

# Social Status of Malay Woman Viewed from Malay Traditional Clothing

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**Keywords:** Songket, Malay Women, Social Status.

**Abstract:** This article examines the social status of Malay women when using their traditional Malay clothes especially 'songket'. The objective is to explore the social meaning of traditional 'songket' as a part of the most important clothes of Malay society especially for Malay women. As a part of traditional clothing, songket has a special meaning to the user especially for women. The results show that every way of using songket by Malay women has some social meaning then we will be able to know the status of a Malay woman among others whether the woman is still virgin, already has a husband, widow, or wife of officials.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Every human being has information conveyed through verbal or non-verbal language, the process of delivering this information is called communication. Communication is a process of delivering information (messages, ideas, ideas) from one party to another (Ilteljhhon and Foss, 2009: 740). Both types of communication have the same role that is to convey a message, idea, or a specific idea for people to know and understand. Verbal communication is usually done through oral or written. Verbal communication is the most widely used communication community in communicating between humans. Through words, language users express their feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas, or intentions, convey facts, data, and information and explain it, exchange feelings and thoughts, debate, and quarrel. In verbal communication that language plays an important role, this communication tends to use words - words, both orally and in writing (Hardjana, 2003: 22).

Non-verbal communication is usually done outside of oral and written like gestures, postures, facial expressions, symbolic outfits, similar cues, and symptoms. Non-verbal communication is a communication activity that uses sign language or silent language (Arni, 2001: 139), from both types of

communications then the message is communicated by colors in songket is a non-verbal language. According to Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter in Mulyana (2012: 343) non-verbal communication includes all stimuli (except verbal stimuli) in a communication setting produced by individuals and the use of the environment by individuals who have a potential message value for the sender or recipients, so this definition includes intentional, unintentional behavior as part of the whole communication event, we send a lot of non-verbal messages without realizing that those messages are meaningful to others.

In Malay culture it turns out that non-verbal language is also used that is by looking at the clothes worn by women. Then we will know the meaning of women's status in their society through how they wear the clothes especially using songket. Then, the manifestation of that is classified with an artificial message, this message is usually expressed through the appearance-body, clothing, and cosmetics.

The Malay community is known as a rich society by cultural treasures (Effendi, 2004: 3). One of the elements of Malay culture is the Malay Songket. The color on the songket cloth has its own meaning on the wearer by looking at the color then we will know what the social status of the wearer. But in addition to the color it turns out how to wear songket also has a meaning to the wearer specially for women.

As a woman, not separated in the name of beauty, this is what makes men become fascinated with women, not infrequently the men often seduce, glance and even trying to have a woman who has not been recognized because it was already fascinated by the beauty of a woman, then for it through the way a woman put her clothes on implied the meaning of social status a woman in Malay society.

## 2 METHODS

In this article, a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis method (Miles & Huberman, 1994, Moleong, 2014) will be used. In order to perform the study, the research sites has been done in North Sumatera especially in Deli Malay Kingdom and Serdang Malay Kingdom society. This area was chosen because there are still many Malay people who wear *songket* Malay especially during custom ceremonies.

As a field research, this article have some resources as a key informant and we choose the expert source and the society of the Malay culture especially women for the data and the men for the interpretation toward the women. The data in the form of interviews, observations, and documentation during the field research. The data in the form of notes, recordings, and photos that will then be analyzed in order to answer the problem.

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results will be discussed in 3 subsections, they are *songket* as Malay Society fabrics, Malay woman wearing a *songket*, and social interaction of Malay woman.

### 3.1 Songket as Malay Society Fabrics

Malay *songket* cloth is a woven fabric produced and bolted by the Malay community. The word '*songket*' derived from the term '*sungkit*' in Malay and Indonesian, which means "hook" or "gouge". This is related to the way of making *songket*, hook and take a dash of woven cloth, and then tuck a gold thread (Marianti and Istiharini, 2013: 17).

One of the areas that produce *songket* is Padang Genting Village in Batubara Regency of North Sumatra, Indonesia, although actually in Batubara Regency there are some points producing *songket*.

