



The Meaning of Terms in The *Bite Nggukale* Wedding of The Tolaki Tribe in Konawe District

Ilham¹, Sulistyowati²

^{1,2} Linnuistics, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

Corresponding E-Mail: Ilham524637@mail.ugm.ac.id

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Abstract

This study discusses the terms used in the traditional Bite Nggukale wedding ceremony in Konawe Regency. The purpose of this study is to describe the cultural meanings and explain the functions of the terms used in the traditional Bite Nggukale wedding ceremony. The research method used in this study is qualitative descriptive. In collecting data, the author used documentation and interviews. In the data analysis stage, the author used ethnosemantics to reveal the cultural meanings contained in the terms of the Bite Nggukale traditional wedding ceremony. Ethnolinguistics is the study of terms related to semantic meanings, such as kinship, color, flora, and fauna, to reveal cultural meanings. The results show that there are fifteen terms used in the traditional wedding ceremony of Bite Nggukale. The data includes the terms pabitaru, toonomotuo, tolea, sara pombesanggarai, sara pomberahi, sara pombepende, kalosara, powokasi obiri, asolawa sawu lipa, obite tinongo nggukale, asondumbu okasa, oaso kiniku sara, and mowindahako. The cultural elements contained in these terms indicate kinship terms used in resolving traditional marriage processes.

Keywords: Terms, *Bite Nggukale*, Tolaki Tribe

Introduction

In Indonesia, every cultural group has its own traditions and customs, especially in the implementation of traditional wedding ceremonies. Traditional wedding ceremonies are sacred activities for humans, as they are expected to bring couples together to live together until the end of their lives. Traditional wedding ceremonies vary from one ethnic group to another, depending on their respective cultures. For example, the traditional wedding ceremony of the Bugis tribe is different from that of the Tolaki tribe, even though both tribes originate from the same island, Sulawesi.

The Tolaki tribe inhabits the province of Southeast Sulawesi and still preserves

its rich cultural heritage, including the tradition of traditional wedding ceremonies. The traditional wedding ceremony of the Tolaki tribe is called *Sara Merapu*, which means "traditional wedding." Tarimana (1989) defines *merapu* 'marriage' as the union of a man and a woman in a bond as members of a family and having close ties with all family members of the couple, both from the wife's and husband's side. A married person is expected to have children and multiply their lineage, which is analogous to a tree. This lineage is called *asombue*, meaning 'one chain, originating from one ancestor to represent the family lineage.'

Traditional marriage ceremonies in Tolaki society fall into two categories: ideal and non-ideal marriages. A marriage that is conducted through a prior consultation process between the extended families of both parties is considered ideal, as it satisfies the relevant customary norms. Non-ideal marriages, on the other hand, deviate from traditional norms by not undergoing the consultation procedure. In accordance with the Konawe Regency Regulation No. 1 of 2018 on the Implementation of Traditional Marriage Laws of the Tolaki Tribe, non-ideal marriages are classified into eight categories, one of which is the *Bite Nggukale* marriage.

Bite Nggukale, meaning "betel nut wrapped in betel leaf," is a kind of non-ideal marriage in Tolaki culture that has specific features, especially regarding how traditional marriages are resolved and the limits on information shared, as shown by the term "betel nut wrapped." This traditional wedding ritual is distinct from the ideal wedding, which is openly celebrated by a family. *Bite Nggukale* takes place in private and is only known to immediate family and near neighbors. This limitation on transmission is not without cause; it is intended to reduce the family's humiliation for breaking customary norms.

The *Bite Nggukale* traditional wedding ceremony aims to restore the woman's family's honor and prevent disgrace from spreading throughout the society. This approach requires the male to accept responsibility for his behavior while living together. The responsibilities that must be met are (1) moral duty, which is to express readiness to marry the lady, and (2) financial responsibility, which is to offer a dowry to the woman's family.

The traditional wedding ceremony of *Bite Nggukale*, as well as the customary contents, employs several terms that are uncommon to most Indonesians, as they are derived from Tolaki culture and languages. An ethnosemantic study can be used to determine the cultural meaning and intent underlying the use of these terms. Eglin (1980) defines ethnosemantic studies as the investigation of concepts within a given semantic domain. Meaning, according to this viewpoint, is a component of a person's motor experience that reflects a continuous process.

