

Adaptation of Indian and Malay Culture In Muslim Indian Community In Medan City

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Abstract

This research seeks to portray an outline of the description of Indian and Malay cultural adaptation carried out by Muslim Indians in Medan City. The purpose of this research is to see how the process of the Muslim Indian ethnic community makes cultural adaptations in order to maintain their cultural identity and integrate with the local culture (Malay) in Medan city. This research is a social and cultural history research, using library research method and anthropological approach. The results of this study indicate that since the beginning of his arrival to the city of Medan ethnic Indian Muslims received a warm welcome and the adaptation process went well, this is because the ethnic Indian Muslims who came to the city of Medan tried to blend in quickly and did not accentuate their identity (as Indians) thickly even they were able to assimilate into anything and anyone many who assimilated into Malay, Bugis, Javanese and others it was done through the marriage process. The patterns of life of the local community are successfully followed so that there is a very close bond of brotherhood and ethnic Indian Muslims do not look like foreign immigrants in Medan city. In addition, through the Tepung Tawar tradition which is one of the traditions of Indian origin which can then be accepted by the Malay community in Medan city and even become one of the traditions that have been attached to the Malay community, the steps taken by ethnic Indian Muslims at that time by eliminating Hindu elements and embedding Islamic values in it, so that the cultural adaptation process carried out by ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan city is considered successful.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation, Indian Muslim, Malay

Adaptasi Budaya India dan Melayu dalam Komunitas Etnis India Muslim di Kota Medan

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berupaya memotret secara garis besar tentang gambaran adaptasi budaya India dan Melayu yang dilakukan oleh etnis India Muslim di Kota Medan. Adapun tujuan penelitian ini dilakukan untuk melihat bagaimana proses komunitas etnis India Muslim melakukan adaptasi budaya demi mempertahankan identitas budaya mereka dan berintegrasi dengan budaya lokal (Melayu) di kota Medan. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian sejarah sosial dan budaya, dengan menggunakan metode kepustakaan (library research) dan pendekatan antropologi. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sejak awal kedatangannya ke kota Medan etnis India Muslim mendapat sambutan hangat dan proses adaptasi berlangsung dengan baik, hal ini disebabkan etnis India Muslim yang datang ke kota Medan berupaya untuk cepat berbaur dan tidak menonjolkan identitas mereka (sebagai orang India) secara kental bahkan mereka mampu berasimilasi menjadi apapun dan siapapun banyak yang berasimilasi menjadi orang Melayu, Bugis, Jawa dan lainnya hal tersebut dilakukan melalui proses pernikahan. Pola-pola kehidupan masyarakat setempat sukses diikuti sehingga terjalinlah ikatan tali persaudaraan yang begitu erat dan etnis India Muslim tidak terlihat seperti imigran asing di kota Medan. Selain itu melalui tradisi Tepung Tawar yang merupakan salah satu tradisi asal India yang kemudian bisa diterima oleh

masyarakat Melayu di kota Medan bahkan menjadi salah satu tradisi yang telah melekat dengan masyarakat Melayu, langkah yang diambil oleh etnis India Muslim kala itu dengan cara menghilangkan unsur Hindu dan menyematkan nilai-nilai Islam di dalamnya, sehingga proses adaptasi budaya yang dilakukan oleh etnis India Muslim di kota Medan dianggap berhasil.

Kata Kunci: *Adaptasi Budaya, India Muslim, Melayu*

Introduction

Medan City is a metropolitan and multicultural city located in the province of North Sumatra, the diversity of ethnicity, religion, and culture as well as its success in creating a romantic nuance with European roots made Medan dubbed as Parijs van Sumatra in the Dutch colonial era (Hasibuan et al. 2023).

The development of Medan as one of the major cities and a center of economic progress in the colonial era was the attraction of this city, making it a destination for immigrants who wanted to improve their lives. Likewise, these immigrants then influenced several aspects of life in Medan city including economic, social and cultural matters, such as immigrants from South India, namely the Muslim Indian ethnic community. From the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, the Muslim Indian (Tamil Nadu) came to Medan city, they came to work as labourers and some of them worked in the administration of the Dutch colonial-owned Deli plantation (Luckman Sinar 2008).

