



The Symbolic Meaning of Communication in the Baby Bathing Tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village

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Abstract

The baby bathing tradition is a cultural heritage that the community of Kuta Sayeh Village, Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency, continues to preserve. This tradition expresses gratitude to God for the birth of a child. Its practice involves various symbols and ritual actions believed to bring blessings to the baby. However, understanding the symbolic meanings embedded in this tradition has gradually diminished, turning its implementation into a mere inherited routine devoid of profound interpretation. This study aims to explore, document, and disseminate the symbolic meanings within the communicative processes of the *baby bathing* tradition in Kuta Sayeh. The theory employed is Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics, utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews and documentation with purposively selected informants. The findings reveal that each symbol in the ritual carries deep philosophical meaning, expressed through prayers or aspirations. For instance, the Qur'an symbolizes life guidance; pure gold, coconut milk, and sweets signify preciousness, politeness, and guarded speech; *tepung tawar* represents protection and serenity; chicken heart wrapped in eggplant leaves denotes courage and calmness; sticky rice signifies blessings and prosperity; dates represent sweetness of speech; rice and paddy symbolize abundance; a mirror signifies self-awareness; powder, scissors, and a comb symbolize beauty, new beginnings, and neatness; while a split coconut under an umbrella embodies a peaceful soul. Thus, the tradition encompasses social, moral, and spiritual values that are essential to preserve and reintroduce to younger generations as a meaningful part of local cultural identity.

Keywords: Ferdinand de saussure's semiotics, Local identity, Symbolic meaning, The baby bathing



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1. INTRODUCTION

Aceh is a special region rich in traditions and customs (Sahlan, 2012). Each region, including districts, cities, and villages, has its own unique laws and customs that reflect prevailing traditions. Some of these traditions have survived to the present day, including those still evident in arts and dances such as *daboh* (debus) and *rapai geleng* (rebana geleng) (Verulitasari & Cahyono, 2016). In terms of language, it is Acehnese, and in terms of clothing, it is the traditional *ulee balang* (hulubalang) clothing (Nasruddin, 2018). In the traditional wedding procession, there is *manoe pucok* (flower bathing) and *pantun seumapa* (reciprocating pantun) (Trimulyani et al., 2021). Meanwhile, at birth, there is a tradition of *peutron aneuk* (bathing the baby) (Diana Rahmahan, 2023).

One district in Aceh that still maintains the tradition of bathing babies is Nagan Raya. Located in southwest Aceh, Nagan Raya comprises five districts: Beutong, Darul



Makmur, Kuala, Seunagan, and East Seunagan (Jamaluddin, 2016). Despite its ethnic diversity, elements of Acehnese culture remain strong. Of the many cultures still witnessed today, many of their essences and meanings are not well known or understood by the community. These traditions are merely routine and flow without a deep understanding of their meaning. Based on initial interviews, many people in Kuta Sayeh Village, Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency, do not know or understand the meanings of the tradition of turun mandi bayi (baby bathing), which is the focus of this research study. Of the 50 people randomly interviewed on Friday and Saturday (October 25 & 26, 2024), the data showed that the community does not know or understand the meaning of the turun mandi bayi tradition. Only two people knew and understood the meaning of turun mandi bayi: the tengku and the village midwife, who has been the leader or guide of the baby bathing procession in the village. Some of the questions asked were hesitant to answer, and sometimes they forgot the meanings contained in the process.

If this situation continues, it is feared that the many meanings inherent in the baby bathing tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village will gradually disappear, eventually becoming a meaningless routine for the community. According to Martha & Kresno's research article (Oktavia, 2021), initial observations or interviews with 50 community members are considered commonplace because they provide sufficient and appropriate information to address the initial problem. In essence, the tradition of "dancing" (bathing) is almost always performed by the people of Kuta Sayeh Village when a baby is born. The word "tradition" can be understood as something commonly practiced by a community and passed down from generation to generation. Tradition is how people relate to one another, or one group to another. Tradition is also a social custom passed down from one generation to the next through socialization. Tradition determines moral values in a society, as it is a set of rules governing what is considered right and wrong among its inhabitants (Gibran & Bahri, 2015).

The tradition of bathing has been going on for a long time and has been passed down from generation to generation in Kuta Sayeh Village. This procession is held for blessings and to inform the public that a child has been born to a family or tribe (Hakimi, 2024). The turun mandi (bathing ceremony) is an expression of gratitude to God for the blessing of a healthy baby. This tradition is usually performed seven days after birth, and also on the fortieth day after birth. There are two processes in Kuta Sayeh Village for the turun mandi tradition. The first is called peucicap, which involves tasting the newborn baby with something soft and sweet, such as dates or honey, given by the tengku (Priest) who often performs the turun mandi ceremony. Then, the second is called peutron aneuk, where the newborn is taken outside the house and placed on the ground. This activity is simple, but for residents or parents who can afford it, it is sometimes held alongside the aqiqah (Jamaluddin, 2016).



This research is expected to provide information to maintain and preserve cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation, ensuring its sustainability and preventing it from fading under the influence of various modernizations in Indonesia, especially in the tradition of turun mandi, which is still developing in Kuta Sayeh Village. Based on this background, the researcher is interested in studying in depth the symbolic meaning in the communication practices manifested in the turun mandi bayi procession held in Kuta Sayeh Village, Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency, using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic concepts.