Cultural meaning derives from its strong relationship to a society's customary customs, such as the *Bite Nggukale* traditional wedding ceremony. As a result, this study is very important to do as a form of cultural preservation, particularly for the younger generation of Tolaki in understanding their culture. Furthermore, this

research can aid in the documentation of cultural events, which can then be utilized as proof of linguistic and cultural phenomena in Indonesia, potentially becoming empirical evidence of Indonesia's richness in language and local customs, notably from the Tolaki tribe.

Prior studies have thoroughly examined the terms, significance, and customs associated with Tolaki traditional wedding ceremonies. The first, a study on terms, was performed by (Wiriyadi, Handayani, & Amanah, 2018). This research analyzed the utilization of slang expressions on social media platforms. The findings indicated that slang terms are often characterized by irregularities or abbreviations. Besides slang terms, (Maulidiah, 2019) also analyzed local wisdom terms present in the Asahan Malay community. This study demonstrated that expressions derived from local wisdom encompass both monomorphemic and polymorphic forms.

Furthermore, study examining meaning has been carried out by (Rosadi, Isnendes, and Fasya, 2022). This research analyzed the cultural significance represented through the lexicon of Sundanese wedding jewelry. This study's results indicate that the cultural significance embedded in the lexicon of Sundanese wedding jewelry derives from the spiritual dimensions and prayers of the Sundanese community aimed at securing blessings from their ancestors. Conversely, (Maghfiroh and Nurhayati, 2023) investigated the cultural significance associated with the beliefs of the Javanese community regarding the tradition of preparing ketupat during Eid al-Fitr.

This study's results demonstrate that the cultural significance inherent in the preparation of ketupat, consistently observed during Eid al-Fitr, embodies philosophical and religious beliefs intended to uphold the teachings of Javanese ancestors. Andini, Yuniawan, and Syaifudin (2017) analyzed the cultural significance embedded in Begalan art equipment within Purbalingga Regency. This study's results demonstrate that Begalan art equipment comprises linguistic units represented as monomorphemic nouns.

Furthermore, there exist various phrases, including attributive endocentric phrases and literal phrases. Begalan art equipment encompasses various meanings, including those directly associated with God, social implications, and reflections of family life. A study by Rizkia, Ernanda, and Izar (2023) investigated the lexical and cultural meanings of historical ornaments in the Tuo Rantau Panjang house. This study demonstrates that the lexical and cultural significances of the ornaments in the Tuo Rantau Panjang house stem from the community's culture and mindset within that environment.

Conversely, Harahap, Ernanda, and Izar (2023) investigated the lexical and cultural significances of the names of foods and utensils utilized in the Batak Toba adar ceremony in Simangumban District, North Tapanuli Regency. This study identifies forty distinct lexical meanings associated with the names of foods and utensils utilized in the Batak Toba traditional ceremony, all derived from the Batak Toba regional language. The cultural significance of the food and utensils utilized

in the Batak Toba traditional ceremony embodies themes of hope, prayer, and the transmission of blessings.

Finally, there have been many studies related to the traditional marriage ceremony of the Tolaki tribe in Southeast Sulawesi, including (Alan, 2021; Ramadhani, Munir, & Samai, 2023; Ramlin, 2020; Ramly, Putra, Hariyadi, Suriaman, & Husnah, 2023; Syarif, Islahuddin Ramadhan Mubarak, & Ihwan Wahid Minu, 2022; Tolea et al., 2023; Wulandari, 2023). These studies have the same focus on marriage among the Tolaki tribe. Based on these studies, none of them examine the terms used in the *Bite Nggukale* ceremony of the Tolaki tribe in Konawe Regency.

From the literature review above, it can be seen that research examining terms in Bite Nggukale marriage is still minimal, so this study can be categorized as new research in the field of ethnolinguistics. In addition, this study will use relevant theories to reveal the cultural meaning of Tolaki. The theory that will be used is ethnosemantics (Eglin, 1980). Therefore, this study will answer the following research questions: (1) What are the meanings and functions of the terms contained in the traditional marriage *Bite Nggukale* ceremony of the Tolaki tribe in Konawe Regency?

