

FROM A FEMALE TO A MALE TRADITION: THE BATIK SARONG FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PAMEKASAN, MADURA

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the shift in the meaning and use of batik sarongs, from a tradition initially associated with women to a more dominant identity used by men in Madurese society, particularly in the Pamekasan region. This change is analyzed through the perspective of the sociology of Islamic religious education, emphasizing the role of religion, local culture, and the educational process in shaping gender identity. This study uses a qualitative approach using interview, observation, and documentation study methods. The results show that batik sarongs are no longer only understood as a symbol of traditional culture, but also as a symbol of piety, modesty, and male religious identity, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools and Islamic education. This shift is influenced by the process of internalizing Islamic values through formal and non-formal education, as well as a reinterpretation of dress norms in Madurese society. This study concludes that the changing use of batik sarongs reflects the dynamic interaction between culture, religion, and education in shaping the construction of gender identity in Madurese Muslim society.

Keywords: Batik sarong, gender identity, sociology of Islamic religious education, Madurese culture, Pamekasan.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pergeseran makna dan penggunaan sarung batik dari tradisi yang awalnya lekat dengan perempuan menjadi identitas yang lebih dominan digunakan oleh laki-laki dalam masyarakat Madura, khususnya di wilayah Pamekasan. Perubahan ini dianalisis melalui perspektif sosiologi pendidikan agama Islam, dengan menekankan peran agama, budaya lokal, dan proses pendidikan dalam membentuk identitas gender. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode wawancara, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sarung batik tidak lagi hanya dipahami sebagai simbol budaya tradisional, tetapi juga sebagai simbol kesalehan, kesopanan, dan identitas religius laki-laki, terutama dalam konteks pesantren dan pendidikan Islam. Pergeseran ini dipengaruhi oleh proses internalisasi nilai-nilai Islam melalui pendidikan formal dan nonformal, serta penafsiran ulang terhadap norma berpakaian dalam masyarakat Madura. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa perubahan penggunaan sarung batik mencerminkan interaksi dinamis antara budaya, agama, dan pendidikan dalam membentuk konstruksi identitas gender di masyarakat Muslim Madura.

Kata kunci: *Sarung batik, identitas gender, Sosiologi pendidikan agama Islam, budaya Madura, Pamekasan.*

INTRODUCTION

Clothing is a cultural element that serves not only to cover the body but also as a symbol of social, cultural, and religious identity. In Indonesian society, particularly in Madura, the batik sarong holds a deeper meaning than mere everyday attire. The sarong not only reflects local traditions but is also closely tied to the values of modesty, honor, and the social structure that defines the community (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Historically, in several regions of Madura, including Pamekasan, traditional batik sarongs were more commonly worn by women in the past, particularly in domestic settings and during traditional ceremonies. The use of these sarongs was linked to the construction of femininity, norms of modesty, and evolving gender roles within traditional Madurese society. The sarong served as a symbol of social order that distinguished the roles of women and men in social and cultural spaces (Iwan Tirta, 2010).

However, as social changes have occurred, so too has a shift in the meaning and function of the batik sarong. In contemporary Madurese society, the sarong is now predominantly worn by men, particularly in religious activities, pesantren education, and Islamic social spaces. The phenomenon of the “kaum sarungan” has emerged as a strong new identity, in which the sarong is associated with piety, simplicity, and closeness to Islamic values (Muhajirin, 2020). This shift cannot be separated from the role of Islam in shaping the community’s dress patterns. Islam, as a value system, does not exist in a vacuum but is always in dialogue with local culture. From a sociology of religion perspective, religion functions as a framework of meaning that legitimizes social norms, including those related to dress and gender identity (Peter L. Berger, 1990). Thus, the shift in the use of the batik sarong from a symbol of femininity to a symbol of religious masculinity reflects a process of negotiation between Islamic teachings, local culture, and modern social dynamics.

In the context of Islamic religious education, particularly in Pamekasan, Madura—an area known for its Islamic boarding schools (pesantren)—the sarong serves not only as clothing but also as a medium for teaching values. The sarong teaches simplicity, discipline, etiquette, and Islamic identity, which are instilled through both formal and non-formal educational processes (Abdullah Nashih Ulwan, 2007). Therefore, the shift in the meaning of the batik sarong can also be interpreted as part of a socio-religious educational process that shapes the Muslim generation’s perspectives on gender, piety, and self-identity. Given this background, this study is important to understand how the shift in the use of the batik sarong—from a tradition associated with women to one dominated by men—can be analyzed through the perspective of the sociology of Islamic religious education, as well as how this change reflects the interaction between Madurese culture, Islamic teachings, and the process of religious education in Pamekasan.

