

Conference Paper

Traces of Batik Rifa'iyah and the Women

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Abstract

This study uses historical considerations and observation methods. The aim of the study is to analyse the history of batik Rifa'iyah and the women as the driving force behind production. Research respondents are the women involved in batik activities. The data is collected via observations and evaluated using descriptive analysis. Batik Rifa'iyah has experienced ups and downs in popularity from the beginning of its growth and development in the 1800s to the present. Batik Rifa'iyah had its heyday around 1955-1965 when the government proclaimed a policy demanding the use of domestic textile products. The establishment of batik cooperatives had a significant impact on batik centers in the Pekalongan region, including batik Rifa'iyah. Women of Rifa'iyah played an important role in the growth and the development of batik Rifa'iyah. Batik Rifa'iyah's regeneration is a fundamental problem now because the younger generation is not interested in preserving the tradition of batik by singing *zikir* and *selawat* (Islamic prayer). Based on the results of observations, the data obtained show that batik Rifa'iyah still exists in the midst of competition in the textile industry in the Pekalongan region. Therefore, the local government is advised to provide incentives for the younger generation to consider making batik as a career option.

Keywords: batik Rifa'iyah, women, history.

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1. Introduction

Batik is one type of textile artwork that is owned by almost all regions in Indonesia such as Pekalongan, Lasem, Cirebon, and others. Different batik pattern from each region characterizes the batik. Batik Cirebon is famous for its mega cloudy motifs. Batik Pekalongan is famous for its morning afternoon and the three countries motifs. Batang is an area adjacent to Pekalongan which also has a batik motif or pattern that is its trademark. Batang is famous for its batik patterns produced by a group of people who adhere to the Rifa'iyah order. The Batang people call this batik motif as batik Rifa'iyah. The Rifa'iyah have made at least 24 batik motifs. Batik Pelo Ati motif becomes the original motif created by batik Rifa'iyah makers.

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Batik in the Rifa'iyah not only produces works of art but also becomes an inseparable part of religious rituals. When making batik, batik makers do *zikir* and *selawat* addressed to God as the creator and the ruler of the universe. Women are the figures behind the batik activity

in the Rifa'iyah. Rifa'iyah women are not only housewives but also workers. Batik activity in the Rifa'iyah community is suspected to have started since 1885. This condition is certainly interesting to study because on one hand women at that time were mostly housewives or working in the non-industrial agriculture sector. Rifa'iyah women in their time were actively involved in the industrial sector together with the growth and development of batik in the Pekalongan region.

Rifa'iyah is a *tarekat* (ways or rules of life in religion or mysticism) established by KH. Ahmad Rifai in the Batang area of Central Java. This *tarekat* group has different characteristics from other *tarekat* because it makes art activities as a part of the media of *dakwah* and worship. Art that is part of religious activities is *nadzam* (poetry), tambourine (music) and batik (painting on fabric). Rifa'iyah women are a group that drives batik activities while doing *zikir*. This activity has continued until now. Rifa'iyah women view making batik not merely producing works of art that can be sold to meet economic needs but to worship through *zikir*.

Rifa'iyah women are the figures behind the sustainability of batik Rifa'iyah motifs. Rifa'iyah women developed batik through a long process by learning in the district of Pekalongan. Rifa'iyah women learnt every day to make Pekalongan motifs and eventually developed their own motifs, the Rifa'iyah style. Rifa'iyah women were able to develop different motifs from batik Pekalongan motifs. The development of batik Pekalongan motifs into batik Rifa'iyah certainly requires a process of transformation of knowledge and intelligence from the batik makers. The motifs that already exist in batik Pekalongan then distilled again into batik that has a different pattern from batik Pekalongan. Rifa'iyah women later called it batik Rifa'iyah.

Rifa'iyah women, both directly and indirectly, have created something different from the original of batik Pekalongan motif. Batik Rifa'iyah is a modification of batik Pekalongan. Thus, Rifa'iyah women have creativity and are given a role at the social level to develop. The role given, domestic work, that is working in the house to make batik does not mean to hinder the thinking of Rifa'iyah women. Based on this, this study aims to analyze the role of women in the development of batik Rifa'iyah to the present. Rifa'iyah women become one of the driving forces of the economy not only in their communities but also in the Pekalongan - Batang region in general. The community is familiar with the batik Rifa'iyah motif besides batik Pekalongan motif and batik Batang motif. The

development of batik Rifa'iyah is inseparable from the role of women. The history of batik Rifa'iyah traces side by side with Rifa'iyah women as the main actors in batik activities. Based on this, it is necessary to trace the historical role of women in the growth and development of batik Rifa'iyah.