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics is the study of signs, and each sign contains two main, inseparable components: the signifier and the signified. A signifier refers to the visual or auditory aspect of a sign, such as a word, image, or symbol. A signified, on the other hand, is a concept or meaning that arises in the mind as a result of interaction with the signifier, or the meaning contained within the physical form of the sign (Dayu & Syadli, 2023). The relationship between the two forms the basis for human interpretation of symbols or signs in the communication process. Ferdinand De Saussure was also competent in analyzing the meaning of a text and the symbols that underlie it (Hasibuan, 2016).

2. METHOD

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach, located in Kuta Sayeh Village, Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency, on March 24, 2025. Data collection techniques included interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted by first compiling a list of questions based on the required data. Documentation was conducted by collecting data from research articles that aligned with the research focus (Isbullah & Zuhri, 2024).

The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, namely a selection method based on specific criteria or considerations in accordance with the research objectives, so that the data obtained could address the problems precisely and in depth (Zuhri et al., 2023). The reason for using the purposive sampling technique is that it allows the researcher to ensure that the selected informants truly meet the criteria for answering the research problem. The criteria are that informants be people who know and understand the issues being studied in Kuta Sayeh Village and who are directly involved in the baby bathing tradition procession in Kuta Sayeh Village. From these informant techniques and criteria, the main informant was identified as the tengku kepala turun mandi (Samsul Rizal), and the supporting informant was the village midwife (Hayaton).



The data analysis technique follows the stages outlined by Miles and Huberman, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions (Dwi Ananda & Zuhri, 2025; Rahayu & Zuhri, 2023). To ensure greater data validity, researchers employed data validation techniques based on the concept of source triangulation, a method for obtaining data from multiple sources using the same technique. The goal is to assess the data's reliability through cross-checking (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020). In this study, the researcher's source triangulation involved comparing data from the two informants, identifying similarities and differences, and producing valid conclusions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on interviews with primary informant Samsul Rizal and supporting informant Hayaton on March 24, 2025, the informants explained that the turun mandi bayi (baby bath) ceremony is a cultural heritage from ancient times. This tradition is a form of expression of gratitude for the birth and blessing of a child in the family. Turun mandi bayi is usually performed after seven days and sometimes even forty days after birth. There is no difference in the implementation and equipment for baby boys and girls. However, over time, this tradition has shifted from simplicity to luxury. In the past, the ceremony was carried out only by the nuclear family. However, many people, especially those with sufficient economic means, now uphold this tradition as a luxury, following modern developments, such as the event's decorations and even inviting the entire community and relatives.

The people of Kuta Sayeh Village still frequently perform this tradition, albeit on a small scale, serving only one tray of food. This tradition has become a necessity; failure to do so will lead to public discussion. Even today, even if the tradition is not held lavishly, it still becomes a topic of conversation. This is what Hayaton, an informant in this research, experienced when he held the turun mandi (bathing) tradition for his youngest son, which was held on a small scale, leading some community members to question it.

Both informants argued that this tradition should be preserved because it embodies positive values, including gratitude to God for the blessing of a baby's birth. The younger generation must also know and understand this tradition so that it does not become routine, simply flowing without understanding its meaning. The way to do this is to invite them to participate directly in the baby bathing activity. According to the informants' explanations, there are currently no challenges in maintaining this tradition. However, they argue that if the community does not understand the implied meaning, it may disappear on its own. Furthermore, both informants argued that the baby-bathing ritual in Kuta Sayeh Village originated purely as a local cultural tradition, preserved from ancient times. Along the way, the practice of bathing has also been adopted from Islam,

including some positive recommendations. This tradition is not inherently obligatory in Islam, but it does not contradict it either. In fact, it is seen as an expression of gratitude to God for the blessing of a safe and healthy child. The Quran is even used in the ceremony, indicating that the child has been introduced to Islam from an early age. Various meaningful symbols are used in this tradition, including the Quran, gold, dates, plain flour, chicken liver, and others.



Figure 1. Bath ingredients and bathing practice

In more detail, the researcher describes this discussion in terms of the symbols found in the baby bathing procession in Kuta Sayeh Village, Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency, using the concepts of signifier and signified, as explained in the introductory chapter.

3.1 Sources of the Quran

In the tradition of bathing a baby, the Quran's presence in this procession is not merely a ritual complement. The Quran here serves as a central symbol, a vital guide to life, and is crucial for the first time introduced to a newborn. The hope is that from the very beginning, the baby will be introduced to and familiarized with the noble values of Islam. In the procession, the Quran is opened, then presented to the baby's face, and some also touch it with their hands. At the same time, the tengku silently recites a prayer: *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, this Quran is your guide for life during your life in the world hereafter."* This is an effort to ensure that the baby is always in the light of truth, away from evil, and that the Quran is a loyal friend in every step of life. According to Samsul Rizal and Hayaton, the baby bathing tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village requires a copy of the Quran. The Quran is meant as a guide to life, not just to be read or memorized, but also to be adhered to and practiced in daily life. In this ceremony, the Quran serves as a hope or prayer that the newborn will grow into a person who consistently values it. Therefore,

the Quran is not merely symbolic; it also contains spiritual values that mark the beginning of a child's life journey, and Islamic values must always guide these values. Bringing the baby closer to the Quran ensures that Islamic teachings are not only recognized but also deeply ingrained in the baby's heart and mind from an early age. This is an initial effort by parents and the community to lay a foundation of faith from an early age, so that the child grows up in an environment illuminated by guidance and Islamic values. The hope is that the Quran will not only be a Reading material to be opened at certain moments, but also a guide in every step of life, shaping thinking, attitudes, and behavior.