The incorporation of Islamic values has further strengthened the function of the batik sarong as a symbol of women's piety. In the religious Madurese tradition, modest dress is understood as part of the practice of Islamic teachings. The batik sarong serves as a cultural medium bridging religious teachings and local culture (M. Quraish Shihab, 2017). From a sociology of religion perspective, the clothing practices of Madurese women demonstrate that religion does not exist in the abstract but is embodied in concrete cultural symbols, one of which is the batik sarong. This illustrates how Madurese women internalize religious values through their daily dress practices.

Socially, Madurese society has undergone significant changes in the structure of daily life. In the past, gender role divisions tended to be rigid, including in dress practices. The batik sarong worn by women served as a symbol of modesty, confinement to the domestic sphere, and family honor. However, with the advancement of education, social mobility, and changing gender roles, these cultural symbols have undergone adjustments (Kunaifi et al., 2025). Madura men subsequently adopted the sarong as a new social identity, particularly in public and religious settings. The sarong has become a symbol of maturity, piety, and a certain social status, especially among religious students and religious leaders (Huub de Jonge, 2011). This change demonstrates that clothing is not static but evolves in response to shifts in social relations and the construction of gender identities within society (Maulidin et al., 2024).

Religious factors play a dominant role in the shift in the use of batik sarongs. Islam in Madura is practiced not only as a belief system but also as a value system that shapes behavior, including dress. The sarong is viewed as a garment that embodies the principles of modesty (*ḥayā'*) and simplicity (*zuhd*) (Abdullah Nashih Ulwan, 2007). Through pesantren education and religious gatherings, these values are continuously instilled in men. The sarong has become an integral part of Islamic religious education, both symbolically and practically. From a sociology of religion perspective, religion functions as a framework of meaning that legitimizes social and cultural change, including changes in clothing symbols (Khomairoh & Muslifah, 2023).

Furthermore, interpretations of Islamic teachings that emphasize the principle of modesty over gender-based clothing categories have allowed the sarong to be widely accepted as men's attire without normative conflict. This process demonstrates how religious teachings can serve as a driving force for social change that adapts to local contexts (Mahmud, 2024). Both the community and religious leaders agree that the batik sarong has now undergone a transformation in meaning, becoming a symbol of religious identity for Madurese men. The sarong is not only worn during worship but also in daily life as a marker of morality and social ethics. This phenomenon aligns with the sociological perspective on religion, which states that religious symbols often emerge from the interaction between religious teachings and local culture (Sandy Al Fauzan et al., 2025).

Religious leaders also view the shift in the meaning of the batik sarong as the result of the internalization of Islamic values through pesantren education and religious study

circles. It is this process of religious education that has shifted the community's perspective on the sarong, transforming it from a symbol of traditional gender roles into a symbol of piety and Muslim identity (Triandika, 2021). Although the majority of views are positive, there is also a small segment of the community that views this change as a sign of the fading of the old traditions of Madurese women. However, religious leaders tend to see this as part of an inevitable cultural dynamic. As long as Islamic values and social ethics are upheld, changes in cultural symbols are considered legitimate and do not contradict religious teachings (Laily & Miftahur Roifah, 2024).

Thus, the shift in the function and meaning of the batik sarong in Pamekasan can be understood as the result of a negotiation between local culture, religious authorities, and Islamic educational practices. The views of the community and Islamic religious leaders in Pamekasan regarding this shift are generally adaptive and positive (Lulus Sugeng Triandika, 2022). The community views the sarong as a symbol of modesty and a flexible cultural identity, while religious leaders interpret it as a medium for moral education and a symbol of religious piety. This shift demonstrates that the batik sarong is not merely traditional clothing but a dynamic symbol continually shaped by the interaction between culture, religion, and Islamic education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical research design. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon of the shift in the use of batik sarongs from women to men, as well as its implications within the context of the Sociology of Islamic Religious Education. Qualitative research is used to understand the meanings behind social actions and cultural changes in society (Lexy J. Moleong, 2017). A sociological approach within Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is used to examine how these cultural changes are influenced by social interactions, religious structures, and education. The research was conducted in Pamekasan Regency, Madura, which is known as a center for batik sarong production and has a strong religious culture. The research subjects included: 1) users of batik sarongs (women and men), 2) religious figures (kiai, ustadz), Islamic Religious Education teachers, batik artisans, and Madurese community leaders.

