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Malay Traditional Marriage Ceremonies in Brunei: Continuity and Change

Nur E'zzati Rasyidah binti Haji Abdul Samad

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Author

Nur E'zzati Rasyidah recently graduated with a B.A. Hons in Sociology/Anthropology, Universiti Brunei Darussalam and is currently writing her M.A. thesis in car ownership in Brunei.

Contact: ezzatisamad24@hotmail.com

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Abstract:

Brunei Darussalam is a Malay and Islamic state that is well known for its various local cultural heritage and *Adat* (customs and traditions) that are steadfastly maintained until today. *Adat* is considered to be one of the most significant local practices that reflects the unique identity and foundation of Brunei Malay society and culture. It is part of being *Calak Brunei* and has been carried out and passed down from one generation to another. *Adat* functions as a social, political and cultural marker of Brunei Malay society. However, with exposure to and influence of Islamisation in Brunei Darussalam, there has been a decline in the performance and practice of *Adat* especially in Malay traditional marriage customs as some of these customs are seen to be religiously incompatible. This paper explores and understand the extent to which tension and conflict between *Adat* and Islam exist in practices in the marriage customs of Brunei. It will also take into account the various changes and negotiations made to accommodate *Adat* within Islamic practices and values.

Keywords: *Brunei, adat, Islam, conflict, changes.*

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INTRODUCTION

In Brunei Darussalam, culture and religion is intimately connected. *Adat* and Islam act as a defining mechanism for Brunei Malay identity and function as a stable source of reference and framework to regulate the society against the constant shift of modernization. In Brunei Darussalam, according to the *Kementerian Kebudayaan Belia dan Sukan*, *Adat* forms an important core component as part of Brunei Malay history, culture and way of life. *Adat* is claimed to be the manifestation of *Calak Brunei* identity and has a long history.

The importance of *Adat* in the Malay society can be further illustrated through a Malay proverb, '*Biar Mati Anak, Jangan Mati Adat*' which were once highly regarded as a valuable principle to be held in understanding the matters of *Adat* and its practices. Directly translating the popular Malay proverb, it means that it is acceptable to let the children die, for as long as the Malay customs and traditions still live on and upheld by the Malay society. This Malay proverb illustrates how deeply rooted and valued the Malays place upon the importance of *Adat*.

In its political aspect, Brunei Darussalam, according to Othman (2018) regards itself as being a '*Negara Zikir, Negara Beradat*' which strongly emphasise the position and importance of *Adat* among the Brunei Malay society as part of its national image and culture. Therefore, *Adat* is important in defining Brunei Malay society: its identity, boundaries and morality. However, as the Brunei Malay becomes more exposed and integrated to the Islamic world, the strong influence of Islam in Brunei Darussalam has extended; much of the lifestyle were needed to be revised and modified to be compatible and aligned with the nation's values and philosophy of being a '*Melayu Islam Beraja*' and '*Negara Zikir, Negara Beradat*' state. This was further intensified with the implementation of Syaria Law in 2014 in Brunei Darussalam. Following the Titah of Kebawah

DYMM Sultan dan Yang Di-Pertuan in 1984, ‘*We are determined to continue to modernize our country whilst also still keeping faith with the principles and values of Islam*’.

Therefore, with the implementation of Shariah law and influence of Islamisation in Brunei Darussalam, there has been a continuous tendency to reconsider the practice of *Adat*. In particular, the practice of *Adat* has been made modified, which has led to the decline of cultural traditions of the past and social transformation.

This paper will address the tension and conflict between *Adat* and Islam by focusing on Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies. It will also take into account the influence of Animism and Hinduism in the performance of cultural traditions. This paper will also discuss the process of change, adaptation and negotiation in *Adat* in the face of Islamisation.

Data Collection

This research used mainly a qualitative approach which draw from both primary and secondary data. A qualitative approach was used to gain a closer insight on the perceptions and issues raised on the practices involved in the *Adat* of the Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies. Through this approach, it is also hoped that this research will uncover the different meanings and importance attached to the understanding of *Adat*, its practices and Islam.

The primary data and information was collected through a series of interviews with two generations, the older and younger groups. A total of 3 respondents from the older generation and 2 respondents from the younger generation participated in the study. Interviews was carried out from December 2017 until February 2018 at 3 different districts, Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait district. The 3 locations were strategically selected to identify the differences and variations of marital practice and customs between the different *puak* in Brunei Darussalam.

Accessibility to respondents was obtained through snowballing. In addition, I interviewed two *pengaguns* (marriage ritual specialists) from Brunei Muara and Tutong district who provided this research study with valuable insight regarding the significance of the marital customs practiced in the past and present.

Participant observation was also conducted in the months of December 2017 until January 2018. The observation fieldwork was carried out mostly in Brunei-Muara and Tutong districts which were the two main locations for many wedding ceremonies. Access to fieldwork were obtained through wedding invitations. The participant observation fieldwork in this research study was completed through social interaction and informal interviews with the people attending the ceremonies.

Understanding ‘Adat’ and its practices

In ‘*Adat and Islam: An examination of conflict in Minangkabau*’, Taufiq Abdullah (1966) discusses the conflict between *Adat* and Islam in the Minangkabau context. Abdullah’s work (1966) seemed to be a familiar and similar to Brunei Darussalam in which *Adat* is considered to be an ambiguous issue. Prior to exploring more in-depth in understanding the conflict between *Adat* and Islam, it is necessary to explore and understand the meaning and importance of *Adat* in Brunei Malay society.