Thus, the Quran will serve as a real guide to life and a source of inspiration in facing various challenges. As Anjani (2023) stated in his research, the Quran is considered a guide to life for Muslims. The Quran is the main guideline that collects various basic teachings in life and is a source of guidance for Muslims in all aspects of life, from law to morals and spiritual development. This is also supported by Salim Said Daulay (2023), who stated that the Quran is a guide and guideline for living a human life and contains various foundations and basic principles for regulating human life, both in relation to the Creator and with other creatures. Sholikhin (2017) also noted that the Quran, as a guide to life for the Muslim community, is not only a source of religious teachings but also used to safeguard and support culture.

In relation to Ferdinand's semiotic theory, the form of the Quran used in the baby bathing ceremony in Kuta Sayeh is a signifier. The Quran used in this ceremony is printed, not digital. Meanwhile, the meaning conveyed by the Quran's symbolism in this ceremony is signified. As explained in the previous paragraph, the Quran's use here is interpreted as an important guide to life, first introduced to a newborn baby.



Figure 2. The Quran and Introducing the Quran to a baby face



3.2. Pure Gold, Coconut Milk, and Sweets

Pure gold, coconut milk, and sweets carry a hopeful meaning. Gold was chosen because it symbolizes value. In practice, this is done by inserting the tengku's right index finger into a ring soaked in coconut milk mixed with sugar until it is wet. The finger that has been moistened with coconut milk mixed with sweets is then dripped into the baby's mouth. At the same time, the tengku silently recites the prayer *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Just as gold is precious, coconut milk is fat, sweets are sweet, so is your voice valuable to others, your opinion is heard like gold, and this is how politely you speak to everyone, and your tongue is always guarded so as not to hurt others."* The gold mixed with coconut milk and sweets is a prayer that the child will grow as a person of value, both in the eyes of God and humans. The hope is that, in the future, his opinion will be valued, his words will be heard, and his presence in society will be meaningful, like precious, pure gold.

From this prayer, it can be concluded that gold signifies high value and esteem, coconut milk signifies politeness and gentleness, and sweets signify sweetness and pleasantness, directed toward the baby's tongue. This procession is accompanied by prayers that the child will grow into a person of value, be polite in speech, have their opinions respected, and be a source of benefit to the community. The symbols of gold, coconut milk, and sweets were not chosen by chance, but with deep philosophical consideration.

This tradition is positive because it instills moral values from an early age, such as the importance of being mindful of one's words, respecting others, and being a helpful person. In an increasingly modern society, these meanings remain relevant and even more important. Therefore, traditions like this need to be preserved, not only as a form of cultural preservation but also as a means of building the spiritual and social character of the younger generation. This is also found in the tradition of turun mandi (bathing) in West Aceh, which uses gold in its practice to signify value, specifically the value of life (Ilham et al., 2023). Meanwhile, coconut milk and sweets are not used in the turun mandi tradition there. This condition is similar to that found in the turun mandi procession in Sungai Kayu Aro Village, Senyerang District, West Tanjung Jabung Regency, as explained by Pranata (2023), that the properties in the turun mandi procession there are gold jewelry such as rings, bracelets, or yellow necklaces that symbolize appreciation and hopes that the baby will achieve glory and success in the future.

Meanwhile, in Alue Ambang Village, Aceh Jaya Regency, Agustina (2023) explains that there are symbols of sweets, but they do not use gold and coconut milk in the turun

mandi procession. Here, the meaning of the sweets is for the baby to feel sweet in his life when he grows up, which differs from the meaning in the turun mandi baby tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village. This means that the turun mandi baby procession is typical in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh, but the symbols used sometimes differ in meaning and practice.

Based on the description above, gold, coconut milk, and sweets here function as signifiers, namely, concrete objects used in the ritual. Meanwhile, the meanings attached to each object, such as gold as a symbol of value and appreciation, coconut milk as a symbol of gentleness and politeness, and sweets as a symbol of pleasant, polite speech, are signifiers. The close relationship between the signifier and the signified presents a sign system rich in meaning, where the procession is not only a cultural ritual, but also a symbolic communication medium that conveys the community's collective hopes for the character and future of children. Thus, this tradition demonstrates that the symbols used in cultural practices do not appear by chance but rather embody deep philosophies that are passed down from generation to generation as a form of moral, spiritual, and social education.



Figure 3. Pure gold, coconut milk, sweetness and tasting pure gold, coconut milk, and sweeteners in a baby's mouth

3.4 Tepung Tawar

Tepung tawar used in the Kuta Sayeh baby bathing tradition consists of water, flour, cocor bebek leaves (*on sisijuek*), and sambau grass (*on naleung samboe*). The soft texture of the plain flour signifies coolness, tranquility, and protection. This is a prayer and request to God that the newborn baby will always be under His protection. In the



procession, the prepared leaves are tied together, including the roots, then placed in a glass filled with water mixed with a small quantity of flour, and then sprinkled on the baby's hands and feet. At the same time, the tengku silently recites the prayer, *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, O Allah, keep this child away from all forms of danger, disaster, calamity, disease, and various bad circumstances that can disrupt his life's journey in the future."* This is the hope that the baby will become someone who brings coolness to those around him, both within the family and the social environment, and in general life.