The presence of Muslim Indians in the city of Medan and settled until now with a large number is an important part of the development of socio-culture in the city of Medan, in its journey with a long process of Muslim Indian not only maintain their culture of origin, but introduce their culture by adapting to local culture, especially Malay community in Medan city was mostly the result of the adoption of Indian culture which adheres to Hinduism, this can be seen from various aspects such as customs, religious ceremonies and others so that there are still many cultural gaps owned by the Malay community in Medan city, especially with the teachings of Islam.

However, after ethnic Indian Muslims came and settled in Medan city, the process of cultural adaptation occurred, this was done to maintain their Indian cultural identity while still following Islamic law. The adaptation process that occurs reflects the dynamics of interaction between Indian and Malay cultures in the context of a minority community living in a multiethnic society, so this is interesting to study.

This research aims to see how the process of the Muslim Indian ethnic community performs cultural adaptation in order to maintain their cultural identity and integrate with local culture in daily life, then the formulation of the problem in this study will examine, namely: 1) How is the social culture of the Malay community in Medan city, 2) How are the social characteristics of Muslim Indian ethnic in Medan city, and 3) How is the adaptation process of the Muslim Indian ethnic community in maintaining the balance between maintaining their cultural identity and integrating with the Malay culture.

Research related to the Muslim Indian community in Medan city has been conducted by many previous researchers related to Muslim Indians in Medan city that focuses on the process of cultural adaptation carried out by the Muslim Indian community has never been done. The studies that have examined this theme include: First, a thesis entitled "Social Interaction of Indian Muslim Community in the Development of Islam in Medan City" written by Reza Rezky in 2021. Second, an article entitled "An Initial Study of the Tamil and Punjabi Communities in Medan: Adaptation and Social Networks" written by Zulkifli B. Lubis in 2005. In addition to research in the form of these

and articles, there is also a book that examines "The Indians in North Sumatra" written by Tengku Luckman Sinar in 2008.

Based on some of the literature review, the difference between this research and previous research is in the focus of the study. This research reveals the cultural adaptation process carried out by ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan city in order to maintain their cultural identity and integrate with local culture.

In addition, this research uses the theory of cultural adaptation by Gudykunst and Kim. Both explain that intercultural adaptation occurs because of the similarity between the form of communication owned by the local community and the form of communication of migrants, and vice versa. This, intercultural adaptation also occurs because of the suitability of the form of communication that is the driving factor.

This research is a social and cultural history research, using the library research. The study in this research is an attempt to portray an outline of the description of the adaptation of Indian and Malay cultures carried out by ethnic Indian and Malay cultures carried out by ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan City. The approach used in this research is to use an anthropological approach.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Culture of the Malay Community in Medan City

Today Medan is known as the region of people who have clans (Batak tribe), but initially the Malays were the original tribe in Medan city. Medan city is a destination city because it used to have a large port and infrastructure development that was good enough to attract migrants from various regions and even abroad, this caused the Malays in Medan city to be increasingly marginalised because they were dominated by other tribes, namely Batak. The Malay community in Medan city is known as Deli Malay. The presence of migrants greatly affects the socio-culture of the Malay

community in Medan city (Laudra et al. 2021).

The social condition of the Malay community in Medan city is inseparable from the influence of the opening of the Deli plantation during colonialism. In 1862, after Sultan Mahmud PerKondisi sosial masyarakat Melayu di kota Medan tidak terlepas dari pengaruh dibukanya perkebunan Deli pada masa kolonialisme. Pada tahun 1862, yakni pasca Sultan Mahmud Perkasa Alam realised the idea of large foreign investment in plantations, since then plantations in East Sumatra, especially in Deli, began to build their foundations. Jacob Niyeus, was the first person to open a Deli plantation and later developed rapidly to become a plantation company known as *Deli Maatschappij* or Maskapai Deli (Nababan 2019).