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method as a methodological approach and an ethnosemantic research method as a theoretical approach. Ethnosemantics is a method of analysis to examine meanings related to culture in society. Eglin (1980) defines ethnosemantics as a study that covers terms related to the semantic domain, such as kinship, color, flora, and fauna. This study focuses on the cultural meanings of terms used in the traditional wedding ceremony of Bite Nggukale. A total of 15 terms were identified.

The data identification process was based on the original local government document of Konawe Regency No. 1 of 2018 concerning the “implementation of customary law on marriage Sara Merapu of the Tolaki tribe in Konawe Regency.” To gain an understanding of the cultural meanings contained in these terms, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with a reliable informant, Mr. Karim Banda, a former *toonomotuo* “traditional leader” who lives in Lalodangge Village, Pondidaha District, Konawe Regency.

The selection of informants was based on his experience as a traditional leader, his understanding of the rules and procedures for the implementation of Tolaki tribe marriage customs, and his very active participation in traditional ceremonies held in the village. The research method used in this study involves three strategic steps: (1) collecting data, (2) analyzing data, and (3) presenting the results of the analysis (Sudaryanto, 1993). This study applied the Simak Libat Cakap and Catat techniques, both proposed by Cresswell (2014).

The purpose of this process was to obtain accurate data that could support

analyzing the meaning of terms used in the Bite Nggukale traditional ceremony. After the data is collected and classified, the data analysis is conducted by grouping the information found according to the meaning and function of the terms. The researcher presents the analysis results informally, using simple and easy-to-understand sentences (Sudaryanto, 1993).

Results

In this section, the researcher will identify and analyze the meaning and function of terms used in the traditional marriage ceremony of the Tolaki tribe in Konawe Regency using an ethnosemantic approach to reveal the cultural meaning of these terms. Based on the data that has been collected and classified, it can be seen that the Tolaki tribe's traditional marriage process includes terms that refer to four traditional leaders, each of whom has duties and responsibilities in the marriage process. Additionally, the traditional marriage process includes 11 specific terms. The following are the terms used in the *Bite Nggukale* traditional ceremony.

Table 1. The Meaning and Interpretation of Bite Nggukale

No.	Terms	Meaning	Interpretation
1	<i>Menggigit Nggukale</i>	Betel nut wrapped	A wedding in which betel nut is used in a special wrapping signifies that the marriage must not be made public.
2	<i>Pamarenda</i>	Government	A leader elected through a democratic process.
3	<i>Pabitara</i>	Female spokesperson	The female family spokesperson in traditional wedding ceremonies.
4	<i>Toonomotuo</i>	Traditional leader in customary institution	The leader of the Tolaki indigenous society.
5	<i>Tolea</i>	Juru bicara laki-laki	The male family spokesperson in traditional wedding ceremonies.
6	<i>Sara Pombesanggarai</i>	Submitting a permit application to the government.	Traditional customs of politeness in the marriage process, requiring permission to be sought first before conducting traditional marriage ceremonies,

			especially permission from the government.
7	<i>Sara Pomberahi</i>	Submitting a permit application to the <i>toonomotuo</i>	Traditional customs of politeness in the marriage process, requiring permission to be sought first before conducting traditional marriage ceremonies, especially permission from the <i>toonomotuo</i> .
8	<i>Sara Pombepende</i>	Submitting a permit application to the <i>pabitara</i>	Traditional customs of politeness in the marriage process, requiring permission to be sought first before conducting traditional marriage ceremonies, especially permission from the <i>pabitara</i> .
9	<i>Kalosara</i>	Tolaki traditional symbols	A traditional symbol considered sacred by the Tolaki people because it is used to resolve all traditional issues, especially traditional marriage ceremonies.
10	<i>Powokasi Obiri</i>	Conveying information	Custom of informing the immediate family of a woman that her daughter will be married according to custom.
11	<i>Asolawa Sawu Lipa</i>	Traditional sarong	The customary contents traditional wedding consists of a sarong that must be given to the bride's family as a symbol of protection and affection.
12	<i>Obite Tinongo Nggukale</i>	Betel nut wrapped	The contents of the custom that serve to

			cover the shame of the two perpetrators and must not be disclosed to society.
13	<i>Asondumbu Okasa</i>	One cloth of Kaci	Symbol of purity of heart
14	<i>Oaso Kiniku Sara</i>	The traditional contents of a buffalo	A symbol used as an outlet for expressing the anger of female parents.
15	<i>Mowindahako</i>	The process of completing the traditional wedding ceremony.	The final process in the completion of the Bite Nggukale traditional wedding ceremony.

