sit parallel to those in front of the bride. While the male guests will sit in front of the groom. And the two parties of the bride and groom will sit facing each other. Likewise with the food served to the guests and also the bride and groom. Food with sweet, salty, bitter and also other tastes, becomes one of the symbolic meanings that married life does not only taste sweet. But the taste of salty, sour and also bitter will be a picture of life after marriage. And this symbolic meaning is poured into the food.

And the event process also has a symbolic meaning that has its own meaning. The handover of the bride to the groom's family is a symbol that the wife's responsibility has been carried by the husband. It is no longer the responsibility of the parents of the bride. The process of selecting flowers alternately of course has a symbolic meaning in order to show the personality of each bride and groom from the color of the flowers that are removed. There is a separate meaning in each color. Like white which means holy and also red which signifies courage. Removing flowers with the right hand which is then transferred to the left hand is one of the forms that the husband has the responsibility to provide for his wife. And this method must be done quickly.

The food served in this traditional eating face-to-face ceremony always serves rice which will be complemented by a whole chicken consisting of the head, breast, thighs and wings. The chicken which is divided into 4 parts means that if the groom gets rice with his head, then he will become the head of the household. Meanwhile, if the bride gets the head, then she will be the head of the household. The joint meal event also has a symbolic meaning in which it teaches the bride to serve her husband's meal and also provide rice and side dishes. And when cooking, a wife must first ask about her husband's wishes when he wants to eat. This is the symbolic meaning of eating together.

The bride and groom are also given the opportunity to choose the dishes available during the process. And before choosing a dish, the bride and groom must ask their partner about the desired food menu. The meaning is so that the couple can know the preferences of each bride and groom and also care for each other.

One of the traditions that exist in the culture of eating face to face is to feed the in-laws. It turns out that this tradition has a symbolic meaning that the bride and groom must display and also show affection from their daughter-in-law to their mother-in-law who cannot discriminate

between one and the other. The tradition of eating face to face is one of the Malay cultures in North Sumatra which has a symbolic meaning in it and is preserved.

In addition to traditional wedding ceremonies, one of the cultures and traditions that are often carried out by the Malay community, especially in the Langkat area, is the acculturation tradition between Islamic and Malay cultures. In the past, Malay culture was synonymous with Hindu and Buddhist influences. However, along with the times and the entry of Islam into the area of North Sumatra, Malay culture began to change towards Islamic culture. According to Junaidi (2014: 2) that the influence of Islam on Malay culture is indeed very strong. And this comes to mind, that Malay literature is also a blend of beautiful traditions. One of them is the Tepung Tawar culture, which has a procession of Islamic and Malay culture.

The Tepung Tawar tradition has indeed become an important part of the process of a series of traditional ceremonies in the Malay community, especially in North Sumatra. This tradition has a symbolic meaning as something sacred. Therefore this tradition is always held on events that are quite sacred. Such as weddings, tasyakuran, circumcisions, aqiah to other religious ceremonies. This tradition was passed down from its predecessors and passed on to the next generation.

The symbolic meaning contained in it functions to maintain safety, happiness and also the welfare of the community or people who get the Tawar Tawar. Another meaning is to pour out a feeling of happiness and also a form of gratitude for the success of the hajat and also the good intentions that have been carried out by the community.

In fact, this tradition was originally a relic of Hindu beliefs which were then passed on to the Old Malays or Proto Malays. And then passed on to the next generation. This tradition and culture as a manifestation of society to the Almighty for all the pleasures obtained. However, along with the times, there was a shift after the Young Malays or Detro Malays embraced Islam who entered Andalas. So that this tradition was changed by combining Islamic law.

The Tepung Tawar tradition is a combination of religious and cultural values that are quite important. The symbolic meaning that appears in it apart from being a holy thing, also has a special meaning which means happiness, safety, strength and goodness that appear as one. Even though it has experienced a shift in meaning to a religious side, this tradition has become one of the preserved old Malay cultures. And it turns out that quite a lot of people or respondents know the culture and traditions of Tepung Tawar. And it was recorded that around 76.8% of respondents said they knew the culture. While the rest do not know the culture. Then, of the respondents who knew about this tradition, it turned out that only about 59.3% knew the entire symbolic meaning of Tepung Tawar. While 27.5% only partially know and the rest do not know at all.

The respondents, amounting to 87.1%, said that they knew enough about the tools and materials used for the celebration of the Tawar Tawar tradition. On average, the respondents mentioned that the sowing ingredients, perinjis and also incense used were the main tools used to carry out this tradition. The sowing ingredients consist of white and yellow rice and potpourri supplemented with rice flour. And this perinjis concoction is water and kaffir lime which is sliced and placed in a bowl. Meanwhile, 7 kinds of davids are tied up as a tool to sprinkle the water. On average, the respondents know the tools and materials with the rest of the respondents not knowing.

The leaves used for sprinkling are pepulut leaves, gandarus, kalinjuhan, jejurun, as cold and whole as well as sambau. And each of these leaves has its own symbolic meaning in the Tepung Tawar ceremony tradition. Then it turned out that only 56.3% knew about the procedure for Fresh Flour. While 30.7% said they only knew some of the procedures and the rest did not know the procedures for Fresh Flour at all.

There is no difference in the method of bargaining for each traditional ceremony. The cloth will be stretched over the thighs of the person who will get the Fresh Flour. Then the two hands of the person will be placed on the cloth and then spread the sowing material from right to left while reading sholawat to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Then the perijis concoction will be



sprinkled over the hands and added rice flour. The conditions for bargaining penpung must be odd with the rank of community that does it first. Or the elders in the community.