2. Theoretical Framework

Studies on women from various perspectives have been carried out by many experts from the aspects of sociology, anthropology, and psychology. The study is also conducted on the role of women in all professional fields. The figure of women in the cultural treasures in Indonesia is quite interesting to study. This victory is often caused by a paradox both due to customs and stereotypes carried out by some people. Fakh (2004, p. 21) states that gender identity is strongly influenced by determinative, very varied, such as cultural values, traditions, understanding of religious teachings, social structures, and political systems. Discrimination against women is complex enough that it requires intervention on all sides to ensure equality of women according to their conditions. Raho (2016, p. 212) says that gender is a trait or peculiarity associated with each sex whether as male or female. So if the gender perspective is often viewed from the physical aspect as a basis for distinguishing the type of work performed. In society there is still this perspective so as to distinguish the roles and occupations between men and women.

Sadli (2010, p.27) argues that gender identity is a definition of a person as a woman or man, which is a complex interaction between biological conditions as a woman or a man. This shows that men and women are aware of their sex. This awareness has an impact on self- concept to determine its future. In certain cultures in society, women are placed higher than men. Minang community bloodline is determined from the mother not from father line. Minang people adhere to matriarchal not patriarchal system. This shows that the pattern of relations based on gender is more influenced by culture. Culture in a community determines the type of work done by women or men. Raho (2016, p.221) states that this stratification based on gender is evident in the fact that men are involved in jobs that contain power while women are involved in jobs that do not require physical strength or power. This statement in certain periods can be considered as truth but at some other periods considered as an error.

In the Rifaiyah, women are placed in the domestic environment but are still given a role to work. Making Batik is a type of work that is not only related to creativity, economics, but also self-actualization of women to be able to work in accordance with

the conditions of their times. Rifa'iyah women are an important and contemplated part of the social structure. Raho (2016, p.68) states that social structure also means patterns that must be followed in behavior so that society as a whole can survive. Structure means elements or components which are more or less fixed enough to make something stand or survive as a whole.

Women in traditional societies have a role in social structures which is to maintain traditional patterns. Women in traditional societies often occupy positions of respect in social relations. The profession of being a bride, for example, is a position taken by women. In this position women are highly respected by the community because they have expertise in bridal makeup but are also considered to have supernatural powers. The bride who is made up will look more beautiful than usual because of the touch of makeup on her. Making batik as a profession is also taken by women. This profession requires perseverance and thoroughness to produce admirable batik works.

Batik does not only appear as an object but also has an aura because when the process is carried out it is accompanied by prayers. Batik Rifa'iyah is currently still being produced. Batik Rifa'iyah is one of the motifs that contributes to the progress of the batik industry in the Pekalongan region.

Batik cloth as a result of culture always follows the development of the times so that it remains sustainable until today. Batik motifs and fabric materials are tailored to the needs of the community. Likewise, batik cloth is changing in every movement of social change. Koentjaraningrat (1982:193) quotes Fortes's statement about social structure as stating that social structure should not be imagined as silent; social structure is always alive, and the arena is also moving. But there are three kinds of movements, namely; (1) moving because of a relationship is an activity that takes place in space, time and duration; (2) moving in the sense of continuity of social structure in time space; and (3) moving in the process of growth of social structures. Changes in social structure have an influence on changes in the existing arts system in society. Changes occur mainly in the function of the art itself. In the past there were several types of clothing that functioned as a religious system, but now due to the change in social structure clothing functioned as everyday clothing.

Batik cloth as a cultural artifact can also be used as a value in certain groups. These values can also be a means of communication between one group and another. When an official or other person using batik cloth visiting a boarding school, it is a form of communication and appreciation for the value of the traditions that the person adheres to. Batik cloth can melt the atmosphere between one group and another. In this connection Martin and Thomas (in Sambas, 2016: 180-181) state that there are

two main concepts that characterize intercultural communication, namely the concept of culture and communication. The relationship between the two is very complex. Culture influences communication and in turn communication determines creating and maintaining the cultural reality of the community or cultural group. Thus to be able to establish communication through the culture of both parties mutually uphold the cultural values that apply to each group. Respect for a particular group's culture can be communicated through the attributes or symbols possessed by the group.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a naturalistic paradigm with a historical approach. The purpose of this research is to describe the history of the role of Rifa'iyah women in the growth and development of batik. The research method uses observation. Respondents in the research are women in the Rifa'iyah group. Interviews and observation are used in data collection. Descriptive analytic method is used in data analysis.