But in Padang Genting Village, the activity of weaving Malay *songket* is every day running active.

*Songket* fabric is indigeneous knowledge or local intelligence (local genius) that has local wisdom, Sibarani (2012: 122) states that Local Wisdom is a Local Intelligence or indigenous knowledge derived from the noble values of cultural traditions to regulate the order of society life in order to achieve social progress both in the creation of peace and improving the welfare of the community.

*Songket* is one of the hallmark of Malay culture so that *songket* cloth is so famous among the Malay people, besides having a high quality it turns out that the Malay *songket* fabric has a very high price so that the *songket* fabric becomes a very prestige cloth and symbolizes the luxury for the wearer. It also often referred to as beauty queen *songket* for the beauty and luxury that emanated from the *songket*.

Besides the cultural identity and luxury embedded in *songket*, it has a high sacredness in the Malay culture. *Songket* usually used on traditional occasions, such as at the circumcision, the ceremony for-took off and welcomed-the hajj, traditional ceremonies such as ceremony for feting the sea (*menjamu laut*), children's giving name event (*menabalkan nama bayi*), and events related to culture. *Songket* play as an important role in the customary event in the Malay community.

The use of *songket* in cultural activities is regarded as an obligation although there is no written rule. People usually wearing *songket* must also wear Malay other main clothes such as china scissors cloth (*baju gunting china*) or *teluk belanga*. The colour of the clothes must be adjusted with the colour of the *songket*.

Basically, wearing *songket* depending on the wearer in Malay society. This proves that the Malay *songket* indeed can not be separated from Malay culture so it has a special position for the Malay community. In the past, *songket* has a color that was not too varied as it is today because in the first *songket* usually woven specifically for the Malay royal family or the noble family. This because the price of *songket* was so expensive. The color of *songket* has a strong meaning for Malay society especially in the District of Batubara at this time. Even the color of yellow, blue, green and black should not be used by indiscriminate people because it has its own meaning of the color. Besides that, the color of the *songket* has its own authority that can not be contested by society because it into an unwritten, yet traditionally entrenched and become cultural.

Furthermore, to be used as a fashion or clothing, *songket* has a beautiful motive with many variety of shapes. It also has a color that has implied meaning for the wearer. Each color gives separate message to other people. Thus, by seeing its color alone it will be caught the social class of the wearer, then when viewed from the way of wearing *songket* clothing in women, it also has an implied meaning that show the wearer status. In addition to beautiful *songket* also has several components or structures that make it into one unity as for the *songket* fabric structure that are:

- Body cloth
- Head cloth
- Foot cloth
- Head clamps
- Soil fabrics
- Peak cloth
- Clamp body fabric
- Peak legs
- Kendik

From those structure of the *songket* cloth that needs to be considered in analyzing the meaning of *songket* wearer by women is the head cloth that worn by woman. The head cloth is a part of the *songket* motif that is the distinctive mark of the *songket* itself. If we pay attention with the head on the *songket* when a woman wear it, then we know about social status of the woman.

### 3.2 Malay Woman Wearing a Songket

How to use *songket* by women can not be done haphazardly because it implies the status of women who wear the *songket*. Status of the Malay woman can be determined by looking at the way she put the *songket* on her body. We must pay attention to the head cloth of the *songket* then we know the status of the woman. The ways of using the *songket* also determined by the position of the head cloth. There are four positions of the head cloth when Malay woman wear a *songket*. In the front, in the back, in the right and in the left. Each position indicates meaning for the woman who wear it.

First, position of the head cloth at the back or behind the waist of the woman. In this position, the women who use the head cloth at behind are ordinary women who wear it at traditional ceremonies. In this condition, the woman usually bring her child or holding a child and some are not carrying children but using a *songket* clothing with head position *songket* in behind. If she doesn't bring her child and come to ceremony alone it doesn't mean that she is a single woman. It means that he

woman who use the *songket* with position of the head cloth at behind, is a married woman. This illustrates that there is no limit must have a child or not but the very important is the status of the woman has shown no longer single or she already has a husband.

