

The Role of Bines Dance in Matchmaking Among The Gayo Tribe: A Phenomenological Study

Nabila Jaratun Nisa¹, Toni Nasution²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

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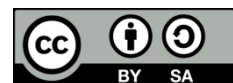
Gayo Tribe

Matchmaking

Abstract

This study examines the evolving role of the Bines Dance in the matchmaking traditions of the Gayo community in Southeast Aceh. Initially performed as an interlude to the Saman Dance, the Bines Dance has developed into a meaningful cultural practice, particularly within the bejambu Saman tradition, where it serves as a subtle platform for courtship between local female dancers (seberu) and male visitors (tetamu). Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this research explores the lived experiences of individuals involved in or affected by the dance. Data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, involving 15 informants: cultural leaders, dancers, matchmaking facilitators, and community members. Findings reveal that the Bines Dance acts as a poetic form of indirect communication. Female dancers express romantic interest through structured rhymes and metaphorical verses, initiating a symbolic exchange known as najuk. This tradition allows emotional expression while adhering to customary norms. The offering of a money ring (cincin uang) by the male guest's family to the dancer marks a shift toward serious intent, often culminating in arranged meetings and marriage. The study concludes that the Bines Dance functions not only as entertainment but also as a living cultural mechanism for relationship-building and social cohesion. It reflects the community's values while adapting to modern contexts, highlighting the importance of preserving traditional art as a dynamic force within Gayo society.

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Corresponding Author:

Nabila Jaratun Nisa

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: nabila0309213090@uinsu.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic nation widely known for its ethnic and cultural diversity. With over 1,300 ethnic groups spread across 38 provinces, Indonesia boasts a rich cultural heritage. Each region boasts distinctive cultural expressions, from language and customs to traditional art forms. One province that embodies this rich culture is Aceh. Not only is Aceh renowned for its strong religious identity, but Aceh also preserves a diverse range of local

cultural traditions, including those of the Gayo ethnic group, who live in highland areas such as Central Aceh, Bener Meriah, Gayo Lues, and parts of Southeast Aceh [1].

The Gayo people are a society that upholds customary values, spirituality, and traditional arts. Among their prominent cultural heritage are the Saman and Bines dances. These two dances are performed as a performing art and hold profound social and spiritual significance in the lives of the Gayo people. The Saman dance, for example, has been recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In contrast, the Bines dance, performed by women, is an important part of various rituals and traditional events, particularly the bejamu saman (traditional gathering) activity, a form of cultural kinship between villages [2], [3], [4].

The Bines Dance has distinct characteristics from the Saman Dance. This dance is performed standing, with harmonious hand, head, and body movements, accompanied by poetry or pantun chanting in response. The poetry in the Bines Dance is an aesthetic element and contains symbolic meanings such as subtle satire, expressions of feeling, or social expressions aimed at the audience, especially young people from outside the village [5]. This is where this dance plays an interesting social role, opening up a space for symbolic communication between young men and women in a relaxed yet sacred cultural atmosphere. This interaction often develops into a more personal relationship and culminates in a matchmaking process [6].

However, the phenomenon of finding a soulmate through artistic mediums like the Bines Dance has not received much academic attention. Previous research has focused more on the aesthetic aspects and moral values of the Bines Dance's poetry, its presentation in bejamu saman ceremonies, and the practice of matchmaking in other ethnic groups, such as the Karo people [7]. Studies on how the Bines Dance functions as a medium for matchmaking and how the poetry and interactions in its performances create space for inter-gender communication within indigenous communities are still minimal [8], [9].

Since not much research discusses this issue explicitly, this study was conducted to delve deeper into the social meaning of the Bines Dance, especially its role as an indirect medium for finding partners among young men and women of the Gayo Tribe. The research location was chosen in Jambur Lak-Lak Village, Ketambe District, Southeast Aceh Regency, because in this area, the tradition of matchmaking through the Bines Dance performance is still practised in real life. A qualitative approach with phenomenological methods was used to understand the direct experiences of individuals who experience the matchmaking process through this cultural tradition.

Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of knowledge in the fields of cultural sociology and anthropology but also serves as an effort to preserve local traditions imbued with social values. Through this study, it is hoped that the public will understand that traditional arts are not merely a medium for aesthetic expression but also a social instrument capable of strengthening kinship networks, cultural identity, and interpersonal relationships within traditional communities.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. This approach explored the meaning of individual experiences, particularly those who experienced the matchmaking process through the Bines Dance performance. The phenomenological method was chosen because it can reveal the informants' subjective perceptions and interpretations of the cultural traditions they experience daily. The research location is in Jambur Lak-Lak Village, Ketambe District, Southeast Aceh Regency. This area was chosen because it still maintains the traditional practice of the Bines Dance as part of community cultural activities, including in the bejamu saman event, which often serves as a forum for meetings between young men and women from various villages. The research was conducted directly in the field until the data obtained was deemed adequate and no longer indicated adding new information [10].