Based on the research findings, many of the respondents during the interviews had a different understanding and interpretation of what is regarded as ‘*Adat*’. Generally, it could be concluded that defining *Adat* does not only refer to the guidelines and regulations of ideal patterns of behavior, but it also functioned as a basic foundation to the whole structural system of the society which shapes all ethical, legal and social judgements. According to Musor (2013), *Adat* is referred to as the living norm and law in Malay society at a certain time and place. Therefore, *Adat* is considered flexible and adaptable to the social needs and context that it should not be regarded as fixed and permanent. This was similarly claimed by Bakar in *Adat Perkahwinan Orang Melayu Brunei* (2015) who argued that *Adat* in Malay society does not necessarily only refer to social and cultural habits, usage and traditions but also to rules, orders and guidelines which control and organize society. Therefore, the primary purpose of *Adat* is found to be threefold: it functions as a protection, regulation and preservation of society (Musor, 2013).

Hence, with the apparent differences in defining the meanings placed upon the definition of *Adat* and its practices among the society, I would like to conceptualise *Adat* as a ‘Word in

motion' to further understand its practices and relevance in the society. 'Word in Motion' is a concept by Gluck & Tsing (2009) in which the authors suggested that the impacts of meanings and definitions placed upon certain usage of words tends to shift contextually across different time, space and society depending on how it is being circulated at that period of time. In this sense, the term *Adat* was originally derived from an Arabic word, *Ada'*, which refers to the ordinary habits and practices that are often not addressed in Islamic laws. In Southeast Asia, the term is used to refer to the variation of local traditions and customs that is usually found in Malay societies. Takari (2014) believed that the terminology of *Adat* is often synonymous with culture as a whole. It is something that could or should not be separated from the Malay way of life as it is seen as a fixed and stable framework of guideline and reference to their cultural identity, history and practices as in the case of Brunei Darussalam.

Performing *Adat* in society is reinforced through the generational practice of passing it down from one generation to another. Local customary practices are regulated by the act of conformity to the normative rules, obligations and consequences in order to ensure its continuity and persistence within the society. According to Kling (1985), the generational concept involved in a cultural practice will eventually become the society's tradition, history and ways of living.

According to Al-Sufri (1976, p.3), one of the main contributing factors to the declining awareness of the importance and structure of *Adat* in Brunei is due to the fact that it is usually not found to be written but are usually passed down directly or indirectly to the community. This was supported by Musor (2013), in Sarawak, where *Adat* is an oral tradition passed within the community and largely unwritten. Therefore, the tradition and practice vary in time as Musor (2013) claimed and contended that what is usually being practiced may not be an accurate reflection of the written rules. Due to its fluidity and variation, misinterpretation and confusion often arise. Al-Sufri (1976) argued that it is inevitable for new interpretations and assumptions to develop as it is passed down. Shifting meanings and interpretations of *Adat* practices have an impact in cultivating a sense of appreciation, awareness and importance of performing *Adat*.

Selat in *Adat: Antara Tradisi dan Kesenambungan* (1997, p.36) place *Adat* as a form of practice that exercise, unites and cultivates kinship relations. According to Selat (1997), kinship is one of the most important basis for all kinds of relations. It is through the similarity of culture and

practice that individuals will be able to create and cultivate a sense of unity and community which will ensure harmony in society. Therefore, in such a collectivist society such as Brunei Darussalam, the Malays accept the importance of performing and maintaining *Adat* to maintain and unite family relations. The family is highly regarded and valued as the focal point of the social structure of Brunei Darussalam. It is observed that within the family institutions, the older generation and elite groups take an active interest in maintaining local cultural practices from one generation to the next.

One of the respondents, Nor, 55, stated that,

In the past, those who dare to break or abandon the rules of Adat and its practices shall be subjected to punishment. The punishment was often in a form of a heavy payment such as keris, tajau, canang and gong. At that point of time, these items are very difficult to be own and therefore, are often high in value. Thus, the Malay proverb, 'Biar Mati Anak, Jangan Mati Adat' illustrate the value of Adat as equally as important and valuable as having children.

In general, according to Hamid (2003, p.67), any Malay family who tries to reduce or abandon any of the customary practices, in particular in marital ceremonies, will have to face negative judgement and perceptions from the community. Many claimed that societal pressure and expectations are often what drive people to practice the customs. In particular, social pressure is often felt by those acquiring high social status.

This was further supported by Suria's account, 60, in which she shared that those with a social status and background often insisted on holding and performing all the *Adat* in an orderly way to maintain their standing. Often being highly regarded by the community, it is expected that their status should also reflect their knowledge, respect and value for Brunei Malay practices, manners and identity. Thus, according to Suria, 60, there are no excuses for them to neglect performing *Adat* as they are financially able to do so.