Discussion

This section will explain the *Sara Merapu Bite Nggukale* ceremony. The discussion in this study aims to answer the research question about the cultural meaning and function of the terms contained in the traditional wedding ceremony of the Tolaki tribe in Konawe Regency. The explanation will cover the cultural meanings of the terms used in the ceremony and their functions. The following is an explanation of the cultural meaning and function of the terms used in the *Bite Nggukale* traditional ceremony.

(1) *Bite Nggukale*

The term *Bite Nggukale* in the data (1) denotes 'wrapped betel nut.' In Tolaki tribal tradition, this term denotes a customary marriage enacted when an unmarried couple (male and female) is caught red-handed living together as husband and wife. The term *Bite Nggukale* reflects both traditional marriage practices and the kinship system within Tolaki society. This aligns with Eglin (1980), who asserts that ethnosemantics encompasses the study of the meanings of kinship terms.

The union of two families represents a social acknowledgment of a couple's status. This term encompasses more than the material object (wrapped betel nut); it highlights the intricate nature of Tolaki kinship relations shaped by traditional values. The local government, traditional authorities, and their families all participate in the traditional marriage settlement process, which according to established rules in Tolaki traditional. In addition to legitimizing the couple's relationship, the Konawe Regency Regulation (2018) states that this event also restores family honor, strengthens Tolaki customary law principles in the community, and acts as a traditional settlement mechanism.

The *Bite Nggukale* can complete their traditional wedding ceremony in two stages. In the first stage, both parties involved will hold a family meeting with the government and local traditional institutions. Second, they will carry out the

traditional marriage ceremony. At the meeting, the pamarenda 'government,' toonomotuo 'traditional leader,' tolea, and pabitara 'spokespersons for the male and female parties' have their respective duties and authorities in the meeting.

(2) *Pamarenda*

The term pamarenda in data (2) technically means 'government', but in the context of Tolaki traditional wedding ceremonies, it alludes to the strategic role of the village head and the lurah in particular. Pamarenda must be present at both ideal and non-ideal marriages, including the Bite Nggukale marriage, when they function as both permission granters and official witnesses. This word refers to the familial link between the government, the community, and the couple's respective families. The term underlines the importance of obtaining permission from the local government for any customary activity, particularly weddings. Thus, pamarenda is more than just an administrative institution; it is also a cultural entity that merges customary law with the Tolaki community's social government.

(3) *Pabitara*

The term "pabitara" in data (3) refers to the "spokesperson for the bride's family" who, in the context of traditional Tolaki weddings, serves as the official spokesman for all aspects of the bridal procession. The pabitara, as the bride's parents' representative, not only delivers traditional themes but also commands respect within the traditional institutional framework. The term pabitara has kinship importance in Tolaki culture, implying a close reciprocal link between the pamarenda (traditional government), the male family spokesman, and other traditional institutions, as well as expressing the Tolaki society's cultural values.

(4) *Toonomotuo*

'Traditional leader' is the literal translation of the expression toonomotuo in data (4). Refers to a traditional leader at the village level in Tolaki society who is instrumental in the preservation of harmony within the society. Toonomotuo maintains deep kinship connections with pamarenda (traditional government), pabitara (spokesperson), and other traditional institutions due to its status as an essential component of the traditional structure (Eglin, 1980). The toonomotuo is required to be present during the entire ceremony in the context of traditional marriage, where he serves as an official witness and guarantor of the marriage's validity. The toonomotuo's presence in every Tolaki traditional wedding ceremony is anxiously anticipated, and his role as a social mediator and guardian of culture in the society is also affirmed by this position.

(5) *Tolea*

Although the term tolea in data (5) technically means "male spokesperson," in the context of the Sara Merapu ceremony of the Tolaki tribe, this term denotes a

particular responsibility as the spokesman for the groom's family in marital matters (Tarimana, 1989). A tolea elected based on eloquence, wisdom, and understanding of cultural values, tolea not only serves useful purposes in conventional wedding rituals but also personifies moral principles as trust, honor, and responsibility. The Tolaki traditional structure's tolea build a network of interrelated kinship ties with the pamarenda (traditional government), pabitara (female spokesperson), and other traditional institutions, so strengthening the social and cultural system of Tolaki society that values harmony among several spheres of life (Eglin, (1980).