The data sources used consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interactions with informants directly related to the research object, such as couples experiencing soul mates, youth leaders, traditional leaders, and Bines dance trainers at the cultural event [11]. Secondary data were collected from literature, books, scientific articles, local documents, and archives relevant to the Bines Dance tradition and Gayo culture [12].

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly to observe the dynamics of interactions during cultural performances [13]. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' experiences regarding the matchmaking process through artistic media. [14]. Documentation was used to record events through photographs, notes, or other visual evidence that supported field findings [3], [15].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

The Process of Implementing the Bines Dance Event by the Gayo Tribe

The Bines Dance is a cultural expression born from the Gayo people of the Aceh highlands. Typically, this dance is performed by a group of girls sitting in rows, displaying rhythmic hand and body movements accompanied by typical Gayo poetry. In practice, the Bines Dance does not stand alone but is part of a series of traditional activities called Bejamu Saman, a major event that unites two villages in an artistic performance and fosters camaraderie among residents [16].

This dance has long historical roots and is steeped in religious values. According to various local historical sources, the Bines Dance began to be known in the 14th century, coinciding with the development of the Saman Dance, introduced by Syeh Saman, a cleric who used art as a means of Islamic preaching. Thus, Bines is seen as an aesthetic performance and an instrument for conveying moral, religious, and social messages [17].

In Gayo society, customs and social structures significantly influence the traditional arts' form, function, and implementation. One example is the Bines Dance, which symbolises women's position in the socio-cultural order. This dance may only be performed by unmarried girls, reflecting the symbolic meaning of women's chastity and honour, which,

according to Gayo tradition, must be strictly maintained. The restriction on participation by married or widowed women also demonstrates the strong norms of decency and social relations within this traditional society.

The Bines Dance is performed collectively in a ceremonial procession. It involves not only the dancers but also all elements of society, from the youth who prepare the performance stage, the traditional leaders who deliberate to make various decisions, and the elders who provide food and other necessities. This emphasises that individuals do not own the Bines Dance, but rather part of a collective cultural heritage maintained and preserved through cooperation and mutual assistance [18].

The Bines dance has distinctive movements that distinguish it from other traditional dances in Indonesia. The dancers form group patterns while moving their hands and swaying their waists and bodies to a predetermined tempo. This dance uses no instrumental music, but is accompanied by lyrics and handclaps. This form of performance reflects the simplicity, unity, and harmony of Gayo social life.

The verses sung in the Bines Dance serve a variety of functions. Besides conveying moral messages or religious teachings, the verses are also used to convey subtle satire, praise, and even symbolic seduction. Specifically, in the Bejamu Saman performance, these verses are often directed at young men and women from the guest village (serinen) as a form of indirect communication between them. Thus, the Bines Dance also serves as a space for social interaction and is part of the matchmaking tradition in Gayo culture.

Symbolically, the Bines Dance reflects the character of the Gayo people, who uphold the values of politeness, a sense of togetherness, and harmony among members. This dance serves as a platform for the intersection of tradition and personal expression, manifested in an aesthetic and communicative art form. In this space, women are given a special place to perform, convey messages through poetry, and demonstrate their social skills within the community.

Amid the onslaught of modernisation, the Bines Dance remains a vital element of the Gayo people's cultural identity. Despite changes in the delivery of poetry and patterns of social interaction, the traditional values at the heart of this tradition remain steadfastly maintained. This demonstrates that traditional arts like Bines are not rigid but flexible and can adapt to changing times without abandoning their cultural roots [19].

Based on the results of interviews regarding the stages of the Bines Dance implementation in the Gayo community, information was obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, such as dance instructors, youth leaders, and cultural practitioners with direct experience. These findings reinforce the previous conceptual explanation and provide a concrete picture of how this tradition is carried out.

1. Traditional Deliberation and Determination of Guest Villages

According to Mr. Zainudin (50 years old), the traditional leader of Jambur Lak-Lak Village, every Bejamu Saman event always begins with a traditional deliberation held in Mersah. This deliberation is attended by traditional leaders, youth leaders, and male representatives from the community. This forum decides which village will be the guest for the Bejamu Saman event. Women are not involved in this process because, in Gayo tradition,

customary decision-making in public spaces is the responsibility of men. In addition to determining the guest village, this deliberation discusses various initial preparations, including forming an organising committee. The committee is tasked with cooperating to organise all aspects of the event, from welcoming guests and providing food and beverages to arranging traditional seating, security, and the technical aspects of the event.



Figure 1. Documentation of an interview with Mr. Zainudin as the traditional leader.

2. Mango Process (Traditional Invitation)

Once the decision regarding which villages to invite has been reached, the next stage is the traditional invitation process, known as *mango*. At this stage, representatives from the inviting village will visit the intended village carrying a *tepak* or *batil* containing traditional items such as betel, areca nut, gambier, and lime. This batil is a symbol of respect and a sign of the village's readiness to receive the guests according to customary procedures. Upon arrival at the invited village, the envoy will meet with the local youth leader and then be taken to the residence of *the gecik* (village head). Their visit's purpose is conveyed verbally and through an official letter. The village that accepts the invitation will request several days for internal deliberation with its traditional leaders. If willing, they will receive an official response and agree on technical matters such as the date, duration of the event, the number of Saman dance groups that will perform, and their readiness to host the event.

