SYMBOLIC MESSAGES OF KERAWANG GAYO’S TRADITIONAL PATTERNS

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Abstract

The present study aimed to analyze the meaning of symbolic messages found in the Kerawang Gayo's traditional patterns and their applications into Gayo’s traditional clothing. The present study also discusses efforts needed to preserve Kerawang Gayo. The present research applied a historical and ethnographic approach. Data was collected through the processes of documentation, observations and interviews. The results of present study show 14 Kerawang Gayo’s patterns; (1) Tapak Sleman (Footprint of Sulaiman), (2) Tali Puter Tige (Rope Twisted Third Times) (3) Mata ni Lao (sun), (4) Pucuk ni Tuis (Bamboo Sprout), (5) Emun Berkunē (Fixed Clouds), (6) Emun Berangkat (Walking Clouds), (7) Peger (Fence), (8) Emun Beriring (Lining Clouds) (9) Rante (Chain) (10) Tali Mestike (Mustika’s Rope) (11) Tekukur (Measurement) (12) Cucuk Pengong (Circle) (13) Emun Mupesir (Splitting Cloud), (14) Sarak Opat (Four Elements In One Integrated Bond). The use of specific patterns and the colors of Gayo’s patterns depend on the wearer’s position in the society as Kerawang Gayo is regarded as a sacred item for people in Aceh.

Keywords: Kerawang Gayo’s patterns, Gayo’s culture, meaning, symbolic message.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gayo’s (one of traditional tribes in Aceh, Indonesia) community has several prominent traditional arts such as Kerawang Gayo (traditional clothing) which is known for its distinctive patterns. In regards of this, Kerawang Gayo can be defined as an art of decorating cloth which can be performed by both women and men. Kerawang Gayo is made by piercing the fabric back and forth using needles...
In addition, Kerawang Gayo refers to Gayo’s carving patterns in the province of Aceh (Ferawati, 2013, p. 29). Furthermore, the patterns in Kerawang are symbols of ideas and forms of communications which have become a part of legacy of Gayo’s people for their next generation. The patterns in Kerawang Gayo are not random ones. Traditionally, Kerawang Gayo contains philosophy and meaning concerning the joint aspects of life and human social order, which are identical based on the phenomena of the universe and other objects born spontaneously without conformity. (Joni, 2017, p. 51).

The patterns in Kerawang Gayo cover the instructions, rules (manners), hopes, and advice of life. Traditionally, these patterns are used to identify people’s social statuses. In addition, Gayo’s traditional values are symbolized in Kerawang Gayo’ patterns and consist of traditional and cultural values. It can be said that Kerawang Gayo has a deep meaning for Aceh’s people. Due to its importance, understanding the symbolic meaning behind Kerawang Gayo’s patterns seems imperative. The present study aims to analyze the symbolic meaning of Kerawang Gayo’s patterns.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Kerawang Gayo

Kerawang Gayo can be symbolized as a beauty of jewelry that contains philosophy and meaning concerning aspects of the behavior of the joints of life and human social order, which are identical based on the phenomena of the universe and other objects born spontaneously without conformity. (Joni, 2017, p. 41). Initially, Kerawang Gayo only had five patterns. Periodically, the patterns and the philosophies behind them also develop. Following are some patterns and philosophies of Kerawang Gayo:

a. Tapak Sleman. A philosophy behind this pattern is “Ku langit jerak Ilang, ku bumi ku atu ampar dan I uken telege pitu, I toa pitu kuala” which means some problems need to be handled completely in a wise manner.

b. Tali Piter Tige. A philosophy behind this pattern is “Edung bertetunung
“tali puter tige” which means everyone should support honest jobs and become righteous people.

c. **Mata ni Lao.** A philosophy behind this pattern is Mupestak pejer, “Mubiner mata ni lao” which means being grateful as a source of all creatures and expresses a relationship between The creator and human beings.

d. **Pucuk ni Tuis.** A philosophy behind this pattern is “Kucak berkul konot bernaru, harus berwajib sinte berluah” which means a motivation to educate the next generation for future leadership.

e. **Emun Berkunê.** A philosophy behind this pattern is “Keramat mapakat behu bededele, Terus lagu gelas bullet lagu omut” which symbolizes a democracy in finding truth to take decision and conduct responsibly.