In this sense, this could be linked back to what Gluck & Tsing (2009) claimed in which they argued that certain usage of words such as *Adat* have social and political implications, that function as a way to organize, mobilize, inspire or exclude certain public agenda. The usage of *Adat* could be

argued, in this sense, as a form of recognition to identify different social groupings. Kling (1985) argued that Malay identity is a diverse and complicated term to define. However, through an identification with cultural practices and their historical context, one can establish group identity and belonging. Therefore, being one of the most significant local customary practices, the Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremony, continues to uphold its utmost position as a common practice as the customs and traditions involved reflects and distinguish the identity of the Brunei Malay society from the other Malay societies. Thus, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of performing and maintaining *Adat* as it is regarded as a criterion of ‘*Calak Brunei*’ (Hamid, 2004, p. 92).

In addition, based on the research findings, it could also be a form of defining and comparing features of an individual between being ‘*Orang yang beradat*’ (person with culture) vs ‘*Orang yang tidak beradat*’ (person without a culture) in Malay society. Being perceived as ‘*Orang yang tidak beradat*’ connotes a negative stigma compared to being labelled as ‘*Orang yang beradat*’ which reflects a good morality, knowledge, character and wisdom of a person.

Hence, *Adat* basically serves to carry significance, symbolic meanings, representations and functions in society. Taking into account its practicality, positive values and acceptance in society, it continues to be practiced and eventually becomes the norm.

In summary, it is relevant to conceptualise *Adat* as a ‘Word in Motion’ to understand the importance and meanings of the practices which has the tendency to shift as it travels contextually and culturally. To some extent, the meanings and structure of practices may also become localized to the current state and condition of the society. Based on my observations during the research period, many Bruneians at present often fail to clearly present their knowledge and understanding of the local customary practices; they have gradually lost their essence and meaning. Nevertheless, it is important to not make any generalisations as some groups still insist on retaining these customs and practice out of the norm of compromising, respect and concern towards the wishes of their family and past ancestors. Therefore, it could be concluded that in terms of understanding the importance and relevance of *Adat* in daily life, it could also be highly dependent on the degree of cultural reinforcements and understanding of *Adat* in society and its institutions.

Brunei Darussalam: The influence of Animism and Hinduism on Adat

It is recorded that, prior to the arrival of Islam in the 14th century in Brunei Darussalam, there were 4 major periods that is believed to have shaped and influenced Brunei Malay culture and society which were Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. These 4 major historical periods are known to have impacted on the structure of the Brunei Malay culture and traditions. According to Duraman (2016), the Malay Archipelago during that period of time was the centre of trading routes. Due to its importance and centre for trading, there were many intercultural marriage and migration taking place.

Nor, 55, described that,

At that period of time, there were no religious belief or institutions. Hence, when other religion came to Brunei, it was relatively easy for the people to passively accept what is being circulated as the degree of exposure and knowledge from other different religion at that period of time was also low.

Cultural assimilation and diffusion occurred and influenced many of the Malay customs and traditions. To further solidify this point, King (1994) argued that between 15th and 17th century, Brunei was a historically and politically a significant power incorporating and influencing various populations. Hence, various cultural practices and customs from other sources were brought in, incorporated and further modified into the practices of Brunei Malay society.

Yusof, 72, accounts that,

Logically, no one would actually have any idea on how to perform Adat or in particular, a marriage ceremony properly. Thus, through observation and exposure to other cultures, Adat is created, modified and claimed as belonging to the society. Moreover, it is part of the human nature to observe and imitate what they see. Through this lens, individuals are able to learn and understand the consequences of their actions. And to some extent, maybe

this is part of the reason why there are similarities and resemblance with other cultures. It is inevitable.

ADAT BRUNEI MALAY TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

In this section, I will illustrate the above by discussing the influences of Animism and Hinduism on Brunei Malay customs and traditions. The Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies or locally referred to as, *Adat Istiadat Perkahwinan Brunei*, is one of the most significant local customary practices of the Brunei Malays.

Yussof, 72, accounts that

Marriage is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that should be celebrated with joy and traditions with all members of the family. Marriage marks the end of the responsibility held by the parents which is further passed down onto the husband.

The Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremony consists of 10 ceremonies which are *Majlis Berjarum-jarum*, *Majlis Menghantar Tanda Pertunangan*, *Majlis Menghantar Berian*, *Majlis Berbedak Siang*, *Majlis Akad Nikah*, *Majlis Malam Berbedak*, *Majlis Berinai*, *Majlis Bersanding*, *Majlis Berambil-ambilan* and *Majlis Mulih 3 atau 7 hari*. These ceremonies illustrates the three important elements that shape Brunei Malay customs and traditions namely: the ideology or expressions, cultural materials and proper ethics and manners adopted in performing each of the respective ceremonies.

Before the process of entering married life, there are certain '*rites of passage*' or local *Adat* (as stated above) that are needed to take place in order to fully prepare the couple for their big day and life. The Malays believe that within the duration of completing their marriage ceremonies, both bride and groom are in a state of '*darah manis*' (*sweet blood*) in which both of them are vulnerable to various sources of harm. Therefore, *Adat* was created to protect these individuals from harm- either by humans (purposely or otherwise) or spiritual beings. Hence, it is believed they should be practiced in a proper order.

For this section, I will only focus on five ceremonies: *Majlis Berbedak Siang*, *Majlis Malam Berbedak*, *Majlis Berinai/berpacar*, *Majlis Bersanding* and *Majlis Mulih 3 atau 7 hari*. The details illustrated in this section will be based on the literature of *Adat Perkahwinan Orang-Orang Melayu Brunei Secara Umum* (2014) and a study done by Daudy & Bahri (1994) to provide a descriptive overview of the Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies. The data and information on details, functionality and symbolic meanings of customs and materials involved in these ceremonies were mainly gathered from my field observations and interviews with the older generation respondents and *pengaguns*.