(6) Sara Pombesanggarai

The term sara pombesanggarai in data (6) denotes the process of 'requesting permission from the village government or village head' (Konawe Regency Regulation No. 1 of 2028: 9), which is a fundamental aspect of Tolaki customs. Within the process of the Bite Nggukale traditional marriage, this practice serves to meet administrative requirements while also embodying the values of respect for government authority acknowledged by both the state and the community. The process of seeking permission conducted by the tolea (male spokesperson) illustrates the kinship connections within the Tolaki society, which upholds harmonious relations between customary institutions and the village government (Eglin, 1980). It also highlights the significance of customary legitimacy in carrying out traditional activities, especially wedding ceremonies.

(7) Sara Pomberahi

In the data (7), the term sara pomberahi describes the procedure of "asking permission from the traditional leader," known as toonomotuo, as mandated in Konawe Regency Rule Number 1 of 2028:9. This procedure reflects Tolaki community ideals of unity and kinship in addition to showing respect for conventional authority. In the framework of customary events like the Sara Merapu wedding, Sara Pomberahi is a vital stage that has to be finished by getting clearance from the local traditional institution as well as the government. The participation of traditional leaders as witnesses and guarantors of the validity of the event emphasizes their crucial part in guaranteeing the seamless flow of customs and so fostering social ties inside the society. Thus, Sara Pomberahi represents the Tolaki kinship system and harmonically links the government, the organizers of the tradition, and the traditional authority.

(8) Sara Pombepende

In the context of Tolaki traditional marriage, the term "sara pombepende" (literally, "asking for permission") refers to the formal procedure whereby the tolea (male spokesperson) requests approval from the pabitara (female spokesperson) in accordance with Konawe Regency Regulation No. 1 of 2018. Given the sanctity of the tradition that must be maintained in any kind of traditional ceremony, this

procedure is required since the traditional wedding ceremony cannot be performed without the consent of all three parties: the government, traditional authority, and the female spokeswoman. Following official approval, the tolea is allowed to present kalosara as a sign of purity and the legally binding agreement within the Tolaki tradition, while also confirming the integrity of the entire wedding process. Sara pombepende is more than just an administrative process; it carries deep kinship in cultural Tolaki society.

(9) *Kalosara*

The term kalosara in data (9) combines two words: *kalo*, meaning 'sacred bond or circular object', and *sara*, meaning 'customary rules'. Tarimana (1989:21) states that kalosara serves as a traditional multipurpose symbol in Tolaki society, functioning as: (1) a ritual tool in inauguration ceremonies, (2) a sacred object for welcoming officials, (3) a medium for peace to resolve disputes, and (4) a means of conveying invitations to family celebrations. This circular symbol, depicted in the image, signifies not only the binding customary rules but also acts as a visual marker of the significance of sacred values in all Tolaki customary activities.

Figure 1. *Kalosara*



Kalosara, a traditional symbol of the Tolaki people, is composed of three philosophical elements: (1) rattan shaped into a circle, representing divinity and eternal unity, (2) a piece of *kaci* cloth at the center, symbolizing human existence in the earthly realm, and (3) a woven container at the base, signifying the afterlife and connection with ancestors. In the Bite Nggukale ritual, the presence of kalosara acts as a sacred symbol that ensures the seamless progression of the wedding ceremony without conflict. More significantly, it embodies the Tolaki kinship system, which seeks to: (a) unite two families in a customary bond, (b) uphold social harmony, and (c) preserve the continuity of ancestral traditions. Therefore, the kalosara serves not only as a ritual object but also as a tangible representation of the socio-cultural values of the Tolaki community throughout each phase of the

traditional wedding ceremony.

(10) *Powokasi Obiri*

The term "powokasi obiri" in the data (10) denotes the process of conveying information to the woman's family within the context of Bite Nggukale marriage. The information provided consists of formal notifications to close relatives from both the groom's and bride's families. This process incorporates traditional customs, including *asolawa sawu lipa* (traditional sarongs), which serve as symbols of respect and seriousness in the execution of the marriage. Therefore, *powokasi obiri* functions not only as a procedural step but also as a traditional mechanism that reinforces social bonds and reaffirms community values within Tolaki society.