3. Intensive Preparation and Training

Once the guest village accepts the invitation, the inviting village will begin an intensive preparation phase, typically lasting about a month. This includes fundraising, renting or making traditional clothing, building a performance stage, and intensive dance training involving young men and women.

According to Mrs. Imah (45 years old), as the trainer of the Bines Dance, the initial stage of training begins with the appointment of a main trainer chosen directly by community leaders. This selection of trainers is not done haphazardly, but it must be someone who has experience, understands dance movements and the structure of the lyrics, and can guide the dancers well. After the trainer is determined, the selection of dancers is divided into two groups: Seberu Sedang, which consists of teenage girls, and Seberu Kul, a group of adult girls.

"...Usually, before the village begins practising the Bines Dance, a trainer is chosen. After that, the dance groups are formed. The teenage and adult girls are separated to make practice easier," explained Ibu Imah.



Figure 2. Documentation with Mrs. Imah as the *Bines dance* trainer

The training sessions, held 25 times, are mandatory for all selected members. The training material covers mastering basic movements, maintaining unity, understanding poetry, and displaying expressions that reflect the meaning of the pantun or song being performed.

4. Customary Rules Regarding the Participation of Dancers

One crucial aspect strictly adhered to in the Bines Dance is the customary rules regarding who can be a dancer. According to Mrs. Rukaiyah (40), a dance instructor and cultural performer, only unmarried women can participate. This rule is a customary rule that has been passed down through generations and cannot be violated.

"...The Bines Dancers must be female. That is the rule from the ancestors. Besides, if married women participate, their husbands might get angry," said Mrs. Rukaiyah.



Figure 3: Documentation with Mrs. Rukaiyah as the *Bines dance* trainer

Apart from maintaining the family's dignity, this rule also aims to prevent conflicts in the performance, considering that the poetry often contains seductive or symbolic rhymes aimed at guests from other villages.

5. The Function of Poetry and Social Communication

One of the main characteristics of the Bines Dance is the use of poetry or rhymes as a means of communication during the performance. Any musical instruments accompany this dance, but it instead uses only handclaps and synchronised movements that align with the lyrics. According to Mrs. Rukaiyah, the poems performed previously contained mostly religious messages, moral advice, or praise for the visiting village. However, over time, the poems also included subtle flirtations or satire aimed at attracting young men from other villages.

"...Where in the past the poetry was advice, now it is more about teasing guests so that the serinen (saman guests) are interested..."

The poetry recited in the Bines Dance is a form of entertainment and an indirect means of social selection. The audience's response to a particular poem often serves as the starting point for personal communication between the dancer and the guest. This makes the

Bines Dance traditionally accepted to build social relationships, even opening up matchmaking opportunities.



Figure 4. Documentation of the Bines dance group while singing poetry and rhymes

6. Social Symbolism and Relationship Formation

Based on interviews and field observations, it can be concluded that the Bines Dance is a beautiful art form and serves as a medium of social communication and a symbol of Gayo women's identity. The strict rules, disciplined training, and the social significance of the poetry performed make this dance a crucial platform for forging relationships between communities and passing on traditional values to the next generation.

The community also interprets this dance as a cultural space that allows for the meeting of soul mates. Relationships formed in this respectful, traditional atmosphere are considered socially legitimate and respected as part of a customary process recognised by the community.

7. Selection and Development of Bines Dance Costumes

The next stage, after the dancers are declared ready regarding movement and lyrics, is the selection of costumes. The costumes worn have both aesthetic and symbolic significance in Gayo culture. These outfits are not merely accessories for the performance, but also represent cultural identity and the values of modesty that are held in high regard.

Traditionally, the dancer's costume is known as baju lukup, or more commonly known as baju kerawang (openwork dress). It is a typical Gayo garment with short sleeves and colourful, symbolic embroidery. The lower part is accessorised with patterned sarongs, such as selungkit penuh (full-length), bara (coal), samarena (samere), and upuh polos (plain-colored sarong). Each has its aesthetic value and is typically chosen based on the availability and traditions of each village.

Additional attributes include an openwork shawl left loose to the thighs, adorned with renggiep, a small silver ornament that enhances the appearance and creates a jingling sound when the dancer moves. In some villages, variations of the costume also include upuh jewe (a long cloth), sempol (a bun), and ketua (decorative flowers in the bun), which further enhance the appearance.

In an interview with Mrs. Imah (45 years old), the Bines Dance trainer, she said there were differences between past and present costumes, especially regarding modesty.

"...As for the costume worn by Bines dancers, it is like a Gayo openwork dress, pawak (sarong), sempol (bun), and pucuk (flower headdress tucked into the bun). That is the only costume, but there are slight differences between then and now. In the past, the dancers did not wear hijabs, but now they do. The openwork dress has short sleeves, whereas in the past, people did not wear long-sleeved underwear, but now they do, so the attire is more modest..."