A. Majlis Berbedak Siang

Majlis Berbedak Siang, is considered to be the first and opening ceremony of the official wedding week. Usually the ceremony will be held separately for the bride and groom. It is in this ceremony that indicates that both bride and groom have successfully entered into the '*Berjaga jaga*' phase which often signals the start of their *pantang larang* (prohibition) week. At the start of this week, both bride and groom will not be allowed to go outside of their home and often, Suria, 60 shared that it is the *pengagun* who has full control of the bride and groom. In addition, during this week, both bride and groom will be required to dress in all white until the end of their ceremony. Curious to understand the symbolic meaning of dressing in white, I asked my informants the motives and reasons behind this practice.

According to Yussof,

It is a must for the bride and groom to wear white during this week. It functions as a way to mark which one are the bride or groom of the house. White are also symbolic, it represents purity and cleanliness. Marriage are regarded similar to stepping into a new rite of passage. Another way to explain is, dressing in white is symbolically similar to how women veil themselves in a white 'telkung' (prayer cloth) to pray.

Suria argued that,

White represents purity and cleanliness. Many bride and groom are encouraged to keep track of their food intakes during this week. It is preferable that they eat enough amounts of eggs and milk. Actually, not only the way they dress, but food intakes, interactions and movements of the bride and groom will all be regulated and controlled.

Thus, from this ceremony onwards, the bride and groom are often regarded as the ‘*Raja Permaisuri Sehari*’ (the King and Queen of the day) in which they will be treated and pampered like one by the *pengagun* and their family members by the strict disciplines and regulations imposed on them.

In the *Majlis Berbedak Siang*, the bride or groom will be called out to the centre of the room in which he or she will be asked to sit on a special fabric made out of a *Jongsarat Brunei*. The bride or groom will be surrounded with 4 candles that would be lit prior to starting the ceremony. The opportunity of *memaliti badak* (an act of powdering) will first be given to the ‘*orang tua keluarga*’ (the elderly) as it is considered as an act of paying respect to and blessing of them. This will be followed by the other family members who attended the ceremony. Later, the *pengagun* will take over to finish the ceremony by taking them back to their room to proceed with completing the act of cleansing, scrubbing and bathing the whole body.

Based on the information provided, the act of cleansing, scrubbing and bathing is symbolically regarded as a way to replenish the individual’s blessings, happiness and fertility upon entering a new phase of life with their spouse.

According to Suria, the *lulut* (scrub) from the bride and groom body will have to be collected and kept by the representative of the family until the end of the wedding ceremony. It is believed that the *lulut* of the bride or groom could be used in many harmful ways against the couple. In another practice, the *lulut* of both bride and groom are collected to be mixed together at the end of the ceremony as it is believed to strengthen the relationship of the couple for a lifetime.

Later, the bride or groom will proceed with the bathing ritual performed by the *pengagun* in which they will also be accompanied by 7 children dressed in colourful *selendang* (veil) on their shoulder, each holding a candle. The candle will then be collected by the *pengagun* to be blown off by the bride or groom after the bathing rituals. The bathing rituals include water that are mixed

with *langir*, *bunga melor*, *bunga gambir*, *limau nipis* and *bunga kelambigi* which have been properly mixed and recited over the *pengagun* prior before the bathing ceremony. While bathing the bride or groom, the *pengagun* will also recite the *bacaan jampi* as part of completing the ritual act to cleanse the outer and inner part of the body.

B. Majlis Malam Berbedak

A similar concept as to the *Majlis Berbedak Siang* is being adapted in this ceremony. The difference is that this ceremony is usually held at night whereas *Majlis Berbedak Siang* is usually held in the afternoon. Another difference is that the bride or groom will be dressed in Brunei Malay traditional clothing and ornaments made out of gold such as the *Tajok*, *Karang Tembusa*, *Ayam-ayam*, *Sisir*, *Kancing* and many more.

In addition, based on my observation, most of the brides are dressed in red and often, their faces will be covered with a cloth until they reach the *pelaminan* stage. The bride or groom will be asked to sit on the stage as the powdering ceremony takes place.

According to Yussof, there will be 7 colours of powders and *Bunga Rampai* that will be prepared for this ceremony. These 7 colours of powders symbolize and represent the 7 layers of skies, earth and rainbows.

Often, the powdering ceremony will be initiated by the '*orang tua keluarga*' (the elderly) and followed by the other invited guests. Suria added that proper ethics and manners are observed during the powdering act. This refers to the importance of using the ring finger to dip into the 7 colours of powder and applying it on the forehead of the bride or groom as a way of "*menaikkan seri muka pengantin*" (to increase the glow of the bride or groom).

Later, the *Bunga Rampai* is scattered all over the bride or groom which signifies a form of blessing and the end of the powdering act. The bride or groom will then be brought back to their room. Specifically, for the bride, the *pengagun* will proceed to perform the '*Adat Masuk Pengagunan*' phase in which; the bride will be centered in the middle of the '*orang tua keluarga*'. A candle will be lit by the *pengagun* and will be passed to the members surrounding the bride. Later, the bride will be asked to put her arms all around the *pengagun* and led around the bed for

about 3 times. To signify the end of the initiation, the bride will then be asked to blow the lit candle.

