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The Sikerei Clothing Ornaments' Meanings in Mentawai Island: A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

This research explores the traditional clothing traditions of the Sikerei Mentawai, an indigenous community living in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia. Sikerei traditional clothing is mostly made from natural fibers such as tree bark (baiko), leaves, bird feathers, chicken feathers, and red kenikir flowers with red ashoka thread or wool woven together to create various decorative elements of sikerei clothing. Men often wear simple tongoro (baiko) made from tree bark, while women wear short skirts made from woven fiber or red cloth. Both men and women can also wear jara-jara (head bands) or red asoka flowers and various other accessories, such as lekkau bracelets, ngalau necklaces, which are made from natural materials. Sikerei traditional clothing is not only a cultural expression but also has a practical purpose. The lightweight and breathable nature of clothing helps the Sikerei people adapt to the tropical climate of the Mentawai Islands, while the use of natural materials reflects their close relationship with the environment and sustainable lifestyle. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore complex nuances and look beyond raw data to discover meaningful patterns of meaning. In qualitative research, the focus is on process and meaning, as explained by Creswell (2014). Saussure's theory of signs and signifiers is used to analyze the symbolism in traditional Sikerei clothing, which helps understand the meaning contained therein. The conclusion of this analysis is that the Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing is proof of the resilience and richness of Mentawai culture. This symbolizes a sikerei's strong connection with nature, spiritual beliefs, and commitment to preserving the traditions of the Mentawai Sikerei people. Sikerei traditional clothing is not only an expression of culture but also has a practical purpose, designed for comfort, durability and to suit their lifestyle. These conservation efforts highlight the importance of traditional clothing in maintaining cultural diversity and promoting a sense of belonging within the Mentawai community. Thus, the traditional clothing of the Mentawai Sikerei is not only a symbol of their identity but also a source of pride and a true and special cultural expression.

Keywords: Semiotics, Sikerei Clothing, Mentawai Island, Cultural Meaning, Symbolism

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I INTRODUCTION

According to Fromkin (2010) Linguistic knowledge is the general term for our understanding of language. As the scientific study of language, the framework or theoretical approaches that could be characterized as the scientific method in this example, the scientific method for human and social studies are also present in linguistics (Bussman, 2006). A general theory of language structure serves as the framework for systematic language analysis. In 1837, the term linguistics was first used in England scholars of linguistics (Saussure, 2012). The type of grammar commonly taught in schools before the advent of modern linguistics is called traditional grammar. The main weakness of this grammar is that the criteria used to define parts of speech are inconsistent (Baldi, 2012).

As already mentioned, semiotic analysis can be applied to linguistics. Thus, the anthropologist by analyzed the concept of anthropology based on Saussure's theories of semiotics and structural linguistics. Like Saussure, who argued that signs are perceived as natural thoughts and have conventional meanings, Lévi-Strauss argued that mental structures of which people are unaware underlie all acts of human (Saussure, 2012).

Further, humans live in this world are inseparable from one thing called a sign. Signs are means to display something to be understood by others. As social beings, humans engage in relationships and interactions in their own way with great diversity (Halliday and Webster, 2006). However, sometimes what is described in all its forms has not been able to be understood clearly by others. Signs are a communication tool that requires the same concept so that it can be understood. A sign is defined by Trask (2007) as "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity."

The subject of this study is the sign in form of traditional clothing from the people, the definition of sikerei is the person who is believed to have supernatural powers living in the Islands of West Sumatra. A Sikerei is enthroned through a special ceremony called *Tadek*. For the people, the word means knowledge, experience and skill in medicine and medicinal plants. A person who can empathize with the souls of people in the real and supernatural worlds. Because of these traits,

sikerei play a very important role in mentawai life. becomes a medicinal and spiritual figure and ceremonial leader in all traditional ceremonies or *puñen* (parties) of *Uma* (traditional homes of the Mentawai).