(11) *Asolawa Sawu Lipa*

Asolawa sawu lipa in data (11) literally means 'one traditional sarong' which functions as: (1) a traditional item (ritual accessory) in the completion of the Bite Nggukale marriage, as well as (2) a symbol of recognition that the couple has been together before the official marriage bond. In the Tolaki socio-cultural context, the customary contents of this sarong has a dual meaning: as a sign of the transitional status of the bride from singlehood to marriage, and as a representation of the responsibility of the groom's family to provide protection and warmth through the sarong as a metaphor for unity. This process is not merely a form of compensation for violating ideal marriage norms but more importantly serves as a medium for traditional reconciliation that: (a) restores family honor, (b) binds the commitment of both parties, and (c) reaffirms the values of kinship within the Tolaki social system.

(12) *Obite Tinongo Nggukale*

Obite tinongo nggukale literally means 'wrapped betel nut'. This term has a philosophical meaning as: (1) a social protection mechanism by limiting information about marriage to only the parties involved (the government, traditional institutions, and the immediate family), (2) a form of traditional conflict resolution that avoids disgrace through closed procedures. This process is carried out when the *tolea* (male family spokesperson) leads a closed meeting with the *pabitara* (female family spokesperson), *toonomotuo* (traditional leader), and the parents of both parties. The use of betel nut as a symbol which this context is metaphorical, symbolizing the concealment of shame akin to betel nut being wrapped, while also serving as a marker of the Tolaki traditional value system that prioritizes social harmony over the resolution of an ideal marriage.

(13) *Asondumbu Okasa*

The term *asondumbu okasa* in data (13) means "a piece of kaci cloth." A piece of kaci cloth is a traditional content that symbolizes purity because of its white color. In the context of marriage, the kaci cloth can be seen as a traditional item that helps

alleviate the sadness, hatred, or anger of the bride's parents. The kaci cloth symbolizes an apology to the bride's parents. Based on this explanation, it can be understood that the term "asondumbu okasa" has elements of kinship in Tolaki culture.

(14) *Oaso Kiniku Sara*

The term oaso kiniku sara in data (14) means "one traditional buffalo." This term is a customary requirement in the traditional marriage ceremony. The buffalo serves as a customary fine that must be paid to the bride's family. In addition to its role as a traditional fine, the buffalo can also serve as a means for parents to vent their anger toward the groom. However, over time, this custom has begun to fade, and the traditional gift of oaso kiniku sara has been repurposed for more practical uses, such as serving the buffalo as a dish during the traditional wedding ceremony. Based on this interpretation, it can be understood that the term oaso kiniku sara contains elements of fauna used in the traditional wedding ceremony of Bite Nggukale.

(15) *Mowindahako*

The term Mowindahako in data (15) means "customary settlement process." In other words, "Mowindahako" is the final stage of the Tolaki traditional wedding ceremony. This means that after the traditional wedding ceremony have been completed, the ceremony is closed with traditional ceremony Mowindahako. Based on this explanation, it can be understood that the term "Mowindahako" contains elements of kinship in Tolaki culture because it serves to unite two large families.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the interpretation and explanation of the Bite Nggukale traditional marriage ceremony described above indicate that violations of custom that occur within the scope of marriage must always be resolved through a peaceful consultation process between the customary institutions and the people involved in the problem. The involvement of customary law and the role of customary institutions aim to prevent undesirable things, such as murder, ongoing disputes, and various other adverse effects, from happening to people who have violated Tolaki social and customary norms. Thus, the aggrieved party will also get their rights back in the form of compensation from the party who violated the customary marriage rules. The terms contained in the Bite Nggukale traditional ceremony are inseparable from the cultural elements of the Tolaki community itself, so that by examining the meaning and intent of these terms, it can be proven that Eglin's (1980) theory of language can reveal cultural meanings Tolaki society. Thus, it can be concluded that the Tolaki community's view of the Sara Merapu ceremony is not ideal, not only reflects the complexity of their cultural customs, but also shows how the community, government, and local customary

institutions are willing to resolve various social conflicts that arise in the context of marriage in their society.

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