The '*Adat Masuk Pengagunan*' phase is strictly observed to signify a period of control and regulation for both bride and groom. This is mainly because they have completed all of the initiation rituals and customs and seen to be in a state of purity. According to Suria,

In the past, the bride or groom will be restricted from leaving their rooms. This is because the pengagun fears the risks of harmful things that may happen them. Many individuals are devoted in the black magic practices back then. There were even competition with one another to display their skills and knowledge to the public. The society often fears these people which thus, offers them with some kind of status, privileges and respect from the community. Marriage is often one of the most common occasion in which these practices are tested out. In addition, as the initiation and customs has completed, leaving the home or room is also believed to be able to cause the bride or groom 'libas' (A Bruneian dialect which refers to miserable consequences) as they are often regarded as 'attractive' and 'sweet' to be followed and harmed by spiritual beings.

C. Majlis Berinai/Berpacar

Majlis Berinai/Berpacar is usually held in a small gathering that will be attended by close families and friends. In this ceremony, the bride or groom will be pampered by their family members where each of the members will have the opportunity to take turns to put the *inai* (henna) on their hand and foot. Applying *inai* (henna) is considered to be significant as part of the wedding practices as *inai* (henna) is regarded by many as an indication to others that they are already married.

Emah, 62, based her argument that,

Other than to cleanse and purify the bride and groom, applying mixture of inai (henna) is also regarded as a form of 'protection'. This is because bride and groom is considered to

be in a state of 'darah manis' (sweet blood) and often, an attraction to be followed or harmed by spiritual beings.

According to Nor, 55, the application of *inai* is similar to wearing a Henna found in Indian cultural practices. Today, many brides even add in decorations on their hands making it similar to an Indian culture. These decorations, according to Nor, might cause religious issues as the practice may resemble a symbolic meaning and representation peculiar to Indian society and culture. However, Osman, 45, denies this point and stated that wearing *inai* (Henna) is a similar practice in Arab society and he regards this as part of the beautification and decoration that are permissible to Muslim women.

D. Majlis Bersanding

Majlis Bersanding, is usually a grand affair that will be attended by both sides of the family, relatives and friends. The ceremony is considered to be the second main event after the *Majlis Akad Nikah* as this will be the ceremony in which both bride and groom will be united and exhibited in front of all their family members. Both bride and groom will be dressed in full Brunei traditional clothing and will walk down together to the *pelaminan* stage.

'*Adat Pusing Naga*' will be performed in this ceremony by the groom prior to getting up to the stage towards his wife. According to Yussof, this *Adat* has its significance in the practices of the past as both bride and groom is believed to be in a state of '*darah manis*' (sweet blood) and thus, by performing this *Adat* which requires the groom to walk around a circle, the harmful things that have been following them will eventually disappear out of distraction. In another aspect, Osman argued that, this practice is performed to give extra time for the bride to prepare herself before meeting the groom. On the other hand, Nor, compared the similarity of this *Adat* with a Hindu practice in which both bride and groom walk around circling the fire.

E. Majlis Mulih 3 atau 7 hari

The local term '*Mulih*' refers to going or returning back home. In this context, *Majlis Mulih 3 atau 7 hari* refers to the day that the groom will be expected to bring home his wife after their 3rd or 7th day of staying at the wife's house.

According to Suria,

In the past, the purpose of this Adat is often used to mark the 3rd or 7th day of the newlywed marriage. It is the day that the family members await as the main highlight of this ceremony is to announce the state of purity of the wife publicly to the other family members through the use of 'Bunga lapik pinang' (white cloth) that are delivered along during the previous Majlis Menghantar Berian.

An examination of Adat in Brunei Malay Traditional Marriage Ceremonies

First, it could be analyzed that the ideology adopted in the marital customs and marriage ceremonies relate to the idea of natural environment and spiritual beings. For instance, the need to follow the *pantang larang* week, the use of *bacaan jampi*, *inai*, *lulut* and others. The main purpose of these customs and rituals is to safeguard and protect the individuals involved from any sources of harm through the natural and spiritual callings. According to Dr Haji Ramlee (2009, p.7 cited in Aziz, 2015), a hundred years ago, many of the Malay communities used to live by at the forest and rivers. In such circumstances, they often learned to survive and reason with their spiritual interactions with the nature. Thus, this explains why the ideology and expression involved particularly in the *Adat* of the Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies seemed to relate to nature and spiritual beliefs.

In addition to this, the ideology adopted in these customs does, to a certain extent, resembles the pre-existing belief of Animism and Hinduism as it was claimed to be the first two religions to dominate Brunei at that time. Animism is based on the beliefs of supernatural and magical powers in nature such as plants, animals, weather and many more. According to Abd Rahman (2001, p.23), in such a small-scale community, such beliefs were functional as they provided a sense of direction and purpose for the community to live out their life. Therefore, with

the existing knowledge and beliefs acquired by the community, in the past, such practices and traditions were created to protect and safeguard the individuals involved with the assistance of the *Pengaguns*. In Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies, according to a study by Hakim (2014), *Pengaguns* hold an important and leading role in performing as well as maintaining rituals and customs involved in marriage ceremonies. Among the Brunei Malays, it is claimed that the *pengagun* acquires knowledge and skills that are able to guard and protect the bride and groom from any sources of harm. Their acquired knowledge and beliefs from past ancestors has formed the basis of customs and rituals performed in marital ceremonies. Therefore, they are often regarded as important and knowledgeable in performing such practices.