Samsul Rizal and Hayaton explained that the plain flour represents a prayer and hope to the Creator. Ingredients such as water, flour, cocor bebek leaves, and sambau grass are used to symbolize coolness and protection. This procession is accompanied by prayers, asking God to protect the baby from harm, disaster, and disease. Furthermore, this ritual embodies the hope that the child will grow into a person who brings coolness and peace to the family and the surrounding community, and who will be strong enough to face the various challenges of life.

This practice reflects the subtle and meaningful way traditional societies pray for a child's safety and future. The use of ingredients such as cocor bebek leaves and samba grass demonstrates a deep philosophical understanding of harmony between humans and nature, which is part of a prayer or hope for a peaceful life. This procession is highly relevant even in modern times, teaching us the importance of maintaining spiritual and moral values from the beginning of life. The prayer, uttered silently, demonstrates the power of hope that the child will grow into a person with a balance of physical strength and determination, and will have a positive impact on others. This practice deserves preservation because it contains noble teachings on protection, compassion, and prayer.

In his research, Alam (2020) explained that the practice of bathing babies is also found in Kuta Padang, Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency, with a similar concept. The use of "flour" (white flour) conveys a calm, refreshing atmosphere, suggesting the hope of receiving blessings, safety, and a healthy life. The study found similar symbols and meanings. Furthermore, in the Karang Malang area, Depok District, Sleman Regency, Prasetyo & Kumalasari (2021) explained that "flour" serves as a coolant or cooling agent, symbolizing hope for good things and protection from dire circumstances. Furthermore, "flour" also expresses gratitude and thanksgiving to the Creator. The symbols and meanings in this study are similar to those found in Kuta Sayeh, except that the study focused on the *peusijuek* tradition. Slightly different, in Melayu, Tanjung Balai City, in Pangaribuan (2024), it was also found that the flour-throwing procession was meaningful as an expression of the family's blessing and hope for the

bride and groom, so that they would avoid various difficulties and have a harmonious, blessed household life.

So, water, flour, cocor bebek leaves, and sambau grass here are signifiers, namely concrete forms in the form of ritual materials that are visually and physically recognizable. Meanwhile, the meanings attached to them, namely coolness, calm, protection, and prayers for the child to avoid danger and grow into a person who brings peace, are signifieds. The tradition of fresh flour here represents how society articulates prayers and hopes through meaningful symbols and shows how strong the bond between culture, religiosity, and social life is in maintaining the balance between humans and their environment.



Figure 4. White flour and sprinkling plain flour on a baby's hands and feet

3.5 Chicken Liver in Eggplant Leaves

The following symbol in the Kuta Sayeh baby bathing ceremony is the use of a rooster's liver wrapped in an eggplant leaf and then placed on the baby's chest. The rooster's liver was chosen for a reason; it symbolizes courage, steadfastness, and purity of heart, just like a rooster's. Roosters are known to be gallant, agile, and full of spirit. Furthermore, the eggplant leaf wrapped around the rooster's liver signifies the calm and serenity necessary for life. The rooster's liver, placed on the baby's chest, directly above the heart, symbolizes the center of feelings, intentions, and consciousness, and is a prayer that the child's heart and mind will always have the desire to change positively, becoming a wise and highly conscious person. This tradition is important to preserve because it contains profound moral teachings, shapes a child's character from an early age, and strengthens the spiritual connection among humans, God, and nature. In this ceremony,



a raw chicken liver is placed in an eggplant leaf and slowly turned over the baby's chest. The tengku silently prays, *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, O Allah, just as this chicken liver is turned over and over, so this child's heart and mind will change."* The change referred to here is toward a better, wiser, and more conscious state.

In fact, the use of chicken livers is common in baby-bathing ceremonies in Aceh. One example is in Paya Peunaga Village, Meureubo District, West Aceh Regency, where chicken liver is used in the ceremony. This is intended to help the baby's heart and mind develop a positive outlook as they grow up (Oktafia, 2025). This is also found in the Southwest Aceh region. Ervina (2017) explains that there is a chicken-heart symbol, but does not use eggplant leaves in the turun mandi (bathing) procession; instead, jackfruit leaves are used. The meaning of the chicken heart in jackfruit leaves here is that if the baby faces future life problems, God, as the Creator, will provide a way out. This is different from the meaning of the chicken heart in eggplant leaves in the tradition of turun mandi bayi (baby bathing) in Kuta Sayeh Village.

Meanwhile, in Tanete Rilau District, Barru Regency, Mundzir (2014) explains that there is a chicken heart symbol, but it does not use eggplant leaves. The chicken heart here means a manifestation of affection and sincere prayers for the student. The chicken heart symbol here is carried out in the Mappanre Temme tradition, expressing appreciation for a child's success in completing learning to recite the Koran. This is different from the meaning and use of the chicken heart in the turun mandi bayi tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village.

It can be concluded that the signifier in this tradition is the physical form of raw rooster liver and eggplant leaves that are actually used in the ritual. Meanwhile, the signified attached to it is a philosophical meaning, expressed in the form of prayer and hope, that the child will grow up with courage, steadfastness, and a pure heart, and will live with peace and awareness. The placement of this symbol on the baby's chest, directly above the heart, further reinforces the meaning that the heart is the center of intention, awareness, and change towards goodness. Thus, this tradition is not merely a ceremonial practice, but a form of symbolic communication that conveys moral and spiritual values through cultural signs. The relationship between signifier and signified makes the baby bathing procession in Kuta Sayeh a form of meaning inheritance that educates the younger generation from an early age and demonstrates how society interprets symbols to internalize prayers, hopes, and noble character.