This statement shows a cultural adjustment to religious values and politeness norms that are increasingly strong in society. However, this change still maintains the Bines Dance's essence and original cultural identity. Thus, the costumes of Bines dancers not only display visual beauty, but also reflect socio-cultural changes in the Gayo community, showing that traditions can adapt without losing their symbolic meaning.

8. The Continuity of Events and Social Interactions in Bejamu Saman

After the rehearsal and costume preparation phases are complete, the culminating event, the Bejamu Saman, occurs. This sacred and collective tradition is vital to the Gayo community's cultural activities.

Based on the explanation of Mr. Karim (51 years old), the youth leader of Jambur Lak-Lak Village, several stages in the Bejamu Saman procession are directly related to the Bines Dance performance.

During the ceremony, the host village welcomes the guest village, which consists of young men and traditional male leaders. The welcoming ceremony is conducted according to tradition, including the Didong Alu dance, in which Gayo girls (Bines dancers) place flower garlands on the community leaders and youth leaders from the guest village. Offerings of plain flour follow this as a symbol of prayer and customary acceptance.

Afterwards, the guests were directed to the bangsalan, where the Bejamu Saman ceremony occurred.

This location was chosen to accommodate the large number of participants. The serinen (partners) are selected in this hall, the partners for each pesaman (Saman dancer) from the guest village. This selection process takes into account the guest's age and social status. For example, if the guest is a traditional figure, they are paired with a traditional figure from the host village. In the past, the selection of serinen often began with personal courtesies such as exchanging cigarettes or other small tokens.

Once the couple is chosen, the guests are taken to their respective homes by the host village's pesaman (hostess) for two days and two nights. During this time, all the guests' needs, such as food, bedding, and clothing, are the host's responsibility. This tradition aims to strengthen ties between villages and build sincere friendships. He stated,

"...Two days and two nights are true friends in the world of the afterlife..."

After the private meal, all participants returned to the pavilion to begin the besaman (same dance) session. In this session, two Saman groups sat facing each other. The group from the host village (sukut sepangalan) acted as the mangka, directing the movements, while the guest group (jamu) acted as the ngging, imitating the movements. The more complex the mangka movements, the greater the honour for the guest group that successfully followed them.

The besaman sessions take turns, showcasing artistic skills and strengthening inter-village bonds through healthy and meaningful competition. Between the besaman sessions, the siberu (girls from the host village) perform the Bines Dance.

This performance provides refreshing entertainment and fosters a sense of camaraderie. The verses sung contain praise, subtle sarcasm, or symbolic teasing directed at the guests, creating emotional social communication.

Guests typically offer a najuk (donation) at the end of a Bines performance. Najuk comes in two forms: the general tabuk (donation), which consists of money or other items tucked into the dancer's bun as a shared tribute; and the money ring (ring), which consists of paper money folded into a ring and given privately to a favoured dancer. Often, this ring includes a phone number or hidden message, as an initial communication that can develop into a personal relationship.

Social interaction between dancers and guests through the giving of rings is seen as a form of artistic appreciation and a means of building social relationships, including opportunities for legitimate matchmaking according to custom.

From this entire series of activities, it can be concluded that the Bines Dance in the Gayo community tradition is not just an art performance, but rather part of a complex cultural system, encompassing social, spiritual, and symbolic aspects carried out through structured traditional processions.

This dance begins with a traditional meeting, the invitation of guest villages, intensive training by unmarried girls, and the Bejamu Saman, the culmination of the cultural event, bringing the two villages together in an atmosphere of intimacy and respect. The role of women as Bines dancers reflects the values of purity and honour in Gayo society.

Meanwhile, the sung poems serve as a medium of social communication, opening up space for interaction and even matchmaking. The gift of a najuk (a traditional Indonesian costume) and a ring is a token of appreciation and a symbol of customary affection. Overall, the Bines Dance serves as a social glue, a space for cultural expression, and a means of transmitting traditional values that remain respected and preserved today.



Figure 5: Documentation of an interview with Mr. Karim as the youth leader.

Bines Dance as a Cultural Medium for Matchmaking

Within the Gayo community, the Bines Dance holds significance beyond artistic performance. While it preserves traditional values and collective identity, it also serves an important social function—facilitating interactions between young men and women in a culturally sanctioned environment, often leading to the formation of romantic relationships. Rather than being solely a form of entertainment, the Bines Dance operates as a symbolic and structured cultural space for interpersonal connection.

Gayo customs strictly regulate interactions between the sexes, limiting opportunities for direct communication. As a result, traditional ceremonies such as Bejamu Saman, where the Bines Dance is performed, become rare but crucial spaces that permit symbolic interaction between young people. During these events, the boundaries of social norms are maintained, yet they provide a culturally approved context for subtle exchanges of interest.

In the performance, female dancers from the host village and male guests from neighbouring areas can observe and indirectly communicate through poetic lyrics, facial expressions, and symbolic gestures like the presentation of a crown or a ring made of money. These flirtatious elements, while suggestive, are still embedded within the framework of customary propriety. The audience, including the guests, often responds with smiles, cheers, or symbolic remarks, creating a shared emotional atmosphere that encourages further interest.