Osman accounts that,

The knowledge, purpose and rationality of past practices may not be relevant at present as the contents and structures were often formed on the basis and reasoning of the state of society and its conditions. Therefore, it might be difficult to justify and rationalize everything with reasons as the past practices rely heavily on the knowledge, purpose and values held by our past ancestors in which it may no longer apply or fit into our present context.

Brunei Darussalam: The Arrival and Influence of Islam

The arrival of Islam in the 14th century in Brunei Darussalam has made a great impact, influences and challenges the pre-existing beliefs, customs and attitudes of the Brunei Malays. Duraman (2016) described the period and arrival of Islam as an eye-opening experience as Islam has brought in new values, ideals and perspectives. Islam has brought in the concept of rationalism, intellectualism as well as a community-based system where individuals have equal status as opposed to a caste-based system of Hindu society.

Therefore, according to Osman (1984), the transformation of culture brought through Islam among the Malays in the archipelago were possible. Most importantly, the transformation was seen to be necessary as Islam should not only be practiced on the basis of beliefs and faith but also, practiced practically in all aspects of life including customs and traditions. Following the Titah of

Kebawah DYMM Sultan dan Yang Di-Pertuan in conjunction with the celebration of Prophet's Muhammad's Birthday in 1984 ordered that, '.... as an Islamic practicing country, Islam should be practiced as a complete guide to the way of living in reference to the prescriptions and proscriptions that has been set by Islamic teachings and values'

Al-Sufri (1976, p.4) argued that, other external influences and interactions have also constantly challenged the cultural heritage and practices of the past. The external interactions have exposed individuals at present to rationalize their practices. They expose individuals to the idea that local customary practices and traditions are part of a backward cultural practices that are not align with the present context. It is seen as being old-fashioned.

An examination of *Adat* and Islam in Brunei Darussalam

Based on a research study done by Daudy & Bahri (1994), there are a number of *Adat* in the marital ceremonies in Brunei Darussalam that are regarded as irrelevant and incompatible with current Islamic practices. This section will examine the conflict and tension between *Adat* and Islam in Brunei Darussalam.

There is a remarkable quote in the Malay society that states, '*Adat bersendikan Syarak, Syarak bersendikan kitabullah*' (Melayong, 2016) in which it recommends that local customs should cause no conflict with the practices and beliefs of Islam. At present, this is the principle held by many Malay individuals concerning *Adat* and its practices. According to Abdul Rani (n.d) in *Menjaga Agama: Antara Adat & Tuntutan*, specifically in Malaysia, the understanding and usage of this concept has caused confusion amongst the Malays and has created diverse views and interpretations. Abdul Rani (n.d) explained that Islam does not entirely prohibit what is being considered as *Adat*.

From a religious aspect, some of the customs and rituals performed are regarded to be sensitive and incompatible with Islam. First, in the rituals and customs performed by the *pengagun*. Hakim (2014) claimed that the presence of *pengagun* in marital customs is considered to be the most important as they serve to act as the leading role in performing as well as maintaining *Adat*. It is believed that the *pengagun* acquires knowledge that are intended to guard and protect the bride

and groom from harm. To a certain extent, Ali (2008) pointed out that this may be partly the reason for conflict as some individuals may put their faith and belief in the supernatural world and depend heavily on the power of the *pengagun* for assistance and protection.

In addition, the recitals of *bacaan jampi* during the initiation process in most marital customs are also regarded to be deviating from and incompatible with the beliefs and teachings of Islam. This is due to the fact that the recitals involve a form of worshipping for protection from spiritual beings. Furthermore, there are also constant involvement of skin contact between the *pengagun* and the bride or groom. In Islam, it is strictly prohibited for its followers to have non-*Mahram* (non-family members) skin contact particularly between the opposite gender. Rituals and initiation such as bathing involves skin-contact.

Kasimin (1989) in *Istiadat Perkahwinan Melayu: Satu Kajian Perbandingan*, noted that the marital customs of the Malay society are similar to Hindu practices. These similarities, were fully acknowledged by my informants, from *Majlis Menghantar Berian* to *Majlis Bersanding*. For instance, the Indian Muslims in India, also applies Henna as part of their marriage beautification customs. The Henna is usually made out of an organic plant named, *lawsonia alba*. On the same day of this custom, the bride and groom will also be applied with turmeric powder on their forehead which signifies fertility and protection from any harm. As part of the rituals, the elderly, particularly in Decca India, would also assist in cleansing the body of the bride and groom using turmeric powders and scented powders. This is usually done in front of all the family members. This practice is similar to the practice of *Majlis Berbedak Siang* as this custom, for the Indian, also marks the prohibition week for them.

From an Islamic perspective, the application of *inai* among men are found to be no longer acceptable as beautification is only regarded for women in Islam. Suria also raised that the use of *inai* in the past was believed to be a form of identification of marriage in the Hereafter which contradicts the values and teachings of Islam. Other practices such as announcing the state of virginity of the bride publicly are also abandoned as it may put families and couples at risk of shame and humiliation. Such personal and private matters should be kept confidential from the public.