Figure 5. Chicken Liver in Eggplant Leaves and The practice of placing chicken livers in eggplant leaves on a baby's chest

3.6 Pulut (Buleukat)

Pulut (buleukat) is a type of sticky rice known for its stickiness. *Pulut* in the procession going down to the baby shower here symbolizes attachment to all good things. Its inherent nature means that everything good, good luck, and happiness is expected to remain attached to the baby throughout his life. In practice, the *putut* prepared on a plate is taken with the *tengku's* right hand and then blown while the *tengku* silently recites the prayer "*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*". The *putut* that has been recited is then turned twice in front of the baby's face, then placed behind his ear while the *tengku* reads the prayer "*As this buleukat sticks, so does everything good, happy, good luck, and keep this child away from bad things.*" If the baby is a boy, it is hoped that he will grow up to be pious, faithful, and helpful. If it is a girl, it is hoped that she will be pious, intelligent, and bring peace. This procession also serves as a prayer to ward off evil and calamity from the child. Like sticky rice (*buleukat*) that only adheres to clean surfaces, it is hoped that the baby's heart will remain pure and ready to receive divine light, grow into a blessed person, and be protected by the Creator.

According to Samsul Rizal and Hayaton, the baby bathing ceremony in Kuta Sayeh Village is incomplete without the *buleukat*, as it carries symbolic meanings of attachment to good things and blessings throughout life. The sticky *buleukat* symbolizes the hope that all goodness, happiness, and good fortune will always be attached to the baby, and keep away from bad things. This procession is not just a cultural ritual; it also serves to educate and shape the child's character through prayers and hopes that he will become a pious, intelligent person who brings peace to the family and community. This kind of tradition is essential to preserve because it contains a profound moral message, helps

maintain cultural identity, and strengthens the spiritual values that are the foundation of human life. Similar findings were also reported in Manan's (2017) research in West Aceh, which explained that *buleukat* means "to stick," indicating that the lessons taught will stick in the head (easily remembered) because this *buleukat* has a sticky structure. However, in Manan's research, *buleukat* is used to accompany the child for the first time to the Koran study. This differs from the practice in Kuta Sayeh Village, where *buleukat* is used during the baby-bathing procession. In Peusangan District, Bireuen Regency, *buleukat* is also used for baby bathing, symbolizing unity and closeness within the family (Nafis, 2024). This differs from the meaning of *buleukat* in the baby-bathing tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village, but both emphasize its symbolic function as a medium for conveying prayers. Another study by Hariadi et al. (2020) also revealed that the sticky behavior of *buleukat* is associated with a good character expected to remain attached to the person who will be *peusujuk*. Just as the *buleukat* sticks, it is hoped that religious knowledge will stick with the baby when he grows up.

So, the signifier in this case is the sticky, physical form of sticky rice used in rituals, while the signified is the symbolic meaning of attachment to all things good, blessings, and prayers for the child to grow into a pious, intelligent, and peaceful person. The relationship between the two shows that the symbol functions not only as a ritual object but also as a means of spiritual communication that reflects the community's collective hopes for the child's future. Thus, *buleukat*, in the tradition of *turun mandi bayi*, is not just food but a sign full of philosophical meaning, passed down as a medium for moral and spiritual education from an early age, while also emphasizing cultural values that remain relevant today.



Figure 6. Buleukat and The practice of attaching bullets to the back of a baby's ear



3.7 Dates

Dates are known not only as a sweet and nutritious fruit but also for their very deep philosophical meaning in the context of tradition. In the procession of the baby bath, dates signify sweetness in speech, gentleness in speech, and beauty in behavior. In the procession, dates are taken and tasted on the baby's palate and tongue. At the same time, the tengku silently recites the prayer *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, just as you eat dates that are sweet in taste, so too will your voice be sweet and your speech gentle to his parents, pleasant to the family, and soothing to everyone who hears."* The presence of dates in this tradition reflects the hope that the child will grow into a person who is respected for his kind words, loved for the gentleness of his speech, and remembered for words as soothing as the sweetness of dates and as beautiful as a sincere smile.

Both informants explained that dates in the baby bathing ceremony symbolize sweetness in speech, gentleness in speech, and beauty in demeanor. It is hoped that by putting dates in a baby's mouth, the child will grow up to be a well-mannered person and be loved for their gentle and soothing speech. This tradition reflects the desire for the child to bring peace to the family and community and to be known for their kindness and sweet speech, just as dates are known for their sweetness. This practice is crucial to preserve because it teaches that the power of speech can be a source of goodness and peace. A child raised with the values of gentleness, respect for parents, and soothing speech will be more easily accepted and respected in social life. Thus, this tradition is not only a cultural heritage but also part of the formation of noble character from an early age.