Plantations in Deli experienced high inflation along with the increasing European market demand for plantation products, especially those from Deli plantations which were so popular in the world market. Welcoming the promising European market demand so that the expansion of the plantation area was carried out by the plantation rulers, besides that the workers (plantation labourers) were also brought in from various regions outside East Sumatra. This was done by the plantation rulers to meet market demand. The arrival of labourers from outside East Sumatra then affected the social conditions of the Deli Malay community as the indigenous population, the plantation rulers brought in labourers from outside the region because the Deli Malay community itself was not interested in working as labourers in their homeland. In addition, in the eyes of the plantation rulers, the Deli Malay community has a stubborn nature and is lazy to work so they are considered unsuitable to become workers on the plantation (Luckman Sinar 2002).

Luckman Sinar explained that before the city of Medan was conquered by the colonials, Deli Malay had reached its golden

peak as evidenced by the existence of various forms of historical relics scattered in the city of Medan and its surroundings. Among them are Maimun Palace, which is the Palace of the Sultan of Deli and is still maintained and famous in the city of Medan to this day. The palace is a relic of the Deli sultanate during the leadership of Sultan Makmun al-Rasyid Perkasa Alamsyah (1973), and once functioned as a residence for the sultans who were in office at that time. There is also a mosque that has become a religious icon of Medan city as well as evidence of the Malay heritage in Medan city, namely Masjid Raya al-Mahsun. The mosque is one of the historical witnesses that the Deli Malay community once ruled the city of Medan and its surroundings until it had a civilisation that was respected by other kingdoms in the archipelago (Luckman Sinar 2002).

The Malay community in Medan city generally adheres to Islam, but some of them have other religions. The social relations of the Malay community in Medan city have always been closely intertwined, the sense of kinship and helping each other is so strong, the kinship relationship makes Medan city happy to be visited by foreigners and causes familiarity with the local community (Deli Malay). The sense of kinship of the Deli Malay is still close, for example in terms of gotong royong in various events such as weddings, circumcisions, weddings and others because this gotong royong is one of the aspects contained in the social-community field.

Social Characteristics of Ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan City

1. Settlements

Medan City has emerged as a multi-ethnic area, where various foreign nations (Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Europeans and others) are able to live in harmony and peace without inter-ethnic conflict, making Medan one of the destination cities for foreign immigrants who are improving their lives

and economies. In the colonial era, the settlement of city dwellers was regulated by the Dutch, they made a categorisation of settlements for city dwellers that were adjusted based on ethnicity/nation so that residents settled according to their national origin. The legacy of this categorisation can still be found today, namely in Kampung Keling with another name Kampung Madras is an area devoted to Muslim Indian (Tamil) ethnic settlements in Medan city. Kampung Keling is the oldest Muslim Indian settlement in Medan city, located on Jl. Zainul Arifin right on the banks of the Babura River, which was the main transport route in the past. In addition, this area is the location of historical sites of the presence of Muslim Indians in Medan city, one of which is a mosque built in 1887 (Fachruddin 2005).

No	Nama Lokasi	Tempat Ibadah
1	Jl. Teuku Cik Ditiro	Taj-Ul Madras Mosque
2	Grave Village	South Indian Moslem
3	Grave Village	Ghaudiyah Mosque

Table 1: Concentration of Muslim Ethnic Indian Settlements in Medan City (Source: Zulkifli B. Lubis, Head of Anthropology Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, USU 2009)

2. Livelihood

Since the expansion of Deli plantations, especially the Tobacco commodity, Medan has turned into an area that is often visited by foreign immigrants from various countries. In fact, since it was inaugurated as the capital of the East Sumatra Prefecture in 1889, Medan has become the most developed area on the East Coast of Sumatra. In the colonial era, Muslim Indians were often given menial jobs, such as plantation

coolies, road builders, ox cart pullers and other jobs that relied more on muscles. This was due to the background of the Muslim Indians who came to Medan city, namely those who came from the lower class in India and had a low level of education. So they were employed by the Dutch colonials as coolies on European-owned plantation (Maler 2018).

