



## ***Women's Power in the Tradition of Menglolo Utang in Pakpak Ethnic Pre-Marriage Ceremony in Dairi, North Sumatra***

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### **Abstract**

*The tradition of Menglolo Utang is a tradition practiced by Pakpak ethnic group before the marriage ceremony. This study aims to examine: (1) The background of the tradition of Menglolo Utang, (2) The process of implementing the tradition of Menglolo Utang in the Pakpak ethnic group and (3) The power of women (the bride's biological mother) in the tradition of Menglolo Utang. This type of research is descriptive qualitative with ethnographic approach. The theory used in this study is the theory of power relations from Foucault. The results of this study found that: (1) The background to the practice of Menglolo Utang in the Pakpak ethnicity was that married girls would be brought to the men's house. Therefore, it is the mother who has power over her daughter, (2) The process of carrying out the tradition of Menglolo Utang to the Pakpak ethnic group is the men visiting the house of the woman and discussing the number of gold (Sipihir-pihir) to the mother of the bride, (3) The bride's biological mother in the tradition of Menglolo Utang has the power to determine the number of Sipihir-pihir and decide whether her daughter can be proposed or not.*

**Keywords:** *Pakpak ethnic marriage, Menglolo Utang tradition, Sipihir-pihir*

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## INTRODUCTION

Every culture has practices that are carried out in its society. Cultural practices that develop in society are called traditions. According to Esten (1993) that tradition shows how members of society behave both in worldly life and in matters that are supernatural or religious. Traditions regulate how humans relate to other humans, how humans act on their environment and how it applies to other natures. Forms of tradition carried out by various ethnic groups include marriage, traditional parties, births, deaths, harvest ceremonies and so on. Each ethnic group does it in a certain way and becomes a particular characteristic of each ethnic group. Some traditions are still maintained by the society and have not changed at all, while on the other hand, some have experienced changes and some have even been eroded by time.

The Pakpak is an ethnic that follows the patrilineal kinship system (based on male lineage). In general, ethnicity which adheres to the patrilineal system usually puts women as subordinates in various aspects of their lives, both in traditional events and family events and in social life. Likewise in the case of decision making, women tend to give up decision making rights to men. This illustrates that the man has the

dominant role of women. According to Maibang (2003) in various traditional events Pakpak who is always a speaker or leader is a man. However, it is different in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, the role of women becomes important and powerful. The tradition of *Menglolo Utang* is carried out by the Pakpak people before the marriage ceremony. This tradition is a tradition that determines dowry for brides. Literally *Menglolo Utang* comes from the Pakpak language, which means to calculate debt. In the Pakpak custom, the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* in pre-marriage is to calculate the debt or dowry that must be paid by men to women. In this tradition the debt that must be paid by the man to the woman is not only a dowry to propose the bride but also in this tradition the man must first determine and discuss the dowry that must be given first to the mother of the bride female (future mother-in-law of the groom).

Maibang (2003: 14) says that in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, the role of women (the bride's biological mother) is very important. This tradition makes women deciding whether the event can be continued or not. The woman who plays a role in this tradition is the mother of the bride. Therefore, the man must first give gold (*Sipihir-pihir*) to the bride's mother in order to be able to continue

talking about the bride's dowry. The involvement of women (the bride's biological mother) in this tradition is an interesting thing to study, because the Pakpak ethnic is an ethnic that follows the patrilineal system. Whereas in the patrilineal system, women are rarely involved as the main actors in customary events, which are very contradictory in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* that was carried out by the Pakpak ethnic group before the marriage ceremony. This tradition provides opportunities for women to play an important role and have power or authority in traditional Pakpak events.

This research uses the theory of power relations by Michele Foucault. According to Foucault, power relation is the power possessed by an individual or group in a planning process in which there is an interrelated relationship to reach a decision in accordance with the expected planning (Rouso, 2005: 10). In this research the power relation is something that exists and is owned by women in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* which is held before the Pakpak ethnic wedding ceremony.

Power is the ability to be able to determine, regulate, and also the ability of people or groups to influence other people or groups based on authority of a person.