As the people who are believed to have high spiritual powers and closeness to ancestral spirits to cure various diseases, sikerei special abilities are not easy to learn, and there are many levels and trials to become a . He has to go through a lengthy process of gaining knowledge of medicinal ingredients, traditional rituals and rituals, and songs (*Urai Sikerei*). dancing (*turuk Sikerei*). The basic method of semiotics is asking what, how, and why something has the meaning that it now has, also applies to clothing. Clothing does not only function as a body cover and politeness but also functions as a non-verbal communication tool, because clothing contains symbols that have various meanings. Halliday and Webster (2006) argues that clothing is always understood, implicitly, as a special marker of a general who is characterized by the exterior (age, country, social class). in traditional clothes which are typical clothing of a region.

Traditional clothes are a culture result and symbol that marks the development of regions that have their own cultural characteristics. Traditional clothes are clothing that is used for generations which is one of the identities and can be proud of by most supporters of culture. The development of traditional clothes from time to time always changes, even though can occur slowly. This matter influenced by the development of fashion styles that develop in society. The various models, colors, and types of fabrics used in traditional clothes may be changed but do not get to eliminate the characteristics and meaning contained in the traditional clothes.

In traditional clothing, male sikerei (*sikerei simatteu*) are traditional leaders and shamans in Mentawai society. They have an important role in carrying out traditional ceremonies, connecting with ancestral spirits, and maintaining the security and welfare of the community. They also have the responsibility to maintain and preserve cultural traditions and teach spiritual knowledge to the younger generation. Then, in the function of social status, male sikerei often have a higher status in

society. They are traditional leaders and have authority in various community decisions.

Female sikerei (*Sikerei Sinanalep*) or *Jara-jara Sikerei*, have a special role in the field of traditional healing and knowledge of medicinal plants. They often act as shamanic healers who use their knowledge of medicinal plants to treat illnesses and injuries within the community.

They are also involved in religious ceremonies and play a role in teaching culture and spirituality to the younger generation. Then, in the function of social status, female sikerei despite their important role, *Jara-jara Sikerei* usually

have a slightly different social status compared to male sikerei. However, they are respected and considered as keepers of cultural and spiritual knowledge in society. Sikerei Clothing Relations in Mentawai Life was chosen because of the interest in the preservation of traditional clothing for the future generation against the globalization era as well as the semiotic analysis of Sikerei traditional clothing relation to people identity, the ornaments of sikerei traditional clothing, and the meaning of Sikerei traditional clothing ornaments itself.

II RESEARCH METHOD

The method used is Qualitative Research which aims to create a systematic, factual, and accurate picture of the social status of the traditional clothing. The observations carried out were to look systematically at the picture of the social life of the people in the use of clothing attributes in traditional party rituals, wedding parties and death rituals. The tool used to make this observation is a mobile phone. This tool is used to capture the moment when witnessing the start of the preparation of the complete clothing attributes in the form of a portrait photo. According to Sugiyono (2007) the method of finding observation is a complex process, a process consisting of various biological and psychological processes. The two most important are the processes of observation and memory. Qualitative methods are research that uses methods, steps and procedures that involve data and information obtained through respondents as subjects who can express their own answers and feelings to get a general picture of what is being studied. The qualitative focus in research is based more on the level of novelty of information obtained from social situations or the field.

Interviews are used as a data collection method when a researcher needs to obtain information from a small number of respondents who are willing to explain in more detail and when the researcher wants to conduct a preliminary study to identify problems that require further research. This research was conducted using unstructured interviews with informants regarding clothing decorations, so that the deep meaning of clothing decorations can be known.

The traditional head himself was the first source the researchers encountered to collect oral data in the form of voice recordings and extract elements of symbols and signs on traditional clothing. 2 Mentawai Island address. Apart from that, The third source explains the meaning of the signs and symbols in clothing ornaments to reveal the meaning of the physical character, patterns and designs of clothing ornaments by conducting an in-depth study of several examples of social cultural ornaments on the Islands.