Several studies have shown the same tendency as in Mundu Pesisir Village, Cirebon Regency, where dates symbolize sweetness, with the hope that the child will grow up to be a polite person in speaking, speaking gently to elders, and being able to control their words so as not to hurt or offend others (Bayu Argaheni & Kostania, 2022). This is also found in the tradition of baby bathing in Aceh Besar. Hikmah (2018) explains that dates or zabit are the food most favored by the Prophet Muhammad, which can develop sensitivity in the baby's tongue, but also means that when the baby grows up, all his words will be heard by others. This is also found in the study by Diana & Nurjanah (2020), who said that giving babies some sweet foods, such as dates and honey, is expected to stimulate their sense of taste, which is intended to lead the child to live a sweet life. This differs from the meaning of dates in the tradition of baby bathing in Kuta Sayeh Village.

When linked to Ferdinand's semiotic theory, it can be concluded that the tangible physical form of dates in this procession, used and tasted by the baby, is categorized as a signifier. Meanwhile, the signified here is the philosophical meaning of sweetness in speech, gentleness in speech, and beauty in attitude. The relationship between the two emphasizes that dates are not just sweet fruit. However, also a symbolic medium for conveying prayers and hopes that the child will grow into a polite, calming, and respected individual in society. Thus, dates in this tradition function as a cultural sign that unites the material and spiritual aspects, while also serving as a means of transmitting moral values that emphasize the importance of good speech as a foundation for building social harmony.



Figure 7. Dates

3.8 Rice and Paddy

In this tradition, rice and paddy have cultural values that have been passed down from generation to generation since ancient times. Rice and paddy are believed to signify blessings, prosperity, and hopes for a prosperous life for the baby. In practice, the rice and paddy that have been combined in one plate are then sprinkled by the *tengku* on the baby's body while reciting the prayer "*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, as rice and paddy are blessed, so you are blessed in obtaining halal and abundant sustenance. Everything you eat is a blessing for you.*" This is a prayer that the child will grow up blessed, obtain halal and abundant sustenance, and be kept away from all forms of deprivation and hardship in life.

According to Samsul Rizal and Hayaton, paddy and rice mixed on one plate in this procession symbolize abundant halal sustenance, blessings, and prosperity, which are expected to accompany the child throughout his life. Sprinkling paddy and rice on the baby's body, accompanied by prayer, it is hoped that the child will grow up with blessed



sustenance, be kept away from difficulties, and be able to live in sufficiency and prosperity that is approved by God. This tradition shows how much the people there really appreciate the value of hard work, the blessings of life, and the importance of obtaining halal sustenance. This tradition is critical to preserve because it simultaneously teaches spiritual, economic, and ethical values for life. This is a reminder that all forms of good fortune come from God and must be used as well as possible.

Kholil Bisri (2024) explained in his research that rice and paddy are interpreted as reminders for humans to avoid arrogance. Although the study identifies similarities in symbols, the tradition of bathing babies in Kuta Sayeh Village emphasizes the meaning of rice and paddy, underscoring its uniqueness. A similar thing is also found in the tradition of bathing babies in Gampong Tuwi Kareung, Pasie Raya District, Aceh Jaya Regency. Prayetno & Qomaruzzaman (2021) said that rice and paddy in the tradition symbolize humility: the more knowledge or advantages a person has, the more humble he should be; just as the fuller the rice is, the more it bends. Human life should also be colored with such an attitude, because there is always something higher above him. This is different from the meaning of rice and paddy in the tradition of bathing babies in Kuta Sayeh. The symbolism of rice and onions was also found in Noviana's (2018) research on the *peusijek* tradition in West Aceh, which interpreted both as symbols of fertility, prosperity, and the spirit of life. Although the contexts differ, these symbols share meanings with those developed in the baby bathing procession in Kuta Sayeh Village.

Thus, it can be concluded that the signifier here is present in the physical form of rice and paddy mixed in a plate and then sprinkled on the baby's body, accompanied by prayers. Meanwhile, the signifier attached to this practice is its symbolic meaning: blessings, prosperity, halal sustenance, and the hope of a prosperous future for the child. The close relationship between signifier and signified makes rice and paddy not just foodstuffs, but cultural symbols rich in spiritual, ethical, and social values. Thus, through this sign, the community not only passes on prayers for blessings but also affirms its worldview, emphasizing the importance of halal sustenance, humility, and gratitude as the foundation for the well-being of future generations.



Figure 8. Paddy, Rice and Sprinkling Rice and Grain on a Baby's Body

3.9 Mirror

Mirrors are often used as an important symbol in the process of self-reflection. They are not merely objects for reflecting one's appearance, but also symbolize self-awareness and humility. Mirrors teach us to look at ourselves first before judging others. So, before looking at others' faults, examine ourselves first. Perhaps what we perceive as faults in others is actually within us, but we are unaware of them because we are reluctant to look in the mirror. During the baby bathing ceremony, the tengku holds a mirror up to the baby's face while silently reciting a prayer, *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, this is the mirror you use to see yourself before you see others. Do not be like a flashlight that shines on others without being able to shine on yourself."* This symbol embodies the hope that the child will grow into a humble person, capable of self-improvement, and wise in his behavior.

Both informants explained that, in the tradition of bathing babies, the presence of a mirror carries profound meaning, reminding them of the importance of introspection and self-awareness before judging others. Mirrors are not only used to see faces, but also serve as a means of assessing and improving oneself before judging others. This is a significant moral value to instill from an early age, so that babies grow into individuals who are not easily judgmental but instead focus on improving themselves. This moral value is relevant even today, when many people are quicker to judge than to understand. Thus, this tradition is not only worthy of preservation as a cultural heritage but also as a means of character education that forms wise, introspective, and responsible individuals.