However, at present, many Muslim Indians have risen and are doing their work such as textile and spice traders in several markets in Medan city, as well as food traders known as martabak keling, not a few of them have built businesses at regional to national levels (Harahap 2014).

3. Religious Organisations

In the land of Deli, ethnic Indians are not all Hindus, most ethnic Indians in Medan city follow Islam. Even houses of worship that are hundreds of years old do not only belong to Hindus, but Muslims also have houses of worship including the Ghaudiyah and Ubudiyah Mosques located in the Kampung Keling area. Since 1887 ethnic Indian Muslims have had a social institution, the *South Indian Moslem Foundation and Welfare Committee*. Ethnic Indian Muslims also received grants in the form of two plots of land from the Sultan of Deli, for the location of building mosques and cemeteries for Indian Muslims. There are two mosques built by the social institution, which are located on Jln. Kejaksaan Kebun Bunga and on Jln. Zainul Arifin while the location of the cemetery is located next to the Ghaudiyah Mosque on Jln. Zainul Arifin (Lubis, n.d.).

Ghaudiyah Mosque with an area of 1000 metres was built on waqf land with an area of about 4000 metres in the location of Kebun Bunga, part of the waqf land was allocated for the construction of 13 shophouses that will be rented out then the rent is empowered for the prosperity of the mosque and ethnic Indian Muslims with a weak economy. Until now the mosque is managed by the foundation of ethnic Indian

Muslim descendants chaired by Mr Abu Bakar Siddiq and Kamaluddin, every year they hold a religious holiday celebration attended by ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan and surrounding areas. The moment is used as a connection for fellow ethnic Indian Muslims, but the celebration has rarely been found in recent years.

Cultural Adaptation Process of Muslim Ethnic Indian Community in Medan City

Medan city became the main entrance gate and stopover place for foreign ships that were travelling on trade to other countries including ships from India, so it is not surprising that at that time the influence of other religious teachings before the entry of Islam had penetrated into the culture of the Malay community in Medan city. Snouck C. Hurgronje revealed that Islam accepted by the Malay community in North Sumatra, especially the city of Medan, had previously experienced the influence of Hinduism so that ethnic Indian Muslims were very easy to adjust in the area (Halimi 2008).

Long before Islam was present, the culture of the Malay community in Medan city followed the local culture and Hinduism so that the Malay community at that time still believed in myths and other magic things. The Malay community in general is famous for its beautiful poems, they are able to create various poems that are usually used to accompany daily activities. Similarly, the Malay community in the pre-Islamic city of Medan has traditional poems containing mantras in the form of worship of the surrounding nature and living things such as forests, seas, rivers, mountains and animals because they are believed to add their own strength to the people who worship them. These poems are one of the cultures brought by Indians (Hindus) who were earlier present in Medan city, then the Malay community adopted the culture so that when Islam entered the lives of the Malay community in Medan city, many changes in

traditions occurred, such as in terms of culture, and religious traditions.

Since the beginning of their arrival to Medan city, Muslim Indians have received a warm welcome and the adaptation process has been going well, and there has never been a known dispute between Muslim Indians (foreign immigrants) and the local community. This happened because the ethnic Indian Muslims who came to Medan city endeavoured to blend in quickly and did not accentuate their identity (as Indians) strongly even they were able to assimilate into anything and anyone, so that ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan city are known to blend in easily and many are assimilated into Malay, Bugis, Javanese and others this is done through the marriage process. The patterns of life of the local community are successfully followed so that there is a very close bond of brotherhood and ethnic Indian Muslims do not look like foreign immigrants in Medan city. This is evidenced by the granting of two plots of land by the Sultan of Deli to be used as a location for the construction of a mosque and a special cemetery for ethnic Indian Muslims in Medan city (Luckman Sinar 2008).

