

Samin's Arranged Marriage Rituals in Today Javanese's Society

Fransiska Rahayu Myrlinda

myrlinda15@gmail.com

Magister Ilmu Susastra, Universitas Kristen Petra

Abstract

Arranged marriage means a marriage in which the parents have chosen and planned to whom their son or daughter would marry with. This form of marriage commonly has perception that it is held only for the needs of their parents without any consideration of their children's feelings. It results in there is no freedom for either bride or groom to choose their own partner. All the things have been set according to the parents' will. In arranged marriage, usually they even never have a chance to meet each other before the marriage occurs. On the other hand, arranged marriage does exist and has been believed as a culture for Samin people in Kelopodhuwur, Blora, Indonesia. It is held from generation to generation which makes it impossible for the children to deny. It is used by the people in Samin community to preserve their identity from extinction. There are lots of unique rituals should be done for Samin people in holding this arranged marriage. The identity theory was used to support the reliable data to the research.

Keywords: *rarranged marriage rituals, Samin people, Identity*

Introduction

Arranged marriage can be understood as a marriage that is established before a lengthy relationship. It is the opposite of a love marriage where marriage would be considered as the final step to legalize the relationship between the lovers. Arranged marriages were very common throughout the world until the 18th century. Typically, these marriages were arranged by parents, grandparents or other relatives. The arranged marriage is a negotiation and decision between parents and other older members of two families. The boys and girls were typically told to get married, without a right to consent, even if they had never met each other until the wedding day (Broude, 1983, p. 270). In the arranged marriage, the boys and girls do not have power to deny their parents' desire. It is unacceptable for them to argue about whether

or not they agree with the person they are going to marry with.

Arranged marriages were the norm in Russia before the early of 20th century, most of which were endogamy. Until the first half of the 20th century, arranged marriages were common in migrant families in the United States. They were sometimes called *picture-bride marriages* among Japanese American immigrants because the bride and groom knew each other only through the exchange of photographs before the day of their marriage (Goldstein-Gidoni, 200, p. 34). These marriages among immigrants were typically arranged by parents, or relatives from the country of their origin. As immigrants settled in and melded into a new culture, arranged marriages shifted to the arranged marriages where parents or friends made introductions and the couple met before the marriage. As time went by, the arranged marriage then

developed. The marriages among the descendants of these immigrants shifted to autonomous marriages driven by individual's choice, dating and courtship preferences, along with an increase in interracial marriages (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002, p. 135).

Arranged marriages then have declined in prosperous countries with higher social mobility and increasing individualism since there is a negative perception that these marriage happened only for the needs of parents without thinking about the feelings of their children itself. On the other hand, arranged marriages are still seen in countries of Europe and North America, among royal families, aristocrats, and minority religious groups such as in marriage commonly happened among the Fundamentalist Mormon groups of the United States (Ghimire et. al., 2006, p. 1200). In most other parts of the world, especially in Indonesia, arranged marriages continue to varying degrees and forms, along with autonomous marriages. The existence of arranged marriage in Indonesia is still increasing from time to time.

Indonesia, as an archipelago country, consumes arranged marriage as a symbol of uniqueness around its islands. When arranged marriage is held, rituals are always followed side by side. Java, as one of islands in Indonesia, conveys the variety rituals of arranged marriage with lots of meanings. Since there are lots of indigenous communities which still exist in Java, such as Tengger, Osing, and *Samin*, each of them has its own unique way in running the certain rituals in arranged marriage. The marriage rituals between all those three communities are completely different with the carried meanings on it. Besides, those indigenous communities itself usually live outside the common Javanese framework (Shiraishi, 1990, p. 100). They have kept and carried out their traditional culture as their way of life.

Among those three communities, *Samin* is the most interesting community to be discussed, especially in the rituals of arranged marriage they held to preserve their cultures and even believes (Benda, 1969, p. 210). Their existence, especially during their long history of resistance to Dutch colonial government

policies, is also the unique topic to be known by others. Their first movement during Dutch colonial government policies in practicing arranged marriage is one of the excellent points in connection to discuss the interrelation meanings between their movement and the rituals they have. Ironically, even though *Samin* and their movement could make trouble for the Dutch, most people around this community seem to have viewed them negatively. In practicing and maintaining the arranged marriage, for example, they are categorized as being backward or even to be called as primitive people.