Social intimacy is also nurtured through the serinen tradition, in which visiting youths are accommodated in the homes of local families for two days and two nights. This practice provides further opportunity for interaction between the guests and local youth, allowing relationships initiated during the dance to grow more personal and meaningful.

The Bines Dance's role in partner-seeking is not overtly stated but functions within a culturally accepted system of symbols and rituals. This allows for indirect and respectful communication, enabling romantic connections to develop within the limits of social norms. The connections made during the performance and the homestay frequently blossom into serious relationships, often culminating in marriage.

Insights gathered from interviews with key informants, such as Ibu Rukaiyah—a respected Bines Dance instructor who has trained many groups in various villages—highlight the symbolic nature of the interactions. According to her, exchanges between dancers and male guests are never explicit; they are expressed through subtle gestures. A common tradition, for instance, is when a guest presents a ring to a dancer as a token of interest, symbolising a deeper intention within the bounds of Gayo cultural values.

"...Sometimes guests leave money in the dancer's bun, but if they like her, they make a ring out of a banknote and put it on the dancer's finger. The ring can have a phone number or something written on it. If the dancer is interested, they continue the conversation. Many of them end up getting married," he said.

The gift of a ring is a socially accepted form of nonverbal communication within the context of a Bines dance performance. This gesture indicates interest and opens the door to more personal interactions after the event. Guests also offer gifts or general donations, although they do not always carry the same personal meaning as rings.

Mr. Zainudin (50), the traditional leader of Jambur Lak-Lak Village, echoed this sentiment. He explained that the Bines Dance often marks the beginning of a more serious relationship.

"...Usually after the event, guests ask fellow dancers or relatives for their numbers. Some also send greetings via the table. This is commonplace, and the community does not see it as negative, as it is all part of tradition..." he explained.

Furthermore, more intense interaction occurs during the serinen (traditional dance) celebration, where young guests stay at the home of the host village family for two days and two nights. During this time, they can interact with the dancer's family, learn about their customs, and even help with household chores. This informal interaction strengthens emotional closeness and opens opportunities to get to know potential partners.

This process is not forced but allows both parties to build a natural, evolving communication. In Gayo society, arranged marriages are rarely conducted openly, but this

symbolic communication is considered an initial sign of seriousness. Parents and the community understand this dynamic and will facilitate its continuation if deemed in line with customary values.

This interaction is also reinforced through the lyrics of the Bines Dance, which are often sung spontaneously, with a teasing or complimentary nuance. These lyrics form part of the interaction between dancers and guests, conveying subtle messages of attraction. As Ms. Rosdiana (41), one of the Bines Dance instructors, explained,

"...The lyrics are sometimes written specifically to attract attention. For example, if they know a young man from another village is attractive, they (the dancers) can signal to each other through lyrics. This is common and part of the uniqueness of the Bines Dance..."



Figure 6. Document an interview with Mrs. Rosdiana as the Bines trainer.



Figure 7. Documentation of giving crowns and rings to bines dancers by herbalists (guests)

In Gayo social practice, marriages that originate from a meeting during the Bines Dance are held in high regard because they are conducted politely and follow customary law. This type of relationship is socially accepted and symbolises the success of the Bejamu Saman ceremony in strengthening ties between villages.

This is also reflected in the personal experience of Ibu Nora, a 23-year-old informant who is now married. She recounted her first meeting with her husband at a Bejamu Saman event in her village when she was 19 and a Bines dancer. She explained,

"...I first met my husband when I was 19. At the time, I was a Bines dancer and also served as a penangkat (poetry presenter). My husband was a guest at a pesaman (traditional dance performance) from another village. When he performed, I was attracted to him at first sight. Because I was the penangkat, I recited some pantuns specifically for him, although he did not respond then..."

The initial interaction was one-sided. However, during the second performance, the man began to respond through the symbol of nyucuk (a gesture of affection) and the gift of a ring from a banknote containing his contact number. *"In the second performance, I continued reciting pantuns directed at him, and he finally responded by symbolically poking me. Then, at the end of the performance, he gave me a ring made from a banknote, with his WhatsApp number written on it and a short message: 'Sister, save my WhatsApp number, do not be arrogant.' That is how we started communicating,"* Ms. Nora recalled.

After that, their relationship gradually progressed through private communication outside the performance space. According to traditional customs, they had known each other for a year before the man officially expressed his desire to marry Ibu Nora.

"...After I received the ring, we started chatting. Our relationship lasted about a year. I was 19 and my husband was 25. Then he expressed his desire to marry me and asked me to tell his parents that his family would be coming to propose. After that, I broke the news, and my husband's family came to the proposal ceremony and planned the steps leading up to the wedding," she explained.

This story demonstrates that relationships that begin in the arts and culture can develop within a traditional framework to a more serious level. The Gayo community understands and accepts this process as long as it is carried out respectfully and following customary norms. Regarding the community's view of arranged marriages that begin with the Bines Dance, Ibu Nora emphasised that it is commonplace and accepted.