Foucault further stated that power actually exists everywhere can arise from relations between various forces and does not depend on human consciousness. Real power is an ongoing strategy in which there is a system, rules, arrangements and regulations. It is power that determines the arrangement, rules, traditions, customs and relationships from within and allows everything to happen (Rouso, 2005: 11). In connection with the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* that is owned by the mother of the bride who is given by the Pakpak ethnic group in a pre-marital ceremony, it gives authority to the mother to have a strategy as a determinant in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*. Foucault states that power relations that are always closely related to knowledge are always in contact with discourse too. Thus knowledge, discourse and power are always in a relational relationship (Rouso, 2005: 11). Traditions carried out by every ethnic group certainly has agents who play roles in it. In the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, it is seen how someone plays a role in the scenario, where in every tradition both women and men have their respective roles. Just as in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, women have the power to determine whether marriage can continue or not. In this tradition the important role is the mother of the bride. The family of

the groom must first provide *Sipihir-pihir* (gold) and *Ulis Inang Ni Berru*. If this has been well discussed and agreed between the two parties then the marriage ceremony can proceed.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research method used is qualitative research method with an ethnographic approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2009) explain that qualitative research is research that uses a natural setting, with the intention of interpreting phenomena that occur and is carried out by involving in-depth interview techniques and participatory observation. Therefore, in order to understand and describe the Pakpak culture or ethnic traditions logically, systematically and empirically, researchers used an ethnographic approach. Researchers go directly to the field to conduct in-depth observations of the tradition of managing debt and follow each of these traditional activities in order to obtain accurate results in accordance with the formulation of the research problem.

This research was conducted in Desa Sitinjo I, Kecamatan Sitinjo, Kabupaten Dairi. This location was chosen because this village is part of the Dairi area which is one of the ethnic Pakpak settlements.

The Pakpak ethnics living in Desa Sitinjo I still maintain the traditions and customs of the Pakpak community, especially the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*. Meanwhile, the research informants are those who know best about the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, namely traditional figures, respected elders, women who have received *Sipihir-pihir* through the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, Pakpak people who have done *Menglolo Utang* tradition in Desa Sitinjo I. The data collection techniques used by the authors in this study include participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Data analysis techniques are to do: (1) Data Reduction, (2) Data Presentation, and (3) Drawing Conclusions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The background of given *Sipihir-pihir* the mother of the bride is because in the past the story was that if every mother married off their daughter, they would fall ill. Previously, there was no such thing as *Sipihir-pihir* had been given to mothers of brides. However, because most mothers who married their daughters became ill after being left by their daughters, the ancestors then asked every mother who had married their daughters, apparently, they fell ill because of longing and felt lost after her daughter was taken to her

husband's house and did not live with her anymore. This is the background of Pakpak's ethnic ancestors giving medicine (*Upah Ni Tendi*) in the form of *Sipihir-pihir* to a mother who will marry her daughter so that the given *Sipihir-pihir* can treat her longing for her daughter who has been brought to her husband's house later.

The daughters of the Pakpak ethnic group are usually tasked with assisting their mothers in doing housework and caring for their mothers when they become ill. It is the daughter who usually lights the fire when her mother is cold at home, because the girl is used to accompany her mother at home and helps her mother do housework. Thus, when the girl is about to get married then the mother's feeling will be very sad and feel lonely at home. Therefore, it is given *Sipihir-pihir* in the form of gold to be wear by the mother of the bride so that wherever the daughter goes the gold the mother wear is a substitute for her daughter who can no longer accompany her every time before she marries and is taken to the house of the man or her husband.

*Sipihir-pihir* given by the men to the mother of bride are not as payment for her mother's struggle to raise her daughter all of her time, but rather are give as a longing bidder to her mother. When her

daughter is married, she will no longer be able to help her mother do homework and accompany her mother to talk at home. The mother of the bride will feel lonely when her daughter is married, therefore to treat the loneliness, it is given of *Sipihir-pihir* in the form of gold. Based on the results of interviews with the informant, the given gold is considered to have magical powers that could be the *Penjaga Ni Tendi Inang Ni Berru*. Not the amount of *Sipihir-pihir* expected at this event, other than, the way the men asked permission from the mother of the bride to marry her daughter, so that the mother of the bride does not feel lost when her daughter has been brought to the man's house.

The Process of implementing the *Menglolo Utang* tradition, first the mother of the bride is given food that has been prepared in advance by the man specially for the mother of the bride. The food that has been prepared by the man must first be delivered to the mother of the bride. If the prepared food has been given specially for the mother of the bride, then a large family of men and women who gather at the *Menglolo Utang* tradition can eat together. Then after finishing eating together, there is a later discussion about how many *Sipihir-pihir* will be given to the mother of the bride. At this event the mother of the bride has the right to

determine how much of the *Sipihir-pihir* should be given to her. *Sipihir-pihir* that will be given by the groom is entirely to the mother of the bride only and cannot be shared with father or other family members of the women. An agreement on the amount of *Sipihir-pihir* to be given to the mother of the bride and groom will be valid if the bride's mother and groom have mutually agreed with the amount that has been determined and discussed. After finishing discussing the number of *Sipihir-pihir*, *Ulis Inang Ni Berru* was given a run-in order to achieve *Mengemgem Tendina*. The event can be continued if all matters with the mother of the bride have been finished. After completing the event for the mother of the bride, the next event is to discuss how many dowry (*Sinamot*) for the bride.