Historically, *Samin* is an Indonesian social movement founded by Samin Surosentika in central Java, Indonesia around late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Samin* people rejected the capitalist views of Dutch colonials who forced taxes upon Indonesian's people. *Samin* people rejected to pay tax, since they think that they live in Indonesia and Dutch does not belong to their country. *Samin* people preferred to resist against the Dutch colonial government policies. They do not pay attention on the life of ordinary world. However, *samin* people maintain to keep their life to be useful not only for themselves but also for others. The feelings of togetherness are the most important part for their lives (King, 1973). *Samin* people consider wealth not as the major aspect that differentiates people. Therefore, according to them, to have a lot of money without feeling happy or even grateful for their precious life is a mistake.

Samín Surosentika, commonly known as the founder of *samin*, around 1890 era started to teach the *Samin's* belief or usually called as "*sikep*". It differentiates the way of life between *samin* people and others' common way of living. *Sikep's* principles later on are used to persuade people to have peace with others. *Sikep's* principles were used by its people to be their philosophy of life. This philosophy of life is learnt from generation to generation. This philosophy of life itself has the main function which is to teach people as human beings to be kind and treat others according to the correct manners. Applying it to the real habitual life means that people should live their life not only for living their

own life, such as being rich and wealthy for themselves, but mostly for helping their surroundings too.

The changing era from historical to the more modern era does not give any difference to *Samin* people and its beliefs. Even with the development of era to the modernism, the *Samin* people still convey what so called as togetherness to maintain their relations to one another by doing the arranged marriage. The rituals held in this arranged marriage are diverse. There are lots of meanings that want to be conveyed by doing arranged marriage for *Samin* people. Each ritual of arranged marriage done by *Samin* people signifies different meanings. The most obvious explanation of performing the rituals in arranged marriage held by *Samin* people is to convey togetherness between each other. Therefore, it needs sort of background knowledge and understanding on how togetherness is portrayed in *Samin* arranged marriage rituals. This research attempts to examine how *Samin* arranged marriage rituals are held in relation to declare identity of the community. The data in this study was only focused on the result of observation done for *Samin* community in Belimbing and Klopoduwur, Blora.

Identity

In defining what identity is, there are many experts who have been discussed about the meaning of it related to the social context where it belongs. Identity is always changing. The changing itself depends on context, experience or space, and even time which give effect on it. In addition, identity is constructed by self and society. Epstein said that the meaning of identity represents the process by which the person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self (1978, p.10). Weeks (1990) later proposed the idea that identity is about belonging. It can imply the meaning that identity is what people have in common with some people. He also added that identity also can evoke the meaning of what differentiates a person from the others.

Rew and Champbell (1999) also give meaning to identity. Identity was viewed as a sign of struggle. They claimed that identity concerns mostly with what you belong to. Identity focuses on emotional experiences, including experience of resistance if it is against the beliefs. Furthermore, identity also concern with commitments to imagined "tribes" and other communities.

Moreover, Nunan and Choi (2010) even divided the meaning of identity into two different aspects; social and cultural identity. Social identity is the relationship between the individual language learner and the larger social world. Meanwhile, cultural identity implies the relationship between the individual and members of a particular ethnic group. Cultural identity mostly shares a common history and language to its members. However, as the debate of the fixed meaning of identity goes on, it is acceptable that there are three key elements related to identity which are context, space, and time when it occurs. Hence, this theory is used to know the interrelation between the arranged marriage and identity that the *Samin's* community wants to be conveyed.

Javanese Culture

Javanese culture is the culture of the Javanese ethnic group in Indonesia, a part of the Indonesian culture. This theory elaborates the explanation of a Javanese's family condition in their habitual life. It values harmony and social order highly. Parents, especially, hold the higher level to be obeyed. They could not be denied. It will be assumed as *kualat* (get cursed) if the children disobey their parents' desire (Koentjaraningrat, 1990, pp. 140-142). Here, it can be stated that the children do not have the authority to overpower their parents.

In relation with power, Franz Magnis Suseno argued his idea in the book entitled *Javanese Ethnics and World-View: the Javanese Idea of the Good Life* that:

For the Javanese, power means more than the mere ability to impose one's will upon others. Because power is concrete, cosmic force, it never appears in the abstract.... In

the Javanese conception power is therefore not neutral, but “good”, not in the moral sense, but in that it has desirable consequences for the public. Real power proves itself through its exercise and through its effects. Indications of real power are that its effects are achieved without the use of force; that it flows from itself, without coercion and without visible strain (1997, p. 114).