According to Ali (2008), the Malays do acknowledge the incompatibility and consequences of their actions and beliefs. However, they justify such cultural practices as means of assistance and protection. Furthermore, Ali (2008) argued that conflict between *Adat* and Islam may only arise if the belief in supernatural world supercede belief in Allah. Abdul Rani (n.d) contended that one of the basic assumptions about *Adat* and Islam among the Malay is that *Adat* and Islam are closely connected and synonymous with one another. Therefore, many Malays believe that performing these cultural practices is compulsory (*wajib*) and must be fulfilled as part of their duty as Muslims.

On the other hand, Ali (2008) argued that these practices are deeply embedded in Malay life and organization. Many of my respondents point out that their main concern is not mainly on the conflict between *Adat* and Islam but the decline in the practices of *Adat* which may weaken the bond of kinship relations and institutions.

Al-Sufri (1976, p.3) accounts that modifying or redefining of *Adat* may not necessarily be negative. It could help to preserve the cultural heritage of Brunei. *Adat* is no longer fixed and permanent but as a process of negotiation of and between religious and cultural practices as well as between traditional and modern practices. In the course of time, modern practices of wedding rituals have been transformed in response to economic and social conditions.

This issue was raised by Hasrulaizan (2013) on *Media Permata* on the extended celebration of marital custom and ceremonies at present. Some of the marriage ceremonies today are being celebrated lavishly. This should be avoided as from an Islamic perspective, this could lead to a form of waste (*membazir*) and may also encourage haughtiness (*riak*) among the individuals involved.

Amirah, 30, shared that,

One of the main reasons why many young couples today decide to delay their marriage intention and plan is due to the high financial expenses involved in a Brunei Malay marriage. The costs involved in the preparation, completion as well as the list of dowry exchange could also be impractical. In addition, most of the financial burden and

responsibility are also often placed largely on the groom. Beside this, the groom has to also worry about paying special requests such as Adat Tabus Bangsa or Adat Langkah Dulang!

Sarah, 23, argued that,

This form of ceremony is seen as burdensome as some family may not be financially qualified or stable to present such expected gifts.

Negotiation of *Adat* and Islam in Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies

In this section, I will highlight the changes that has occurred in Brunei Malay traditional marriage ceremonies which reflects the negotiation and adaptation that have taken place between *Adat* and Islam in Brunei.

A. Majlis Berbedak Siang

Noted as being the first and opening ceremony of the official wedding week, according to Amirah, many families today include the *Majlis Khatam Al-Quran* as part of the ceremony. This ceremony indicates the completion of the recitation of the Holy Book of Allah, the Al-Quran by the bride or groom and members of the family participating.

At first, I was quite against the wishes of my parents as there are already so many ceremonies to go through, however, when my mother explained that this ceremony holds an Islamic significance, I comply to their wishes as the main purpose of this event is to ask for Allah's blessings and mercy upon the completion of my ceremonies.

(Amirah, 30)

In addition, since *Majlis Berbedak Siang* is often held on Friday, it seemed best to include *Majlis Khatam Al-Quran* as according to Amirah, in Islam, Friday holds a significant day as being the ‘*Penghulu segala hari*’ which refers as the best day of the week.

Referring back to the main practices of this ceremony which involves the act of powdering and cleansing of the body, respondents were in favour. This is because most of the respondents understand and accept the positive function that this ceremony holds which is to pamper and prepare both bride and groom before their big day. The intention and act of cleansing the body of the bride and groom are regarded to be acceptable as long as the *pengagun* avoids having skin-contact with the bride and groom. However, according to Suria,

Some families, at present, also took the initiative to take over the role of the pengagun and perform it on behalf of me. I will only assist and guide from afar.

Suria, further explained that the materials used during the initiation such as the use of *lulut* (scrub), mixture of waters and scented material were the only readily available in the past and believed to have the benefit to cleanse, scrub and give scents to the bodies of the bride and groom. Therefore, due to the benefit that it holds, the materials are still being widely used until today.

In addition, Emah, noted that, after the recent Sharia law implementation, many *pengagun* are also advised to best avoid reading the *bacaan jampi* when performing the initiation as the recitals used were found to be incompatible with the beliefs and teachings of Islam. *Pengagun* are, alternatively, advised to replace it with the verses and readings found from the Al-Quran.

Furthermore, according to Amirah, 30, the order of initiation often depends on the decision made by the *pengagun*.

Based on my experience, the pengagun I had did not request for any children to accompany me during my bath or cleansing rituals (referring to both Adat Berbedak Siang/Malam). The reason is because according to my pengagun, it was not important to perform such practices today as it is believed that such practices were done due to the lack of electricity in the past therefore children were needed to accompany such custom.

However, Suria, presented a different view in which the participation of the children were regarded as crucial as it could indirectly function as a way of passing down the knowledge and experiences of Malay local custom to them or otherwise, as a way to offer and revive the cultural memories of Malay custom.

Sarah, 23, stated that a few of the *Majlis Berbedak Siang* that she has attended was held at night instead of in the afternoon. One possible and rational reason for this is due to the fact that most individuals have to go to work in the afternoon and thus, it is only convenient to hold it at night instead.