The adaptation process carried out by Muslim Indians in Medan city is considered to have succeeded in attracting the hearts of the local community. In addition to being granted two plots of land by the sultan of Deli, they were also able to introduce one of the traditions of Indian origin which was then accepted by the Malay community in Medan city, a step taken by Muslim Indians at that time by eliminating Hindu elements and embedding Islamic values in it. The tradition by the Malay community in Medan city is known as the *Tepung Tawar* tradition. It has been described previously, that the culture of the Malay community in Medan city has been heavily influenced by Indian culture, one of which is the *Tepung Tawar* tradition. *Tepung Tawar* that developed in the Malay community in Medan City is one of a series of traditions in the wedding ceremony that is preserved and developed

until now. Although this tradition was originally an original Hindu Indian culture, along with the entry of Islamic teachings into the North Sumatra region, especially the city of Medan, the culture was introduced by Muslim ethnic Indians by changing the mantras that are usually recited in this tradition into prayers that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. At first the Indians glorified and worshiped the gods in carrying out this tradition, but when it entered the lives of the Malay community in Medan city, especially ethnic Muslim Indians, they changed it into sentences that glorify Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad SAW so that *Tepung Tawar* for the Malay community in Medan city has values that do not conflict with Islamic law because in the process of implementation it is based on reading the sentences of *thoyyibah* to Allah SWT. *Tepung Tawar* is one of the traditions in which the noble values of the Malay community in Medan city are contained in providing household harmony, the essence of the tradition is to provide advice for the bride and groom in navigating the household ark. Not only during the wedding ceremony, *Tepung Tawar* is also held when welcoming the return of family members who have just performed the pilgrimage, welcoming the birth of the baby, and also want to occupy a new house. It aims to provide blessings to achieve safety and prosperity and remove bad luck (Pangaribuan 2024).

The procedure is still the same as that carried out by the Indian (Hindu) community, but ethnic Indian Muslims introduced this tradition to the Malay community in Medan city by changing some parts of the implementation of the *Tepung Tawar* tradition which are considered deviant from Islamic teachings and do not eliminate its authenticity as a whole, such as mantras that are usually recited during the implementation process are replaced with prayers that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. This can be seen at weddings, the guests who are present do *Tepung Tawar* to the bride and groom who are sitting on the

aisle seat by taking the ingredients that have been provided on a medium-sized tray. The materials needed are yellow rice (rice soaked with turmeric water), white rice, bertih, water, perenjis (pandan leaves collected and tied to resemble a small broom that is about an inch long), and bunga rampai (various flowers cut into small pieces and mixed together along with sliced pandan leaves). The *Tepung Tawar* process begins by taking a pinch of yellow rice, white rice, and bertih and sprinkling them on the bride's head by surrounding her. When the flowers are sprinkled, the person doing it is recommended to recite the Prophet's salawat once. Then take a perenjis dipped in water and then merenjis to the forehead, shoulders, and palms of the bride and groom this merenjis sequence is depicted in the form of alif lam which means (Allah wills). After completing a series of *Tepung Tawar* processes, it is then closed by reading a congratulatory prayer for the bride and groom (Yamamah 2018).

Conclusion

Since the beginning of their arrival to Medan city, Muslim Indians have received a warm welcome and the adaptation process has been going well, this is because Muslim Indians who come to Medan city try to blend in quickly and do not accentuate their identity (as Indians) even they are able to assimilate into anything and anyone many are assimilated into Malay, Bugis, Javanese and others it is done through the marriage process. The patterns of life of the local community are successfully followed so that there is a very close bond of brotherhood and ethnic Indian Muslims do not look like foreign immigrants in Medan city. In addition, through the *Tepung Tawar* tradition which is one of the traditions of Indian origin which can then be accepted by the Malay community in Medan city and even become one of the traditions that have been attached to the Malay community, the steps taken by Muslim Indian ethnic at that

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