From this statement, we can see how powerful the real power is. It is not limited to the individual, but it gives influence to the surroundings. It conveys the fact that power can be used to manipulate others, since it has “good” effect. Power can be achieved without using force, which means in relation between parents and children those who hold more power do not need to force other to obey what they want. The people who have power can control other. For those who do not have authority to overpower others, they will, without force do every command of those who hold the power.

Koentjaraningrat added that in the relation between husband and wife, a wife then has to show respect towards her husband (*ngajeni*) as the husband is always assumed to be older than his wife. The wife’s sphere of interest centres mainly on the household. The husband is the household head, but he mostly has to concern himself with external matters, such as fulfilling the family’s needs and usually takes little interest in the day-to-day household routine. He only gives his wife a certain amount of money at fixed periods, within which his wife has to run the household for the entire period. The husband is also the only one who can decide everything that his family needs to be done.

Crawford (1820, in Winzeler 1982) also added that the position of a wife in Javanese’s culture as the representation of Javanese women has significance contributions in the economy level. He remarked:

...women are not treated with contempt or disdain. They eat with the men, and associate with them in all respects on terms of equality, as surprised us in such a condition of society...women appear in

public without any scandal; they take an active concern in all the business of life; they are consulted by men on all public affairs, and are frequently raised to the throne, and that too when the monarchy is elective... At public festivals, women appear among the men; and those invested with authority sit in their councils when affairs of state are discussed, possessing, it is often alleged, even more than their due share in the deliberations... The Javanese women are industrious and laborious beyond all those of the archipelago, but their labour, instead of being imposed upon them by the men, becomes through its utility to the latter, a source of distinction (Winzeler, 1982, p. 178).

Here, we can see that in general the Javanese women contribute to the household economy by earning income from wages, trading, and agricultural activities. Some jobs, however, women cannot perform, including ploughing, carrying extremely heavy loads, and performing heavy manual labour, such as road work, carpentry, or bricklaying (Geertz, 1961). This pattern has remained relatively constant over time. Since many Javanese women are economically independent, the typical woman has no difficulty in supporting herself and her children as she wish to (Geertz, 1961).

Javanese women also have the right to own and control land. However, Hull (1982) added that being a housewife is considered a privilege in Java. Women who work are thought not to be able to care properly for their children. The husband’s status also increases if he is able to support the family alone. As a husband, he must have the ability to control not only the financial level, but also the family’s structure.

As this study focuses on the arranged marriage performed in *Samin* community, there are perceptions in the society that construct children to obey their parents as it is stated in Javanese’s culture theory. Certain physical attitudes and qualities of children which represent Javanese’s culture are used as the marker of the significance roles of parents in performing *Samin* arranged marriage.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is commonly defined as “any system of organizational (political, economic, industrial, financial, religious, or social) in which the overwhelming numbers of upper positions in hierarchies are occupied by males” (Goldberg, 1977, p. 25). It is a term to describe social systems in which male is the favoured gender, and in which men hold power, authority, and privilege (commonly called as male domination). It reinforced by societal and cultural norms, religious teachings, and the media. This system has been exist in our society for ages that most of the time we seem not to realize it because we see it as something natural and we have never questioned about it before.

In family relationship, the concept of patriarchy is seen as male dominance where man or husband has power over woman or wife. “Whereas patriarchy refers to hierarchical realities, male dominance refers to male-female encounters and relationships, to the “feeling” acknowledged by the emotions of both men and women that general authority in dyadic and familial relationships, in whatever terms a particular society defines authority, ultimately resides in the male” (p. 37).

Kamla Bhasin added that a man is considered as a head of a household. In the family, he controls the sexuality, work or production, reproduction, and the move of a woman. Family also has an important role to teach the next generation with the patriarchal values. In the family, we get the first lesson about hierarchy, subordination, and discrimination. Boys learn to force and rule, while girls learn to obey and to be treated unequally (1996, p. 11).

Patriarchy is still strongly dominating the society nowadays. The arranged marriage in *Samin's* community conveys the fact that this issue of patriarchy does exist in a Javanese's family, especially in the family relationship and how the arranged marriage rituals occur in their society.

Data Collection

The data in this research are taken from the interview with four different married couples who had performed *Samin's* arranged marriage rituals. The informants are *Samin's* arranged marriage couples who live in Desa Klopodhuwur and Desa Belimbing, Sambongrejo, Blora. They are differentiated into two groups; the parents and the children and categorized based on their marriage's durations and the ages. The interview is limited only on the involvement of the parents' roles in *Samin's* arranged marriage.