Data Collection Techniques 1) Interviews: Interviews were conducted with various key informants, such as kiai and ustadz to explore religious perspectives, batik artisans regarding the transformation of cultural products, batik sarong users, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers regarding educational perspectives. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to obtain rich and meaningful data. 2) Observations were conducted during religious activities (congregational prayer, religious study sessions, tahlilan), traditional ceremonies, batik sarong production activities, and community clothing patterns in daily life (Sugiyono, 2018). Observations were used to examine how batik sarongs are used in real-world contexts.

The documents used included photographs and videos of batik sarong usage, local cultural archives, and articles or news reports regarding Madurese batik sarongs, as well as relevant Islamic religious education documents. 3) Data Analysis Techniques: Analysis employed data reduction and data presentation. “Thematic analysis allows researchers to trace patterns of meaning within the community’s social experiences.” Data validity was ensured through: source triangulation (religious figures, sarong users, artisans, teachers), methodological triangulation (interviews, observation, documentation), and member checking by reconfirming information with informants. This study was conducted in Pamekasan Regency, Madura, which is known as a region with strong Islamic traditions and Islamic boarding schools. The research subjects included: Islamic religious leaders (kiai, ustaz, pesantren directors), local residents (men and women), and current or former pesantren students. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which involves choosing informants considered to understand and be directly involved in the phenomenon under study (Sugiyono, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Madura batik sarongs, particularly those produced in Pamekasan Regency, have long held an important place in the lives of the local community. Sarongs are not merely garments but also symbols of identity, modesty, Islamic values, and social status. However, modernization, cultural commercialization, and the development of the creative industry have influenced changes in the function and meaning of Madura batik sarongs. These transformations have generated diverse perspectives among community members and religious leaders. Many perceive that Madura batik sarongs have become more widely recognized and have contributed to improving household economies.

The transformation of Madura batik sarongs into modern fashion products has increased sales and created new employment opportunities for batik artisans (Wahyudi, 2021). Factors supporting these positive perceptions include increased household income among batik artisans, renewed interest in batik among younger generations, and the growing recognition of batik sarongs as symbols of regional pride, particularly due to their diverse motifs.

This finding is consistent with an interview with Ustadz Wawan, an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher. According to him, from a social perspective, the current shift in the use of batik sarongs is natural because it primarily concerns differences in motifs and is generally accepted by society as long as modesty is maintained. He further explained that batik sarongs are part of a dynamic cultural tradition rather than a rigid one. Unlike the hijab and the *songkok*, which are specifically associated with women and men respectively, batik sarongs are not inherently gender-specific. From a religious perspective, there is no objection to wearing batik sarongs as long as their use does not contradict Islamic law. Whether worn during worship or outside religious activities, the essential requirement is that they properly cover the *aurat* (parts of the body that must be covered). However, if the manner of wearing the batik sarong violates Islamic teachings,

the legal ruling would differ (Ustadz Wawan, personal communication, November 10, 2025).

Nevertheless, some members of the community express concern that the philosophical meaning of Madura batik sarongs may gradually disappear due to excessive commercialization. As one respondent stated, *“Young people wear batik sarongs no longer for prayer or traditional ceremonies but merely as a fashion statement, causing their spiritual significance to slowly fade”* (Rofi', 2020).

Similarly, Islamic religious leaders generally argue that the changing function of batik sarongs is acceptable as long as it does not diminish the values of modesty and they continue to be used appropriately in religious practices. Batik sarongs may be worn as fashion items provided that, when used for prayer or religious activities, they still fulfill the ethical standards of Islamic dress (Rahman, 2017). Their perspectives emphasize two main principles: (1) the sarong remains an essential component of Madurese Muslim identity, and (2) modernization is regarded as part of *'urf* (accepted social custom) that does not conflict with Islamic law.