In Tanah Luas District, North Aceh Regency, the mirror symbolizes a child's ability to acknowledge and correct mistakes without being overcome by ego (Sulaiman, 2023). This aligns with values that teach children to understand their origins, their current

existence, and the direction their lives will take. Similarly, research in Lhokseumawe City (Zulkhairi, 2016) indicates that a mirror is one of the symbolic objects used in the baby-bathing procession. The presence of a mirror in this ritual is interpreted as a hope that the child will be able to self-reflect or introspect before judging or noticing others' shortcomings. Similar findings were reported by Ilham et al. (2023) in West Aceh, who explained that a mirror symbolizes seeing oneself for the first time, with the baby always in a state of self-introspection. From these various findings, it can be concluded that the use of mirrors in the tradition of bathing babies and other traditional ceremonies in Indonesia is a symbol full of meaning, complete with prayer, and serves as a reminder for humans to always maintain self-awareness throughout their lives.

Similar to the previous symbols, the marker here is a mirror, facing the baby's face, as shown by the tengku. Meanwhile, the signs are the concepts of introspection, self-awareness, and humility, which we want to instill from an early age. The relationship between the two shows that a mirror is not just a tool for reflecting appearance, but a cultural sign that carries a moral message: before judging others, a person must first see and improve themselves. Thus, the mirror symbol shows how the people of Kuta Sayeh Village interpret everyday objects as a means of character education that emphasizes wise, humble, and responsible attitudes. This signifier-signified relationship confirms that traditions are not only ceremonial rituals but also mechanisms for communicating life values passed down across generations.



Figure 8. Mirror

3.10 Powder, Scissors, and Comb

In the tradition of baby bathing, powder, scissors, and a comb are used sequentially, starting with powdering the body for a boy and the face for a girl, cutting



the hair, and combing it. Powder with its fragrant aroma and soft texture symbolizes cleanliness, freshness, and beauty. When powder is applied to the baby's face or body, it is a prayer for healthy skin, a radiant face, and an attractive appearance. Moreover, powder reflects the teaching that cleanliness is part of faith, a value introduced from an early age. While the tengku recites the prayer silently, *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, as the fragrance and cleanliness of this powder, so will this child's body and appearance be."* The meaning is not only physical beauty, but also noble morals.

The next step is to cut a small amount of the baby's hair using scissors, symbolizing the beginning of a new life. This haircut is a hope that the child will grow up neat, orderly, and disciplined while the tengku recites the prayer *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, as this hair that I cut, so will new life grow within you."* The procession continues with hair combing, which symbolizes neatness, order, and self-care. When the baby's hair is gently combed, it implies the hope that the child will grow into a person who is organized in thought, behavior, and able to take good care of himself, while the tengku silently recites the prayer *"As your hair is combed, so will you know what neatness is."* Boys become more handsome, and girls become more beautiful. Overall, these three symbols instill the values of cleanliness, beauty, and neatness from the beginning of life.

This tradition is worth preserving because it is a means of early education that forms individuals who are clean in body and soul, neat in attitude, and orderly in their way of thinking. Similar traditions are found in various regions in Aceh. In Gampong Kuta Padang, Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency, there are similar symbols: powder, scissors, and a comb in the baby bathing ritual (Alam, 2020). Although the rituals have differences, they share the same symbols. Meanwhile, Ilham et al. (2023) reported that there are symbols of scissors and a comb, but no powder is used in the baby bathing procession in Meurebo District, West Aceh Regency. Scissors are used to cut some of the baby's hair, and the hair pieces are placed in a coconut to symbolize cleansing from all the dirt attached since birth. The baby's hair is combed to symbolize that the child will always live a clean and well-groomed life. This is similar to the baby-bathing tradition that developed in Kuta Sayeh Village, but with slightly different meanings.

When viewed through Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, the physical symbols of powder, scissors, and combs in the baby-bathing tradition are classified as signifiers. Meanwhile, the signified is the meaning attached to these objects, such as cleanliness, purity, the beginning of a new life, and neatness, which are expected to be realized in the child's future. In other words, these three objects are not only used practically but also serve as cultural signs that teach life values, including physical and spiritual cleanliness, discipline, and orderly thinking and action. The relationship between the signifier and the signified confirms that simple symbols in tradition can

serve as a means of moral and character education from an early age, while also demonstrating how the people of Kuta Sayeh transmit ethical and spiritual values through cultural practices passed down across generations.



Figure 9. Powder, Scissors, and Comb

3.11 Split a Coconut on an Umbrella

The process of splitting a coconut over an umbrella in the baby shower tradition is intended to keep all bad, surprising, and frightening things away from the baby from the beginning of his life. Meanwhile, the umbrella symbolizes protection and safety. In the procession, a mature coconut is used. When the baby is taken out of the house, he is carried by the father or guardian, along with a male relative who is tasked with shading the baby with a decorated yellow umbrella. Next, the coconut is split right above the baby umbrella at the house's doorstep, then the coconut pieces are thrown to the left as part of the symbolic ritual. When the coconut is split over the umbrella, the tengku recites the Basmallah, expressing the hope that the child will grow up with a strong, calm soul, not easily startled or frightened by loud, surprising, or even frightening sounds, such as thunder. This procession reflects the family's affection and protection from the beginning of the baby's life, as well as its determination to prepare him to face the world with courage and calm.