"...As for the public response, it is quite normal. Many marriages have occurred as a result of encounters in the Bines Dance. Everyone knows that the Bines Dance is held for cultural preservation and to strengthen village ties. Nevertheless, we do not know where our soulmates come from. If the process remains within reasonable, polite, and customary boundaries, the community will respect it. It has not considered a violation of, let alone a violation of, our traditional or cultural values," he said.



Figure 8. Documentation with Mrs. Nora and Mr. Putra as resource persons who were one of the soulmate meetings during the *Bejamu Saman* arts event.

A similar experience was shared by Mrs. Rahmi (35), who is now married. She recounted meeting her husband when she performed as a Bines dancer in a *Bejamu Saman* performance at age 20. Her husband was part of a group of guests from another village. In the performance, Mrs. Rahmi played the role of a dancer reciting poetry and rhymes. She noticed one of the male guests actively participating symbolically by inserting money into the dancer's bun.

"...At that time, I was the one who performed the pantun, so the pantun I recited was intended for all the guests. Nevertheless, I noticed there was one person who was doing the most nyucuk. I thought he might be wealthy, as he could give a lot. However, at the time, I was still acting indifferent, because as a woman, I naturally did not want to appear too open," she recounted.

This symbolic interaction developed when the guest village performed the Saman Dance, where, coincidentally, the man also performed the dance and recited a pantun implicitly directed at Ibu Rahmi as a sign of interest. Although she did not take it seriously then, that moment began a close relationship that would develop further.

In short, these stories show that the Bines Dance not only plays a role in preserving art and customs, but also becomes a social space that is culturally accepted as a medium for

meeting and exploring partners that takes place within the corridor of the values of politeness and customs of the Gayo people.

The interactions in these artistic activities slowly build a cultural communication space accepted and recognised by local customs.

"...When it was their turn to perform, he was also a singer. His rhymes felt like 'code' to me. However, I did not react. It was not until the last day of the show that he gave me a ring made of banknotes. Inside was his phone number and the words, 'I have liked you since the beginning. Talk to me later, Sweetie.' That is where we started communicating..."

After the event, the two continued communicating privately via text messages. The relationship lasted for about a year. During that time, Mrs. Rahmi felt a strong emotional and life-view compatibility. She also considered her future husband's financial readiness, which she believed was already well-established.

"...We started chatting and getting to know each other better. Over a year, I got to know him better. I saw that he had good intentions and was quite responsible. As a woman, I naturally thought about the future too. I saw he had an income and a business, so I felt more confident he would be a good partner..."

After feeling they had gotten to know each other well enough, the man expressed his intention to pursue marriage. He asked Mrs. Rahmi to inform her family that the man would be coming to propose. The proposal was carried out according to customary law, involving the extended family and determining an auspicious day for the wedding.

"...After we felt we were compatible, he said he wanted to get married and asked me to tell his parents. Not long after, his family came to our house to propose. We agreed to marry and began preparing for the process according to local customs. Everything was done properly and according to our community's customs..."

Regarding finding a soulmate through artistic activities, Ms. Rahmi believes society considers it normal. She believes the Bines Dance aims to strengthen ties and preserve culture. If a couple finds a soulmate during the process, it is accepted as a natural part of tradition.

"...As for the public response, it is quite normal. Many people have gotten married after meeting at the Bines Dance. Everyone knows that Bines is for art and strengthening ties between villages, but who would have thought that a soul mate could come from it? The community also considers it normal, as long as the process remains respectful, does not violate customs, and does not damage our traditions or culture..."

This experience demonstrates that the Bines Dance is not simply a venue for artistic performance, but also a social space that fosters symbolic communication that can develop into emotional bonds and even marriage. Symbols such as personal rhymes and the gift of rings made from banknotes are part of the Gayo community's mechanism for building social relationships without violating customary norms.

Ibu Rahmi's story emphasises the importance of traditional arts like the Bines Dance, not only as a ceremonial event but also as a means of building lasting personal relationships. In a society that values politeness and tradition, the Bines Dance serves to strengthen ties and serve as a meeting place for legitimate soulmates.



Figure 9. Documentation with Mrs. Rahmi and Mr. Sadri as resource persons at one of the matchmaking meetings during the *Bejamu Saman* arts event.

Apak Rimansyah, a 38-year-old man, shared a similar experience. He described how the Bines and Bejamu Saman dances served as a social platform that brought him and his wife together, ultimately leading to their marriage. Interviews revealed that the relationships born from traditional arts activities are not simply spontaneous encounters but symbolic interactions within a meaningful cultural space.

Mr. Rimansyah said he met his wife when he was 24. At the time, he was a dancer in a Saman group from a guest village, while she was a Bines dancer and a poet. He described the moment as a meaningful experience, where interactions took place through rhymes, songs, and the movement symbols of the dance.