In analyzing the data, this research used the method of interpretation findings and verification methods. According to (Miles and Huberman, 2008). This method classifies data analysis in three steps, including data reduction at this step which is selection, attention focus, abstraction. and transform raw data taken in the field. The essence of data minimization is the process of combining and normalizing all forms of data into a text that can be parsed. By presenting the data after data collection, the researcher groups similar items into categories or groups so that it is easy for the researcher to draw conclusions and draw conclusions. At this stage, the researcher compares the data obtained with the data from the interview results of the subject and the informant for the purpose of drawing conclusions.

The data collection technique used in this research are taking down the notes technique. According to Arikunto (1998). In this research, the writer uses observation technique, it is method of collecting data by analyzing an object systematically. This mean is this research chooses the observation data as the first step to analyze the

data. After that, the data will be analyze based on the problem that related with the tittle of the research.

The data analysis techniques used in this research are semiotics theories technique and thematic studies technique. According to Sudaryanto (1993). Data analysis is endeavour to

clarify or categorize data. It must be based on the research objectives to clarify and organize data. The data analysis approach applied in this research was a split or sorting strategy, which involved dividing or sorting out variants or language choices used by language users, as well as the reasons for the choice of language

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sikerei traditional clothing refers to the traditional attire worn by the Sikerei people, an indigenous community living in the Mentawai Islands of Indonesia. The Sikerei traditional clothing is primarily made from natural fibers such as tree bark, leaves, and grass, which are woven together to create various garments.

The traditional clothing of the Sikerei people typically includes a loincloth for both men and women, which is worn around the waist and extends down to the knees. This loincloth is made by weaving together long grass fibers, resulting in a lightweight and breathable fabric. In addition to the loincloth, men often wear a simple vest made from tree bark, while women wear a shorter, wraparound skirt made from woven fibers. Both men and women may also wear headbands or headclothings made from leaves and flowers, as well as various accessories such as bracelets, necklaces, and anklets made from natural materials.

The Sikerei traditional clothing is not only a cultural expression but also serves practical purposes. The lightweight and breathable nature of the attire helps the Sikerei people adapt to the tropical climate of the Mentawai Islands, while the use of natural materials reflects their close connection with the environment and sustainable lifestyle.

However, it is important to note that due to ongoing cultural changes and external influences, the Sikerei traditional clothing may not be as commonly worn as it once was. Modern clothing and Western fashion have become more prevalent among the younger generation, leading to a gradual decline in the use of traditional clothing. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to preserve and revive traditional weaving techniques and clothing styles. Analysis is presented with detailed data. The data analyzed is the sikerei traditional clothing in the Mentawai Islands. Signs were

analyzed using Saussure's (2020) theory, namely signs and markers, decorative signs on sikerei clothing.

Sikerei Traditional Clothing Relation to Ethnical Identity

In the case of Sikerei traditional clothing, it is an expression of cultural and traditional identity for the indigenous people of Mentawai, Indonesia, known as the Sikerei tribe. The Sikerei tribe is renowned for their unique and distinctive clothing that holds great significance in their ethnical identity. The clothing worn by the Sikerei tribe is often made from natural materials like barkcloth, which is handwoven and dyed using organic pigments. The Sikerei tribe's clothing is an essential part of their traditional ceremonies and rituals.

The clothing helps to differentiate the Sikerei people from other indigenous groups in the region and reinforces their sense of belonging and pride in their cultural heritage. Sikerei clothing plays a vital role in preserving and promoting the Sikerei tribe's ethnical identity. By wearing their traditional clothing, Sikerei individuals also assert their distinctiveness and reinforce their connection to their ancestral roots. Furthermore, Sikerei clothing serves as a visual representation of the values and beliefs held by the tribe. In recent years, Sikerei clothing has gained recognition beyond the confines of the tribe and has become a source of inspiration for contemporary fashion designers. This recognition has not only elevated the status of Sikerei clothing but also created economic opportunities for the community, promoting sustainability and helping to preserve their cultural practices. Overall, Sikerei Clothing is intrinsically tied to the ethnical identity of the Sikerei tribe. By wearing their traditional clothing, the Sikerei people not only maintain

their sense of identity but also share their rich culture and traditions with the world.

The Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing is deeply connected to the ethnical identity of the Mentawai people. The Mentawai people are an indigenous group native to the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia. The Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing is worn during various ceremonies and rituals, symbolizing their cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. The clothing consists of distinct elements that reflect the Mentawai people's identity. Additionally, the Sikerei Mentawai clothing incorporates various accessories such as necklaces, bracelets, and headclothinges made from natural materials like shells, animal bones, feathers, and beads. These accessories are not only decorative but also represent specific symbols or meanings within Mentawai culture. Wearing the Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing is seen as a way to honor their ancestors, preserve their cultural heritage, and maintain a strong sense of identity. It is also a way for the Mentawai people to distinctively represent themselves and their unique traditions to the outside world.

Overall, the Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing holds deep significance in relation to the ethnical identity of the Mentawai people. Sikerei is a shaman or traditional leader of the Mentawai people, Indonesia During funerals, sikerei play an important role as intermediaries between the soul of the deceased and the spirit world They conduct a series of rituals to guide the soul to the spirit world beyond The Sikerei perform special dances and incantations to commemorate the souls of the dead They act as intermediaries between the world of the living and the souls that have left their bodies, At the time of the sikerei's death, the sikerei is also responsible for presiding over funerals and organizing ceremonies involving the entire community. In being a Sikerei, they have some taboos, when someone is ordained as a Sikerei, he/she must temporarily stop cultivating the land, because at the same time he is the spirit of his ancestors. There are also several things that a Sikerei must know, such as they need to make a vow of prohibition in eating soft or mushy sago, unable to operate, prohibition in flying above the ground, prohibition in flirting with everyone or greeting women on the street, prohibition in having sex with their wives, prohibition in eating spicy and sour foods.

Then, when somebody becomes a Sikerei, he or she is automatically bestowed with all the clothes of a Sikerei. They should be willing to serve others and uphold the values and traditions of the Mentawai people. Sikerei is the spiritual teacher of the Mentawai people, who plays an important role in maintaining and preserving their cultural and spiritual heritage. The connection between Sikerei and Mentawai ethnic identities is strong as they play an important role in traditional ceremonies, healing and teaching cultural values.

Sikerei are responsible for providing spiritual guidance, presiding over traditional ceremonies, and teaching traditional values to community members, they also play a role in maintaining balance and the natural relationship between humans and nature. A sikerei must have a deep understanding of tradition, customs and values of the Mentawai people It is important for them to maintain and develop local wisdom, as well as help maintain national identity in the face of changing times. In order to fulfill their role, sikerei must play an active role in efforts to preserve culture, support traditional education, and undertake collective work for the well-being of the Mentawai people. The functions of the sikerei include appeasing the souls of the deceased, conveying spiritual messages and ensuring that the funeral process takes place according to tradition They play an important role in maintaining balance between the human world and the spiritual world, as well as providing spiritual support to families remain.

The Ornaments of Sikerei Traditional Clothing

The Sikerei traditional clothing is native to the Mentawai Islands, which are located off the western coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. The Mentawai people have a distinct culture and way of life, which includes their traditional attire. The origin of the Sikerei traditional clothing can be traced back to the ancient rituals and beliefs of the Mentawai people.

The Sikerei traditional clothing is an important part of their role and identity. It is believed to have originated from the need for the Sikerei to distinguish themselves from others and to showcase their spiritual connection and powers. The clothing is characterized by its intricate designs, which often incorporate natural motifs such as plants, animals, and geometric patterns. The clothing consists of several

components, including a traditional woven cloth that is wrapped around the body, a headclothing adorned with feathers or leaves, and various accessories such as necklaces, bracelets, and anklets. The colors and materials used in the clothing may vary depending on the status and experience of the Sikerei. Over the years, the Sikerei traditional clothing has evolved and adapted to the changing times, with some modern influences and materials incorporated. In Sikerei clothing, the ornaments play a significant role in enhancing the overall look and aesthetic of the attire. These ornaments are usually made from natural materials such as bone, beads, shells, stones, feathers, and animal teeth. v, including:

A.. *Jara-jara* or headdresses are an important part of Mentawai Sikerei ornaments. Usually made from natural materials such as bird feathers, chicken feathers, rattan with a series of colorful beads, and wool thread. This decoration is worn on the head to complement the hair pinnate leaves decorated with yellow hibiscus flowers and red ashoka.