4. Discussion and Results

The development and growth of batik Pekalongan does not stand alone but along with the development of batik Rifa'iyah motif. This batik motif was developed by the Rifa'iyah in the Kalipucang region, Batang regency. Batik Rifa'iyah motif has distinctive color because it is different from the motifs developed in the Pekalongan region or often referred to as the batik Pekalongan motif. These two batik motifs have similarities and differences as well. Batik Rifa'iyah can be said to be the result of the development of the creativity of women in the Rifa'iyah community. At that time many Rifa'iyah women learnt how to make batik in the Pekajangan area. Batik Pekalongan motif was mastered very well. Furthermore, Rifa'iyah women modified these motifs by including new motifs in accordance with the philosophical values of the *tarekat* of KH Ahmad Rifai. It was the first generation to create batik motifs. The motif is an acculturation of the Pekalongan motif with motifs interpreted from the teachings of the Rifa'iyah *tarekat* such as *pelo ati* motifs that describe the contents of the heart and *ampelo* of living things (chicken). This motif conveys that in the organs of the body, the good and the bad meet. When you eat something good it will generate more goodness, on the other hand, when you eat something bad it will generate the badness. Living things are required to always eat well, which is lawful. That is the meaning conveyed in the *pelo ati* motif. The following are some of batik Rifa'iyah motifs:



Figure 1: Motif *Pelo Ati* Doc. Writer



Figure 2: Motif *Gemblong Sairis* Doc. Writer



Figure 3: Motif *Dlorong* Doc. Writer

Every batik motif has a story of value of wisdom contained in it. The role and position of women as batik makers have a central position. Women are the actors and creators of the batik Rifa'iyah motif. Women as in the Javanese community in general do domestic work or at home. Making Batik is one form of self-actualization of Rifa'iyah women. Making batik is a self-expression of economic life on the one hand and religious life on the other. Rifa'iyah women in making batik have ritual namely *zikir* based on the teachings of KH Ahmad Rifai. Rifa'iyah women do batik activities as a leisure time after completing household chores. Women are the most meritorious figure towards



Figure 4: Motif *Nyah Pratin* Doc. Writer



Figure 5: Motif *Lancur* Doc. Writer



Figure 6: Motif *Kota Kitir* Doc. Writer

the preservation of the batik Rifa'iyah motif. Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted, the data show as follows. Rifa'iyah women have an important role in the social structure of both the *tarekat* and the economic aspect of society. This position is given to women through real business and economic movements. Rifa'iyah women are still permitted to work but with a type of work that does not leave the house too long. Batik business is one of the choices given to women. Batik for Rifa'iyah is an activity carried out by women on the sidelines of time both while waiting for agricultural



Figure 7: Motif *Ila Ili* Doc. Writer

products and to fill leisure time. The process of making batik is so long done by Rifa'iyah women in Kalipucang Wetan, starting from drawing, giving the night, coloring, to fading the night (*pelorodan*).

Ancient techniques in making batik are still carried out by batik Rifa'iyah women in Kalipucang Wetan, including cotton cloth (white cloth) is not directly drawn but soaked first with peanut oil (*kethelan*) for 3 to 5 days. In addition to peanut oil, you can also use palm oil, castor oil or nyamplung oil. This is done so that the waxing and coloring can be easily done in the batik process. The process of making batik from beginning to end with many stages within a period of three to eight months for a sheet of classic batik cloth is carried out alone by Rifa'iyah women. This ability is rarely found in the batik process elsewhere. The process of making batik has now been affected by the rationalization that is so strong from the flow of modernization so that making batik becomes a work that has been divided (division of labor), each process or final stage has its own specialization (interview with MJA Nashir, 30 November 2017).

Rifa'iyah women play an important role in realizing a piece of batik cloth, starting from making batik, sagging, to becoming cloth. Men usually only help providing natural dyes taken from the forest where they live. In the Rifa'iyah, batik is a hereditary culture which is passed on to girls. At present the problems with the sustainability of batik Rifa'iyah are increasingly lacking in the interest of Rifa'iyah young women to pursue batik products. Regeneration is not going well. The Rifa'iyah female generation prefers work outside of batik, such as being an employee, civil servant, or other type of work. Rifa'iyah young women also migrate to various cities. Batik Rifa'iyah craftsmen or makers are still dominated by middle-aged women with an age range of 40 to 60 years. The batik Rifa'iyah motif still retains the old motif. Rifa'iyah women view that old motifs have local wisdom values that cannot be replaced.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results of the study can be concluded as follows; (1) women are the main role of the development of batik Rifa'iyah motifs; (2) the batik Rifa'iyah motif is an acculturation of the batik Pekalongan motif with the interpretation of the Rifa'iyah tarekat teachings in the form of batik motifs; (3) there are 25 types of batik Rifa'iyah motifs to date; (4) the preservation efforts on Rifa'iyah batik are carried out with regeneration and education patterns. Regeneration is carried out on the Rifa'iyah community to the girls who live in the village of Kalipucang Wetan.

Moreover, children are introduced to batik activities since elementary school. Skills and knowledge of making batik is implemented in elementary, secondary and advanced schools in the city of Batang in the form of extracurricular lessons so that making batik as a form of culture can be possessed as a special skill.

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