"...I first saw my wife while performing as a Bines dancer. She was the one who sang the verses. Her voice was melodious, and she stood out from the other dancers. From there, I started to like her. During our performances, I often directed my rhymes at her. Even though the lyrics were in the form of lyrics, my intentions were directed at her. I was also the one who most often gave the dancers their nyucuk (gives money) buns. At that time, I felt she was special..."

On the second day of the Bejamu Saman event, he became even more bold in expressing his interest through a specially designed pantun. At the end of the performance, he presented a ring made from banknotes with his contact number and a message of hope.

"...On the show's last day, I gave my mother a ring made from a banknote. I folded it neatly and wrote my phone number inside. The message was: 'I have liked you since the beginning. If you have feelings for me too, please contact me.' I hope she reads it and responds..."

Some time after the event, the girl contacted him. They began communicating intensely. Within three months, their relationship blossomed, and Mr. Rimansyah became increasingly convinced of the seriousness of the relationship.

"...After establishing communication, we chatted and called almost every day. I became more confident. Because my mother is polite and understanding, we discussed the future often. I was also determined to find a wife, so it was not long before I asked her to tell her parents that my family was officially coming..."

The family's response was positive. The proposal and wedding preparations were carried out according to tradition and with full respect.

"...We did not wait long. After visiting, the families agreed. We made plans, including everything we needed to prepare, from the dowry and traditional attire to the ceremony. Everything was carried out according to village regulations..."

According to Mr. Rimansyah, arranged marriages born from artistic spaces like the Bines Dance or Bejamu Saman are not uncommon in Gayo society. This phenomenon is common and accepted as usual.

"...The public response has been quite normal. Many people also find their soul mates through the Bines dance or the Bejamu Saman event. We all know that the purpose is cultural and social, but if a soul mate comes from there, that is normal. It is important to do it politely, according to tradition, and without violating cultural values..."

This experience demonstrates that traditional arts activities serve as entertainment and productive spaces for social interaction. Symbols such as pantun, nyucuk, and cincin serve as communication bridges within respected customary corridors, demonstrating that traditional arts strategically expand social networks and build relationships between individuals.



Figure 10. Documentation with Mr. Rimansyah and Mrs. Karmila as resource persons who participated in matchmaking meetings at the Bejamu Saman arts event.

Mr. Abdul Rahim, a 34-year-old man, expressed a similar sentiment when he recounted meeting his wife through the Bejamu Saman and Bines Dance events. He believes these art venues are not merely entertainment but natural social spaces for finding a soulmate. He met his wife as a Saman dancer, while she was a Bines dancer and poetry writer. Their interactions were fostered through rhymes, songs, and cultural symbols.

"...I first met my wife at a Bejamu Saman performance. I was a Saman dancer, and she was a Bines dancer and a penangkat dancer. She had a beautiful voice, and I thought she was the most beautiful. I was immediately attracted to her. During the performance, I often recited pantuns directed specifically at her. I was also the one who often performed the nyucuk dance as a sign of my affection..."

Mr. Abdul Rahim's courage in directly communicating his intentions to the woman's family demonstrated his seriousness. Although the family was initially cautious, their relationship eventually progressed after the dance instructor facilitated an exchange of phone numbers.

"...On the last day of the event, I asked the coach if he could give me my phone number. Thankfully, he contacted me shortly after. That is how our communication began..."

After several months of getting to know each other, they felt they were compatible and decided to take their relationship to a more serious level, involving their families and going through the customary process.

"...Without waiting long, her family immediately gave their permission. We immediately arranged a time for the family to visit. After that, we discussed all the customary requirements, such as the dowry, ceremony, traditional attire, and everything else that needed to be prepared..."

For the Gayo people, meeting a soul mate that begins with an artistic activity is common as long as the process is carried out politely and according to tradition.

"...The community is quite normal, as it happens often. Many people also meet their soulmates at the Bines Dance event. Although it was originally intended for artistic expression and inter-village camaraderie, marriages sometimes emerge. As long as the process is polite and adheres to traditional customs, the community will support it..."



Figure 11. Documentation was also needed with Mr. Abdul Rahim and Mrs. Putri, who were resource persons at one of the soulmate meetings during the Bejamu Saman arts event.

Besides the dancers, these arts space also serves as a meeting place for audience members, as experienced by 24-year-old Mrs. Karisma. She met her husband while attending a Bejamu Saman and Bines dance performance. Her interest arose after watching her husband perform the poetry.

"...I came as a spectator. I happened to be sitting in the front row. When I saw Saman's performance, I immediately focused on my now-husband. I found him to be the most attractive. He was also the singer and had the best voice. From there, I became interested..."

A brief meeting at a food stall began communication, which continued intensely until marriage, after both felt they were compatible and their respective families agreed.

"...During my break, he and I went to the cafe together. He bought cigarettes and then greeted me. I was nervous because I did not expect him to say hello. He was interested. He immediately asked for my phone number, and that night, he called me. That is how our communication began..."

For the Gayo people, meeting a soul mate born from the arts is something that is socially accepted as long as it remains within the corridors of tradition and decency.



Figure 12. Documentation with Mrs. Karisma and Mr. Ahmad as resource persons at one of the matchmaking meetings during the Bejamu Saman arts event.