B. *Ngalau* and *Tudda*, or necklaces, are commonly worn neck decorations, made from strings of colorful beads and pinnate leaves arranged in various patterns and designs, creating a visually appealing accessory. Mentawai Sikerei ornaments often take the form of *tudda* necklaces made from materials such as bone or copper. Even though it complements the addition of pinnate leaves at the bottom, sometimes *tudda* necklaces can be quite complicated to wear due to the many layers or different types of materials.

C. *Lekkau* or bracelets are common ornaments among the Sikelei Mentawai people. This decoration is usually made of colored beads, wool thread, and other natural materials and is worn on the wrist inserted into leaves, contributing to the overall aesthetic appearance of the sikerei.

D. *Tongoro* or belt is another important part of mentawai Sikerei ornaments. often made from tree bark or can be decorated with shells or other decorative elements. The belt is worn around the hips, adding definition to the Sikerei's waistline. Sikerei traditional clothing for men consists of a loincloth decorated with traditional necklaces and

bracelets. Meanwhile, women usually wear long or short skirts with red motifs and colors typical of Mentawai women. The clothes are often enhanced with headdresses such as natural flowers or leaves.

E. Sikerei ornaments often involve facial and body decoration, such as painting patterns or tattoos, which have symbolic meaning in the culture of the mentawai people. The tattoos on a sikerei's body often have meanings related to their spiritual knowledge and life experiences, as well as reflecting their status and role in Mentawai society.

traditional. Tattoos can also function as a symbol of health, such as the "Sibalubalu" Sikerei Amanmani:

These are the apprentice or junior Sikerei Mentawai who are learning from the higher ranks. They are in the early stages of their training and are acquiring the fundamental knowledge and skills of the Mentawai shamanic traditions. It is important to note that the ranks and their significance may vary within different Mentawai communities, as each group may have their own specific hierarchy and criteria for recognizing the skills and capabilities of their shamans.

In terms of gender, male and female Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing are distinct from each other in terms of design and accessories. Women also wear a breast covering made from woven plant fibers or a necklace made from shells. In accessories. Male Clothing: Men traditionally wear a headband or headpiece made from leaves or woven plants. They may also wear anklets made from rattan or plant fibers. Additionally, men may carry a decorative bag made from woven fibers, which serves both functional and ornamental purposes. Female Clothing: Women, on the other hand, often wear a crown-like headpiece made from rattan or woven fibers. They also decorate their waistbands and skirts with shells, seeds, or small metal ornaments. Women usually carry a small woven handbag, known as a "noken" where they keep their personal belongings. These differences in design and accessories reflect the gender-specific roles and aesthetics within the Sikerei Mentawai culture, where each gender has its distinct attire for cultural and functional purposes.

Identity: The clothing represents the identity and distinctiveness of the Mentawai people. It

The Meaning of Sikerei Traditional Clothing Ornaments

signifies their connection to their ancestral traditions, heritage, and unique cultural practices.

Symbolism: The clothing often incorporates traditional motifs and designs that carry symbolic meanings related to their beliefs, spirits, and natural environment. These symbols may represent fertility, protection, or the presence of ancestral spirits.

Rituals and ceremonies: Sikerei Mentawai clothing is worn during important rituals and ceremonies, such as initiation rites, healing ceremonies, and other cultural gatherings. It is believed that wearing the traditional clothing helps to maintain the connection between the physical and spiritual realms during these events.

Lekkau

Lekkau in Sikerei's life is a term in West Sumatran culture which refers to the process of preparing plans or strategies in facing various events and challenges. The meaning of lekkau for Sikerei's life is the ability to plan wise steps, overcome difficulties, and achieve life goals well.