B. Majlis Malam Berbedak

A similar form of adaptation is being applied in the practices found in the *Majlis Malam Berbedak*. Based on my fieldwork, it is observed that many families at present today consider inviting and performing *Zikir* and *Selawat Nabi* to accompany the whole initiation ceremony. Invited guests no longer have to apply the powder on the forehead of the bride or groom but on the palm of their hands as it is seen to be more practical and appropriate.

In addition, Yussof noted that many families today prepare brushes made out of pandan or *serai* leaves which will be used to dip into the powders and apply it on the bride or groom palm thus avoiding skin-contact.

C. Majlis Berinai/Berpacar

According to Amirah and Suria, *Majlis Berinai/Berpacar* is still being actively practiced. Amirah justified that, despite the fact that this ceremony can be found to be similar with Hindu-Buddhist practices, the application of Henna among women are still widely accepted as part of the marriage ceremonies as it is believed to cause no conflict with Islam but instead, are encouraged among many women.

Sarah, 23, commented,

I think it is partially because there was no such thing as a nail polish back in the olden days. I think, this might be the closest that we can adorn and beautify ourselves on our special day.

Suria further elaborated that,

‘Although it was not mentioned anywhere in the Al-Quran, but it was stated in the Hadith law in which Islam encourages their women to wear Henna as a form of gender identification that distinguish men and women. However, it is important to be noted that men are not allowed in such practice as beautification is only peculiar to women and Islam prohibits its followers to imitate the opposite gender. Therefore, many men today should and do not wish to participate in such practice anymore.’

Thus, this ceremony is often only being practiced by women at present. Men no longer associate themselves with the application of *inai*.

D. Majlis Bersanding

Based on the wedding invitations received, the *Majlis Bersanding* still holds its importance as being the closing and end of the wedding ceremony week. It is the only day that all family members, relatives and friends will have the opportunity to see the newly pair as official husband and wife. Thus, all family members will try to attend and participate in this ceremony. At present, many brides are advised to cover themselves with a *Hijab* and not adorn themselves with any revealing clothes that might cause religious sensitivity.

Moreover, many *Majlis Bersanding* today are being held at a rented hall. All ceremonies are being modified to fit into the context. According to Nor, some families still perform the *Adat Pusing Naga*, particularly when the ceremony is being held at their home. However, the practice has changed in which the groom is no longer required to recite the *bacaan jampi* when performing the act. The groom is advised to replace the recitals with the readings of verses and praises to Allah. Based on my observation, when the ceremony is being held at a rented hall, many families

no longer perform such *Adat Pusing Naga* act. In addition, many respondents also emphasize the importance of having a clear intention in performing these customs and rituals. For as long as the intention is clear, for the sake of Allah and non-other, it is acceptable to perform such customary practices.

E. Majlis Mulih 3 atau 7 hari

Majlis Mulih 3 atau 7 hari has lost importance among the Malays. It is seen as being inappropriate and irrational to announce such personal and private matters to the public. Moreover, Nor also stated that this could cause harm and put the family in shame. Moreover, many of the newly wed couples often go for a honeymoon vacation right after their *Majlis Bersanding* and thus, such ceremony is no longer performed.

Nor, however, disagreed on the timing of the honeymoon,

By right, it is not appropriate to leave your family right after the end of your wedding ceremony. It is important to put consideration of your family feeling, most importantly, your parents. My advice is to return back to the parent's house first and then, go for your honeymoon. This is the reason why Adat is important, it helps to hold, nurture and educate the character of an individual.

Conclusion

The findings of this research addressed issues and reasons relating to the declining practice and relevance of *Adat* in Malay traditional marriage ceremonies at present. The infusion of Animism and Hinduism, along with other external influences in Malay customs and traditions in Brunei are apparent and evident. Abdullah (1966) claimed that the concept of conflict plays a useful and operational tool in order to analyze societal development and social change. In this sense, there are 3 stages of change and adaptation: Firstly, the influence of Animism which helps to form the basis of belief and purpose in Brunei Malay culture and society. Secondly, the arrival of Hinduism which helped to cement the basis of existing belief and structure. Thirdly, the arrival of Islam which

helped to advanced change and negotiation to take place between *Adat* and Islam, so that they can exist side by side.

In this study, I have also outlined the significance and importance of *Adat* which I have illustrated through two Malay proverb, *Biar Mati Anak, Jangan Mati Adat* as well as ‘*Adat Bersendikan Syarak, Syarak Bersendikan Kitabullah,*’ in which I have explained why there is a need and effort to maintain culture and religion. The findings of this research highlighted how Islam has become one of the most major contributions to the transformation of culture in Brunei Darussalam. *Adat* has gradually lost its significance. This is because Islam encourages the right conduct and practice that should reflect and be align with the prescriptions and proscriptions of the religion. However, it should also be noted that such cultural practices are not entirely prohibited in Islam. *Adat* may have its own social and political significance. Thus, Bruneian Muslims at present live by the Malay proverb that states ‘*Adat Bersendikan Syarak, Syarak Bersendikan Kitabullah,*’ a phrase that reminds all Malay Muslims to keep their actions and practice aligned with their Islamic religious faith. In this paper, I have sought to highlight the extent to which the process of negotiation and adaptation has taken place between *Adat* and Islam in Brunei today

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