Beside that, when Malay woman use head cloth at behind shows that he already gave a sign he already has a husband, bring a child, this proves that the woman already has a husband while who has not brought a child but to dress with head *songket* position in the back is still a wife, this may still newly married or still have not in gifted children but by wearing clothing like that then indirectly the woman gives a message to people not to disturb him especially to young singles who are looking for a partner.

Second, position of the head cloth in the front. In this position, the woman who use *songket* with the head cloth in front of her belly is ordinary women who wear *songket* usually woman around the age of a dozen years. Most of these women are young and tend to wear still under the age of 20 years and not carrying or carrying a child. As we can see from the fabric motif that indicates the color of *songket* so varied. On this position symbolizing the openness of receiving and welcoming that any man who will approach will be welcome because they have no one to have. Therefore, it shows that the woman status is a girl or have not a husband yet. The position in the front shows openness in welcoming men who want to apply.

Third, position of the head cloth in the left. A woman who wears a *songket* at a traditional ceremony with variations which carrying a small child or some are not bringing the child but using the *songket* with the head cloth position *songket* in the left illustrates that there is no limit should have a child and it is not important the status of the woman was married. This means that the woman had been married and has become a widow of the message conveyed through this symbol hinted to the men who want to propose her and so that the man doesn't have the wrong choice dan thingking because she was a widow.

The position on the left shows that she was alone and already widowed, so for the man who wanted to applying for the woman no longer need to ask the status of the woman because it has been given through the position of the head cloth of the *songket*.

Fourth, position of the head cloth in the right. The woman who wears it at traditional ceremonies are usually always in the forefront than others because women who use clothing head position

songket in the right very rarely in use by society, only certain people. This indicates the social status of the woman is not seen from the status she is married or not but the title that he embodies as the distinction in general public. The songket usually have various patterns of motifs and colors, not infrequently, the motifs are in full motive so it looks luxurious and is certainly expensive. This means that the woman is a woman who is not arbitrary woman officer may be the wife of the sub-district head or the wife of the regent or nobleman. With this social status, the woman have power, awareness, and glory so that a proper wife of an official.

### 3.3 Social Interaction of Malay Woman

Based on wearing of head cloth of songket by Malay women, shows that the power of Malay culture still have an effect especially with social interaction between Malay own society and the outsider. According to the position of head cloth of songket weared by Malay woman shows all the meaning of Malay women interaction to social and their environment. It will be easy to distinguish which woman is still girl and where woman already have husband so that no mistake in doing social interaction in Malay culture.

Nowadays, there are many Malay people do not know about the function of songket position weared by woman. Hence, many Malay people especially men misrecognize and misunderstanding about women's social status from their own society. Therefore, it disturb the social interaction between man and woman in Malay culture. Yet, it stil not too late to reintroduce the information of social interaction between man and woman in Malay society viewed from songket usage by Malay women.

## 4 CONCLUSION

The Malay people used to use songket as a clothing material. In the Malay society, clothing does not merely serve to protect the body from heat and cold, but also has a function as an indicator of identity, cultural beauty, social strata, indigenous sign and ideology with the function, songket is not only worth pragmatic, but also worth of custom, culture, and aesthetics.

This is a part of the local wisdom that must be maintained so that it continues to survive and become a cultural imperative of value. Similarly, the meaning contained in songket wick used by Malay

women shows that there is wisdom in it, so that there is a limit always in social interaction between man and women and it is appropriate with the Islam precept. This condition is never set in written rules but has become something that is agreed and understood by the Malay community in general, but in the middle of the increasingly advanced globalization and the influence of technology that increasingly dragging humans towards postmodernism, finally culture like the meaning of songket usage by Malay women is not too late in the attention and should be preserve from now. This become a challenge of the era in preserving the Malay culture so that the Malay words "*The Malay will not disappear on the earth*" is not just a merely a jargon.

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