### 2.2 Acculturation

Society’ acculturation and enculturation is a collection of individuals who have distinctive characteristics with a variety of ethnicities, races, cultures, and religions. Each community group has a different lifestyle. As a social unit, each community group interacts with each other which allows cultural exchange to occur. In that process, every other community group then gave birth to a new cultural synthesis. Acculturation and enculturation explains the events of social interaction. In this regard, acculturation refers to a multidimensional system which consists of heritage-cultural and receiving-cultural practices, values, and identifications (Schwartz et al., 2010). In this sense, acculturation and enculturation can be conceptualized as a bilinear, multidimensional and context dependent cultural process (Yoon et al, 2020). The above points show the definition of acculturation.

On the other hand, enculturation is a process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next during an individual's life starting from family institutions, especially maternal figures. Enculturation refers to the process by which culture (culture) is transmitted
from one generation to the next. It is an ongoing process but certain performances have a very important role in this process. (Morissan, 2013, p. 476). The term enculturation as a concept can literally be matched with the meaning of the process of civilizing. Enculturation refers to the process by which culture (culture) is transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture is learned and not inherited. Culture is transmitted through the learning process, not through the genes of parents, groups, friends, schools, religious institutions, and government institutions are the main teachers in the field of culture. Enculturation occurs through them (Koentjaraningrat 1986, p. 233). It can be said that the process of enculturation happens when a culture is transmitted from one generation to others.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study applies a historical and ethnographic approach to analyze Kerawang Gayo’s patterns as its research subjects. In this regard, the present research will analyze the phenomena through observations, interviews and documentation. The key informants for the present study are two researchers of Gayo’ culture.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gayo is one of the oldest tribes in Indonesia which resides in a remote area of Aceh. They created many forms of cultural heritages such as traditional dance, music, carving, and clothing. Kerawang Gayo is one of examples of their traditional clothings. Periodically, the patterns in Kerawang Gayo develops into 14 main patterns. Following are the patterns and symbolic messages behind them:
Figure 1. Sulaiman’ footprints
Figure 2. Rope twisted third times

Figure 3. Sun
Figure 4. Bamboo sprout

Figure 5. Fixed clouds
Figure 6. Walking clouds

Figure 7. Fence
Figure 8. Lining clouds
Each color and pattern of Kerawang Gayo has its own meaning. The thing that distinguishes traditional clothes from one area from another are the colors and patterns found in traditional clothes. Based on the interviews with the key informants, for the background colors, Kerawang Gayo uses item (black), while for the patterns it uses a mixture of ilang (red), putih (white), hijau (green) and kuning (yellow). These colors show the identities of the wearers. Yellow is used by royals, white is used by religious leaders, and red is used by the elders.
The green symbolizes the fertility and black is the color of people.

In addition to social values, Kerawang Gayo has its cultural values. Firstly, it has a sacred value besides a piece of clothing to cover bodies. It also shows the social status of the wearers. Secondly, it has a ritual value. Kerawang Gayo is used for ritual purposes and each pattern should be used based on their symbolic meaning.

**Preserving Kerawang Gayo**

The development of Kerawang Gayo has gone to a commendable feat based on the interviews with the key informants. It can be seen from the developments of Kerawang Gayo’s traditional patterns which still maintain its characteristics as a traditional item of Gayo people. In addition, Kerawang Gayo is not only used for clothings but also curtains, bags, wallets, key chains, caps, prayer mats and else. The uses may be more diverse in the near future. Those efforts can help preserving Kerawang Gayo for the future generations of Gayo people as described by the key informants.

Nevertheless, more efforts are needed to preserve the existence of Kerawang Gayo. First, Kerawang Gayo needs to be introduced more in national and international events. Second, the philosophical values of Kerawang Gayo need to be discussed by Gayo people. By doing that, the future generations may be more familiar with Kerawang Gayo. Next, there should be a regional law which demand everyone in Aceh to wear Kerawang Gayo in specific times such as what has been done to Batik (traditional Javanese clothing) in certain areas in central Java.
5. Conclusion

Kerawang Gayo is a traditional clothing which has unique patterns and philosophical values in each pattern. The present study shows 14 traditional patterns of Kerawang Gayo. The colors and patterns of Kerawang Gayo symbolize the position of its wearers in society and should be worn accordingly since it has cultural and ritual values. In order to preserve Kerawang Gayo, more efforts are needed so that the future generations will be more familiar with the item and make efforts to preserve it as well.

References