The hard coconut, when split, symbolizes the hope that all flawed, complex, and frightening things can be broken and kept away from the baby's life. Meanwhile, the umbrella that shelters the baby represents protection from parents, family, and, of course, the Creator. This procession has profound value, as it teaches that from an early age, children are formed with spiritual strength and inner calm so that they will grow into individuals who are not easily panicked or afraid when facing life's various trials. This tradition is not just a ritual, but a tangible expression of parental love and hope that their

children are ready to face the world with courage, calm, and protection accompanying them every step of the way.

Similar meanings are also found in several other areas. In Gampong Leupung Ulee Alue, Aceh Besar District, (Irma, 2023) explains that there is a symbol of splitting a coconut but here using banana leaves means that by splitting the coconut and surprising the baby so that the baby gets used to hearing loud sounds, so that when hearing loud sounds like thunder and others, the baby is no longer surprised so it does not make him afraid and cry. Meanwhile, Ervina's research (Ervina, 2017) in Southwest Aceh, in which bathing a baby and splitting a coconut are interpreted as a hope that the baby's mindset will be open in the future, as the coconut opens when it is split. There, the coconut splitting is done under an umbrella, and the pieces are thrown onto the house's roof, symbolizing a prayer that the child grows with high ideals and achieves noble goals in life. It is different again in Pangarungan Village, Torgamba District, South Labuhanbatu Regency, North Sumatra Province, where Eviana & Dora (2024) found that the tradition of splitting an ivory coconut without an umbrella was used to predict the baby's sex in the womb. The ivory coconut is first carved or painted by a traditional elder. If the split coconut slit leans toward the image of Dewi Shinta, it is believed the baby will be a girl. Conversely, if the slit slants toward the image of Arjuna, it is believed the baby will be a boy.

The marker here also comes in physical form, as a split old coconut atop a decorated yellow umbrella. Meanwhile, the signs are the meanings implied in these objects, such as protection, safety, and spiritual strength, which are expected to accompany the baby from the beginning of life. The relationship between the signifier and the signified shows that simple objects can be transformed into cultural signs rich in spiritual, emotional, and social meaning.



Figure 10. Split a Coconut on an Umbrella



According to informants, only the tengku and the midwife currently possess in-depth knowledge and understanding of the symbols in this tradition. Families planning to hold this tradition would first meet with the tengku to inquire about the symbols required for the event. So far, Samsul Rizal, the main informant, has explained that there are no symbols that increase or decrease over time. However, if the condition is that one of the symbols is missing, for example, dates are not available, then it can be replaced with rice mixed with bananas. Slightly different from what the supporting informant explained, Hayaton said that as long as the symbols can still be found, they should not be missed, since they are still available today. From the descriptions above, it can be concluded that the baby bathing procession in Indonesia, and in Aceh in particular, uses many symbols with specific meanings and practices as metaphors that convey good hopes for the baby's life journey from childhood to adulthood.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on research with informants on the meaning of communication symbols in the tradition of bathing babies (a case study in Kuta Sayeh Village, Nagan Raya), it can be concluded that the signifier here refers to the physical form of each communication symbol used in the procession. Meanwhile, the signified is the meaning contained or inherent in each symbol.

The baby shower ceremony in Kuta Sayeh Village holds profound meaning. This tradition is not only a form of cultural expression and gratitude for the birth of a baby, but also contains various symbols that convey religious, social, moral, and cultural meanings and values that are continuously passed down from generation to generation. Symbols in the baby shower ceremony tradition include the Quran, which represents a guide to life; pure gold, coconut milk, and sweets signify the preciousness of one's voice, politeness in speech, and a sweet and guarded tongue so as not to harm others. *Tepung tawar* signifies coolness and protection; chicken liver in eggplant leaves signifies courage, serenity, and the ability of the heart and mind to change. Glutinous rice (*buleukat*) signifies the attachment of all good things, good fortune, and happiness. Dates signify a sweet voice; paddy and rice signify blessings, a reflection of self-awareness; powder, scissors, and a comb signify beauty, a new beginning, and neatness. A split coconut on an umbrella signifies the baby growing up with a calm soul, not easily startled by surprising events such as thunder.

Currently, the public's understanding of the symbolic meaning of the baby-bathing tradition in Kuta Sayeh Village, Seunagan District, Nagan Raya Regency, is limited to a few community leaders, such as the village headman and the midwife. Most people, especially the younger generation, have begun to lose sight of the meaning behind baby-bathing symbols. If this situation continues, it is feared that the essence of the baby bathing



tradition will slowly disappear, becoming merely a routine and a bygone era without understanding the symbolic meaning of each process.

It is crucial to preserve this symbolic understanding so that the tradition remains alive and relevant in modern society. This can be achieved through concrete steps, including: first, through broader research to develop the topic and compare it with other regions with similar traditions, so that this cultural heritage can be documented and understood more deeply and comprehensively. Second, village officials, along with community leaders such as village heads (keuchik), village elders (tengku), and midwives (bidan), need to strengthen their educational role, not only as ritual implementers but also as inheritors and transmitters of cultural knowledge to the community. Third, the community, especially the younger generation, is expected to be more active in exploring and understanding the symbolic meaning of this tradition through family discussions, documentation, and direct involvement in the procession. In this way, the baby-bathing ritual will not only survive as a hereditary routine but also remain imbued with social, moral, and spiritual meaning that can be passed down to future generations.

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