3.2 DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this study, which applied a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews with cultural practitioners, dancers, and couples who experienced marriage through the Bines Dance tradition, it can be seen that the Bines Dance holds a

deeply rooted social function in the lives of the Gayo people. Far from being a mere performance or aesthetic display, the Bines Dance—particularly as part of the Bejamu Saman ritual—functions as a symbolic communication platform that upholds traditional values while simultaneously accommodating the relational needs of the younger generation. The role of this dance extends beyond cultural preservation into the realm of interpersonal connection and community building [19].

The poetic verses sung by the *seberu* (female dancers) are rich in metaphor and indirect expression. These verses, often filled with praise, humour, or subtle criticism, are directed toward young men from the guest village (*pesaman*), who may respond through culturally meaningful gestures such as *nyucuk*—the act of gifting a ring and money, symbolising romantic interest [20], [21], [22].

. This exchange, though nonverbal and embedded within the context of a traditional performance, opens a space for socially sanctioned and emotionally resonant courtship. These initial interactions often develop through informal conversations at the reception (*serinen*) and continue through digital communication. Many of these connections, as reported by participants in the study, have culminated in marriage, suggesting that the Bines Dance serves not only as a space for cultural expression but also as a legitimate arena for relational formation within Gayo society [23], [24].

These findings resonate with several prior studies that examine similar roles of traditional performing arts in facilitating social bonds and romantic connections. Nuraini, for instance, found that Acehnese traditional dances often serve artistic and social purposes, particularly in creating controlled spaces for interaction between youth under the watchful eye of community norms. Similarly, Siregar examined the Martandang ritual in the Toba Batak tradition and noted that indirect verbal cues and poetic exchanges were essential in fostering emotional connections without breaching *adat* (customary law). Yulinda & Maulida further supported this idea through their research on *ratéb meuseukat* in Aceh Besar, revealing how the traditional dance served as a platform for young people to express interest in one another while maintaining the boundaries of cultural decorum. The current study adds to this growing body of evidence by highlighting how the Bines Dance, within the Gayo context, functions in a similar yet distinct way, blending tradition and emotional expression within a highly structured and respected framework [25], [26].

From a policy perspective, this study underlines the importance of recognising the Bines Dance not only as a cultural artefact to be preserved through documentation and archiving, but as a living tradition with adaptive social functions. Cultural preservation programs must therefore go beyond conserving costumes, choreography, or music. They should also support the social ecosystems in which these traditions thrive by funding local festivals, creating training spaces for youth, and promoting intergenerational transmission of oral traditions. Additionally, integrating digital platforms to archive and share performances could allow the Bines Dance to adapt to contemporary modes of communication while preserving its core values. Such initiatives would ensure the dance remains relevant to today's youth without losing its cultural significance.

Future research directions may include comparative analyses with other ethnic matchmaking dances in Indonesia, such as *Lengger Lanang* in Banyumas or *Cakalele* in

Maluku, to explore how various communities use dance as a socially acceptable channel for courtship. Investigating the perspectives of young men (*pesaman*)—their interpretations, intentions, and emotional responses to the *seberu*'s verses—would also offer a more balanced understanding of the gendered dimensions of this cultural interaction. Moreover, as digital technology increasingly intersects with traditional culture, studies could explore how online communication continues or transforms these culturally rooted courtships, particularly in communities where migration and modernisation are prevalent.

In essence, the Bines Dance exemplifies how traditional art forms can sustain social relevance by adapting their functions to meet the community's evolving needs, especially among the youth. Its role in mediating courtship within the framework of Gayo adat reveals the fluid boundaries between performance, identity, and relational development. Therefore, acknowledging and supporting these multifunctional aspects is essential for preserving tradition and nurturing social cohesion in culturally grounded yet modernising societies.

4. CONCLUSION

The Bines Dance, as revealed through a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews with cultural actors, dancers, and couples who married through this tradition, is far more than a cultural performance—it embodies a dynamic system of social interaction rooted in the values of the Gayo community. Functioning within the Bejamu Saman procession, the Bines Dance serves as a symbolic and indirect communication medium that enables individuals, especially youth, to build socially acceptable connections. The poetic rhymes expressed by female dancers (*seberu*) and the traditional responses by young men (*nyucuk*) illustrate how the dance facilitates initial attraction and relational development within the boundaries of customary norms.

Notably, the study emphasises that the Bines Dance is a site of tradition and transformation. While preserving ancestral values, it also accommodates contemporary modes of interaction—such as digital communication—without losing cultural integrity. This underscores the adaptability of indigenous traditions in responding to modern social changes.

In practical terms, these findings highlight the potential of traditional arts like the Bines Dance to be integrated into cultural preservation and community development programs. Local governments and cultural institutions are encouraged to support such traditions as heritage and living systems that contribute to social cohesion and identity formation.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies with similar matchmaking traditions in other ethnic groups, explore male perspectives and experiences within the Bines Dance, and examine the impact of digital platforms on the evolution of this cultural practice.

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