Tongoro

Tongoro in Sikerei's life is an expression that refers to strength, enthusiasm and determination to achieve life goals. The meaning of tongoro for Sikerei's life is about strong determination, perseverance, and the spirit of never giving up in facing various obstacles and challenges.

Ngalau

Ngalau in Sikerei life refers to an attitude which means thinking, pondering, or contemplating something deeply. The meaning of Ngalau Sikerei is as a spiritual and cultural center for the Mentawai community, a place where the traditions and beliefs of this tribe are maintained and preserved.

Tudda

Tudda in Sikerei's life is a word that refers to knowledge and wisdom gained from life experiences and lessons. The meaning of tudda for Sikerei's life is about wisdom and knowledge gained from the process of learning and experience.

Jara-jara

Jara-jara in Sikerei's life is an expression that refers to a person's feelings or feelings. The meaning of jara-jara for Sikerei's life is about understanding and controlling emotions and personal feelings.

The function of Sikerei Traditional Clothing Ornaments

Protection: The clothing offers protection against the elements, especially during forest expeditions and daily activities. The fabric is usually thick and cover the body to shield against insect bites, scratches, and other potential hazards in the dense jungles of the Mentawai Islands.

Comfort and mobility: The clothing is designed to provide comfort and ease of movement during various physical activities in the forest and rivers, such as hunting, gathering, fishing, and traditional dances.

Social cohesion: Wearing Sikerei Mentawai clothing promotes a sense of unity and pride among the Mentawai people. It strengthens their sense of community and fosters a collective identity that distinguishes them from other groups.

Lekkau

Lekkau in sikerei culture functions as a guide or life plan that helps someone overcome obstacles and achieve goals in life.

Tongoro

Tongoro in Sikerei culture functions as a driver of motivation, enthusiasm and perseverance which plays an important role in daily life and achieving life goals.

Ngalau

Ngalau in Sikerei culture functions as a tool for personal growth, self-understanding, emotional management, and preserving cultural values.

Tudda

Tudda in Sikerei culture has an important role in preserving knowledge, providing guidance, and ensuring the continuity of culture and learning of the younger generation.

Jara-jara

Jara-jara in Sikerei culture functions as a tool for communicating, building relationships, understanding emotions, and preserving culture, all of which play a role in enriching the social and cultural life of society.

Therefore, Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing carries cultural meanings that reflect the identity and spirituality of the Mentawai people. It serves practical functions such as protection, comfort, and social cohesion within the community.

IV CONCLUSION

In this research the writer does analysis on the clothing in social status of Mentawai culture, but this research focuses in Mentawai island. In conclusion, Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing not only represents the rich cultural heritage of the Mentawai people but also plays a crucial role in their social and spiritual practices. The clothing, with its intricate designs and vibrant colors, serves as a visual representation of their identity and pride.

The traditional clothing of Sikerei Mentawai consists of various elements, such as loincloths, headbands, armbands, and accessories made from natural materials such as tree bark, animal bones, and feathers. Each element holds symbolic meaning and is believed to have protective and spiritual qualities.

Furthermore, Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing is not merely decorative but is also functional. The clothing reflects the Mentawai people's deep connection with nature and

practicality. They are designed to be comfortable, durable, and suitable for their lifestyle, which includes hunting and gathering in forested areas.

Despite the modern influences and changing times, the Mentawai people continue to cherish and preserve their traditional clothing. They consider it an integral part of their identity and a way to pass down their cultural heritage to future generations. This preservation effort highlights the importance of traditional clothing in maintaining cultural diversity and promoting a sense of belonging within the Mentawai community.

Overall, Sikerei Mentawai traditional clothing is a testament to the resilience and richness of Mentawai culture. It symbolizes their strong connection with nature, their spiritual beliefs, and their commitment to preserving their traditions. It is a true reflection of their identity and serves as a source of pride and cultural expression for the Mentawai people.

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