This view is supported by an interview with Lora Sholahuddin Dinil Amini, a young Islamic scholar, who explained that the changing use of batik sarongs should be understood within a broader social context. According to him, batik sarongs themselves are not gender-specific, as their distinctions lie primarily in design rather than in religious prescriptions. The Qur'an emphasizes that clothing should embody goodness, cover the *aurat*, and possess beauty. As stated in Surah Al-A'raf (7:26):

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُورِي سَوْءَكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ ءَايَاتِ
اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

Translation: *"O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your nakedness and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness—that is best. That is from the signs of Allah so that they may take heed."*

He further referred to Risalah al-Qushayriyyah (p. 135), where Imam Abu Ali al-Daqqaq stated: *"Dress as people dress."* This statement implies that any type of clothing is permissible as long as it is proper and does not contradict Islamic law. Therefore, contemporary batik sarongs, despite becoming fashionable, remain permissible within Islamic teachings (Ustadz Ahmad, personal communication, 2025).

From the perspective of Madura batik artisans, an interview with Mr. Sugiyanto revealed that they acknowledge significant changes in both the function and meaning of batik sarongs within society. As a traditional batik producer, he explained that Madura batik sarongs were once primarily worn as traditional attire during formal ceremonies and religious occasions. Today, however, they have evolved into everyday lifestyle products.

Previously, batik sarongs symbolized cultural heritage deeply rooted in traditional values and simplicity. Over time, however, they have increasingly been adopted as casual attire for both formal and informal occasions, influenced by more flexible fashion trends.

Younger generations now wear batik sarongs in a wide range of daily activities, both at home and in public, supported by innovative designs that are more modern and practical.

Despite this shift in meaning, Madura batik artisans remain committed to preserving the authenticity and quality of Madura batik as an important cultural heritage. The production process continues to prioritize traditional techniques and motifs while simultaneously introducing innovations that respond to evolving market preferences (Rahman & Kunaifi, 2022). According to the artisans, Madura batik sarongs represent not only clothing but also a symbol of cultural pride and national identity.

Furthermore, this transformation has created new opportunities to introduce Madura batik to broader segments of society, particularly younger generations, through creative designs that align with contemporary fashion trends. They hope that although the function and meaning of batik sarongs continue to evolve, they will remain appreciated as cultural products possessing rich historical and artistic value (Anonymous, 2025).

Conversely, some religious leaders believe that these functional transformations have gone too far, particularly when batik sarong motifs are applied to non-religious products such as handbags, outerwear, and decorative items. As Hosen (2019) observed, *“When sarong motifs are used to decorate inappropriate objects, the cultural value and dignity of the sarong as a symbol of piety may decline.”* Their concerns include the gradual loss of the sarong's spiritual significance, diminishing respect for traditional dress etiquette, and the erosion of its ritual function under the pressures of commercialization.

Overall, the findings indicate that community members and religious leaders in Pamekasan hold diverse perspectives regarding the changing function and meaning of Madura batik sarongs. Community members generally adopt a more flexible and pragmatic approach, whereas religious leaders emphasize ethical conduct, sacredness, and spiritual values. The transformation of batik sarongs is broadly accepted provided that it does not undermine the cultural and religious values that constitute their fundamental identity.

CONCLUSION

The shift in the function and users of batik sarongs—from women to men—in the Pamekasan subdistrict demonstrates that Madurese traditions are dynamic and continuously undergo a process of reconstruction in line with social, cultural, and religious developments. The batik sarong, which originally carried feminine symbolism and was often associated with women's religious and social roles, has now undergone a shift in meaning to become part of the identity of Madurese men in various activities, including religious and social events. From the perspective of the Sociology of Islamic Religious Education, this change not only reflects cultural adaptation but also demonstrates how religious values, education, and social structures interact to shape new patterns in community life. Religious education—whether in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) or formal schools—plays a crucial role in guiding how the community interprets traditions so that they remain consistent with Islamic ethics and values.

Meanwhile, religious leaders serve as mediators between local traditions and Islamic teachings in addressing these changes. Thus, the shift in the tradition of wearing batik sarongs is not merely a change in clothing style but a symbol of the Madurese people's socio-religious transformation, demonstrating their ability to adapt to modernity without abandoning the religious identity that has long served as their cultural foundation.

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