The interview, later, is analysed based on the background of *Samin's* arranged marriage, the pros and cons, the resistance of power, the negotiation, and how *Samin* people value their arranged marriage as their tradition. After the interview had been done, the matrix was made to list specific language used by the parents that show how they exercise power to their children. Summarizing the reliable data and making the conclusion were the last processes on doing this research.

Findings and Analysis

The marriage practice in *Samin* community, especially in Klopodhuwur, Blora, differs from the common Javanese tradition. Marriages is done only between the *Samin* members based on *adat* (customary law) exists there. It is acceptable when people who come from outside the community want to marry the *Samin* people only if those people become *Samin* and obey the law.

Samin Arranged Marriage Rituals

Before doing the arranged married rituals, those who are categorized as *Samin* people should obey what so called as the *sikep's* principles, the philosophy of life for *Samin* people. The *sikep's* principles mainly discuss about the processes how to be a better future husband or wife before, later on, performing the real marriage. Listed below are the *sikep's* principles:

Demen

Demen conveys the same connotation as to like something, whereas the action of “like” itself does not always have connection with dealing a feeling of *demen*. People can like something even if they are only looking at the appearance of a thing. Meanwhile, *demen* can be described as dealing with feelings of love. In connection to *Samin* arranged marriage, this first *sikep* principle teaches people not only to see their future husband and wife from appearances. They need to love and accept them just the way they are.

Becik

Becik, in this philosophy of *Samin* way of life, means that human beings should treat others kindly. Later on, as marriage couples, by doing *becik*, both husband and wife can complement each other. *Becik* is used as a vehicle to live the life of married couples so that they would not do things that disobey the common rules in society.

Rukun

Rukun for *Samin*’s community is used as a source of living. *Rukun* means unity in diversity. It is used by *Samin* community to maintain togetherness. When human beings want to have peaceful life with others, especially with their own future husband or wife, it needs to be noted that *rukun* is a must to have a good relation in a living. In short, it can be said that a married life would not be last long if there is no *rukun*.

Seger

Seger conveys the meaning of satisfaction. In the married life, *seger* is needed as the expression of fulfilment. This principle can be perceived if only all the efforts are done by the human beings themselves. No matter what kind of condition might be faced, as long as human beings live in the right path, *seger* is easy to be achieved.

Waras

Waras means to avoid doing bad things to others. It has a close connection with being healthy in minds and attitude towards others. It is described as a good manner for human beings so that there is no fight between each other. It is used for *Samin* community to make peace with others.

Avoiding *Jrengki*, *Srei*, *Panesten*, *Dahpen*, and *Kemeran*

Jrengki means to be rude to others. *Jrengki* has the same connotation as doing bad things to other. *Srei* means greedy. People who have *srei* to others commonly have desire to hurt his or her surroundings. *Panesten* conveys the meaning as having desire to make others easily get angry. *Panesten* is the characteristic that ruins a peaceful life. Those who are *panesten* tend to be left behind by others. *Dahpen* is described as a person who likes to be in other’s business. *Dahpen* has the close connection with taking care about other’s business even without being asked. *Kemeran* is perceived as being jealous with others. To avoid *jrengki*, *srei*, *panesten*, *dahpen*, and *kemeran* is needed to have a happily ever after married life.

To do the *sikep*’s principles as mentioned above is a must for the *Samin* arranged married. *Samin* people believe that marriage is as sacred as it is a way to achieve good descendants and that is why parents are the one who hold the power of their children. The arranged marriage rituals itself started at the first time when the baby was born. *Weton* (Javanese Calendar) is the main source of prediction to find the right partner of each person. For *Samin* community, to decide the same *weton* for *Samin* arranged married rituals is the first process to do. The perfect couples, according to *Samin*, are those who have 22, 26, or 27 as the total of their *weton*. It is the responsibility of parents to decide and count the *weton* of their children.

The next process of arranged marriage rituals is for the groom’s parents to come to the bride’s family. This process is called as *nyuwuk*, asking the bride’s marital status and

for marriage officially. However, in *nyuwuk*, the bride has a right to accept or to refuse the marriage proposal. This shows that in *Samin* arranged marriage ritual, a woman has freedom to choose her husband without any enforcement from others. When the groom has grown up, he has responsibility to come and propose his bride. *Samin* people believe that marriage has to be based on love and that is why it is also a must for asking the bride's permission. This differs from the Javanese *adat* which has many ceremonies and spends high costs. In *nyuwuk*, there is no *asok tukon* or *mas kawin* (bride's price). *Samin* people believe that *asok tukon* seems to be buying a woman. In fact, they are considered themselves as *podo manungsane* (having the same status as human beings).