The symbolic meaning is also presented in one of the Malay traditions and culture called *Tepak Sirih* which is used by the Malay community to convey messages with the intent and purpose to be conveyed to other Malay communities. The contents of *Tepak Sirih* contain meanings in the form of betel, gambier, areca nut, tobacco and also lime, the components of which have different meanings by means of different arrangements. The Malay community when conveying something must use Malay customs in a way that is rhyming which according to the Malay community is something that is considered polite.

Many Malay cultural activities and events use *Tepak Sirih* as a communication medium that makes guests understand Malay culture and traditions. With the *Tepak Sirih* tradition, Malay community events and activities can run according to predetermined rules and ethics. This culture is a symbol of communication among the Malay people in their surroundings.

It was noted that from the respondents who were interviewed, around 86.1% said that they knew the culture and tradition of *Tepak Sirih*. While the rest said they did not know the culture. Of the respondents who stated that they knew *Tepak Sirih*, 72.9% said they knew the symbolic meaning in the culture and tradition of *Tepak Sirih*.

This *Tepak Sirih* culture is one of the symbols of Malay culture which still has many benefits. And not only among the Malay community, but other communities also benefit from *Tepak Sirih*. And this culture is still very relevant to today's developments and is also still held in every cultural event and tradition around the community in North Sumatra. Mainly used at weddings.

Culture and traditions are not only found on the side of ceremonies, activities and also religious events. But it turns out that on the architectural side there are also cultural elements that are still very thick with the symbolic meaning of Malay culture. This architectural side seems to have an influence on the shape, characteristics, ornamentation and also its location. From the researchers who made observations, the original houses of the Malay people did not display their dominant side and their original form. However, several aspects such as walls, floors, fences, pillars, windows to the terrace area still have their original shape. However, for the stairs and also the roof has been changed.

Based on the narrative Highhouse (2003: 10) states that the natural conditions that are split by 2 rivers are the forerunner of the birth of the kingdom that ruled in North Sumatra in the 13th to 15th centuries. And the concept of settlement has been well thought out. And the influence of these natural resources also has a significant impact on the culture of the Malay community in North Sumatra.

The remnants of these buildings are still used for offices, homes and other functions. There are many symbolic meanings that can be studied from the Malay culture on the architectural side. For example, the house is about 2 meters away from facing the east side where the sun always rises from that direction, and the houses facing each other and opposite each other have symbolic meanings. The dominance of the poles in the house also shows the style of the stilt house in North Sumatra. The house which is identical with the domination of the pole, can already be known by voters and also the designation of the house. The dominance of this pole allows the local people to know who lives in the house without having to see the occupants of the house. A symbolic placement on the architectural side which is also rich in meaning.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Malay culture in North Sumatra is still very strong. Even though there has been a shift, some cultural activities and traditions have symbolic meanings in them that can serve as guidelines for the community. Religious ceremonies as well as traditional ceremonies also have a symbolic meaning from the Malay culture in North Sumatra. By continuing to preserve Malay

culture, of course there is an opportunity to introduce native culture from North Sumatra to young people.

From the data and also the analysis obtained from the acquisition of the research data, the traditional ceremonial procession has a symbolic meaning and also a communication role which is a symbol for the Malay community. These cultures and traditions become symbols of the life of the Malay community as well as important communication media as well as messages to be conveyed to the Malay community in North Sumatra.

In the traditional ceremony, eating face to face has a symbolic meaning in the household life of a husband and wife which is described in detail in the ceremony. The procession of sitting the bride and groom, then the theme of the food served, the selection of food for the bride and groom and the selection of flowers becomes a symbolic meaning for married life which of course will not always be smooth. Here culture becomes a medium of non-verbal communication that is displayed in the form of gestures, movements, objects to gestures in the ceremony which have their own meaning and significance.

Then at the Tepung Tawar ceremony, it has a symbolic meaning which also implies the strong Malay culture in North Sumatra. A cultural shift at Tepung Tawar also occurred. Traditions that were previously influenced by Hindu and Buddhist cultures, shifted with the arrival of Islam. The symbolic meaning that emerges from the Tepung Tawar ceremony is interpreted as success, gratitude and also hope that it will go well. This Tepung Tawar culture will bring the Malay community to preserve the values and social norms that apply in the Malay community in North Sumatra.

The Tepak Sirih tradition and culture also has a symbolic meaning which is also conveyed to the Malay community. In the ceremony there is a symbolic meaning which means humble, sincere, tenacious, knight and open-minded and contains values that are in accordance with the character of the Malay community, especially in North Sumatra. With today's developments, the Tepak Sirih culture now presents moral messages as well as elements of education, social norms and values to morals which of course contain the life philosophy of the Malay people.

Elements of ethics, learning or education, culture, social up to the norms that do not fade from Malay society continue to be displayed in the Tepak Sirih tradition. This is because Tepak Sirih is a medium of non-verbal communication which has meaning as a tool and media that can have a considerable influence on people's lives, especially in the Malay community. Tepak Sirih has its own symbolic meaning where there are unlimited messages contained in the tradition and culture.

Meanwhile, on the architectural side, there are several symbolic meanings that arise from social strata. The dominance of the pillars in the stilt house is a form of social strata regarding who the occupants are in it and also the designation of the house. This is one proof of how in terms of architecture this also plays an important role as a medium of communication for the Malay community. This non-verbal communication can play an important role in the Malay community.

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