Berutu (2006) states that when the *Menglolo Utang* tradition is about to be held, the family of the groom who comes to the house of the bride parents must bring *Luah* and *Oles* to be given to the mother of the bride and also the *Sipihir-pihir*. The first activity to do in the *Menglolo Utang* tradition is to eat together and give *Luah* to the mother of the bride. After finishing eating together, *Persinabul* from the groom's side ask the mother of the bride how many *Sipihir-pihir* is asked for her desire. When the discussion on amount of

*Sipihir-pihir* has been agreed upon, the parents of the groom give *Oles Inang Ni Berru* to the mother of the bride.

Women's power in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* is the key to giving permission for their daughter to be proposed or not. The process of *Menglolo Utang* is also a tradition that illustrates how women get special treatment and can express their opinions in customary events and have the power to make decisions in the event. The Pakpak ethnic is an ethnic that follows the patrilineal system. In this system, women are generally always secondary and rarely get the opportunity to express good opinions in the family especially in customary events. Unlike the case in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang*, women in the Pakpak ethnic group were given the opportunity to be able to give opinions and have the power to make decisions in the event. This tradition places women in important and decisive positions especially in the patrilineal system which always subordinates the role of women. Through this tradition Pakpak women can make decisions and get a special place in this traditional event. Because in this *Menglolo Utang* tradition women (mothers of the bride) must be given food first and given *Upah Ni Tendi* in the form of *Sipihir-pihir* in order to be able

to let their daughters to be brought to her husband's house later.

The tradition of *Menglolo Utang* to the Pakpak ethnic group depicts women who play an important and powerful role in making decisions in customary events. The power of women depicted in this tradition is consistent with the theory conveyed by Foucault which explains the actors who play in accordance with what has been determined by culture. The very important role of women in the tradition of managing debt illustrates that women (mothers of the bride) play a role in accordance with what has been determined by culture. The tradition of *Menglolo Utang* has been established by ancestors affirmed that women play an important and powerful role in this tradition. Because it is considered that when a mother will marry her daughter who usually accompanies her to do all the housework will go to follow her husband. In order not to become ill, the mother of the bride is then given *Sipihir-pihir* in the form of gold as a longing bidder for the mother of the bride. The gold given will be worn by the mother of the bride so that wherever she goes she will remember her daughter.

## CONCLUSION

The background of given *Sipihir-pihir* to the mother of the bride through the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* is the Pakpak ethnic belief that the daughter is considered her mother's companion at home while the son will go abroad. It is the daughter who takes care and accompanies her mother until finally she is married to the man who will become her husband. When a girl is married to a man before this tradition, the Pakpak ethnic group has a belief that the mother will become ill because there is no longer accompanying and helping the mother because her daughter is brought to her husband's house. Because of that, the emergence of the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* was agreed upon to give *Sipihir-pihir* as *Upah Ni Tendi* to the mother who would marry her daughter. *Sipihir-pihir* must be given before the marriage ceremony takes place. This is done so that a mother can let her daughter to her husband's house later. This tradition also places women in an important position in customary tradition because women must express their opinions and determine and have power in deciding whether their daughter's marriage can proceed or not.

The process of implementing the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* is the groom's side to visit the women's house and

discuss the number of *Sipihir-pihir* to the mother of the bride. The groom's side must also first provide food services to the mother of the bride and give her *Ulis Inang Ni Berru* to warm the body of the bride because the daughter will be brought to her husband's house. Because, in later days, there will be no one who lit a fire to warm her mother's body.

The power of the woman (the bride's biological mother) in the tradition of managing debt is a determinant of whether her daughter can be proposed or not, because the man must first ask permission and blessing from the mother of the bride. If the mother of the bride has given permission and blessing, the family of the man must give *Sipihir-Pihir* as wages to the mother of the bride. If the *Sipihir-Pihir* has not been agreed upon by the mother then the program for the wedding ceremony cannot be proceeded.

A daughter in the Pakpak ethnic group is considered as a child who always helps her mother at home before marriage. A daughter is considered as someone who can cheer up her mother. Therefore, when the daughter is about to get married, the man must give *Sipihir-pihir* to the mother of the bride as "medicine", because her daughter will be taken by the man to her house.

The *Sipihir-pihir* in the tradition of *Menglolo Utang* are given as a *Penjaga Ni Tendi* or a longing bidder to the mother of the bride, because when her daughter is married there will no longer be anyone who will help and accompany the mother at home. Thus, that the mother will not be sad and become ill, *Sipihir-pihir* and the *Ulis Inang Ni Berru* are given.

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