The last process of *Samin* arranged marriage rituals is *diseksekno* (witness ceremony). Based on *adat*, the task of the bride's mother is to organize this ceremony (to make them *rukun*). Meanwhile, the task of the bride's father is to give agreement for their relationship. In *diseksekno*, *Samin* people do not involve the government. This is because government authority is not seen as superior to parents' authority. That is why the marriage is considered "legal" even though it is overseen only by parents. The *Samin sesepuh* (the *Samin* elders) need to attend the ceremony as representative of *Samin* community.

This ritual differs from ordinary Javanese custom in which marriages are performed by *naib* (a local Islam religious representative) or *pastur* (a local Christian religious representative). In *diseksekno*, the groom has to say *sadat* (*Samin* profession of faith). The *sadat* contains the statement that the groom acknowledges the bride as *batur urip* (a friend for life) and promises to stay together forever and *nukulke wiji sejati* (bear children). This promise implies the meaning that *Samin* people believe marriage as a sacred ritual and it is only performed once. This ritual differs from ordinary marriage ritual when divorce is categorized as legal for married couples.

The identity wants to be conveyed

Even if today's society often categorizes this arranged marriage rituals as an old culture, by performing this marriage rituals, it can maintain the community's existence from extinction. *Samin* people believe that if they perform marriage ritual same as the ordinary ones, as time goes by, their off springs might have forgotten about their existence. By doing arranged marriage ritual, it is also one of the ways for *Samin* community to preserve their cultures. Therefore, from generation to generation they keep doing arranged marriage to their children.

Besides, *Samin* arranged marriage rituals are performed without government involvement. They refuse *kawin cara negara* (marriage by government rules). In the *Samin* Klopoduuwur community today which can be considered as more modern than the old *Samin* community, after their marriage ceremony, the couples report their marriage to the government to get a marriage certificate. In the past, *Samin* people did not report their marriages. As the consequence, their off springs did not have birth certificates or identity cards. They argued if they registered their marriage, the government would record them as the followers or local citizens.

Conclusion

People commonly think that arranged marriage is an old fashion or even called as an old tradition for our society nowadays. People may think that the most important reason for marrying others is because of the unbreakable feelings of love between them. Meanwhile, in the arranged marriage usually they know nothing about their future partner even they don't have any feeling to each other yet before the marriage ceremony happens. It conveys the interpretation that arranged marriage will not achieve any good benefits.

On the other hand, from the data observed in this study show that an arrange marriage can also has positive influences a community. *Samin* arrange marriage rituals, for example, convey the meanings that marriage can be used as the symbol bearer of

community's existence towards today's society. They do arranged marriage to protect their community from extinction. Even the marriage is performed based on the parent's arrangement for their children, *Samin* people believe that marriage has to be based on love. That is also the reason why *Samin* arranged marriage rituals are held even at the first time the baby was born. The most important figures in *Samin* arranged married are parents. They do not involve the government, *naib* or even *pastur* to legalize the marriage since *Samin* people believe that they are human beings who are not superior to parents. Moreover this article can also suggest future researcher(s) to develop it.

References

- Benda, Harry & Lance Castles. (1969). "The Samin Movement". *Bijdragen tot de Taal-Land- en Volkenkunde*: 207-216, 218-240. JSTOR 27861031.
- Broude, G. J. & Greene, S. J. (1983). Cross-cultural codes on husband-wife relationships. *Ethnology*, 22(3), pp. 263-280.
- Dennis, Rutledge M. (2005). "Marginality, Power, and Social Structure: Issues in Race, Class, and Gender". *Research in Race and Ethnic Relations*, Vol 12, USA: Elsevier Ltd.
- Edwards, J. (2009). *Language and Identity: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Epstein, A. L. (1978). *Ethos and Identity*. London: Tavistock.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Faizal, Elly Burhaini. (2014). "Practicing Benevolence, Samin Tribe Endures Scorn". The Jakarta Post.
- Ghimire, D. J., Axinn, W. G., Yabiku, S. T., & Thornton, A. (2006). "Social Change, Premarital Nonfamily Experience, and Spouse Choice in an Arranged Marriage Society". *American Journal of Sociology*, 4(111), 1181 - 1218.
- Goldstein-Gidoni, Ofra. (2000). "The Production of Tradition and Culture in the Japanese Wedding Enterprise". *ETHNOS*. 65(1). Taylor and Francis, Ltd. 33 - 55. ISSN 0014-1844.