



JOJAPS

eISSN 2504-8457



Journal Online Jaringan Pengajian Seni Bina (JOJAPS)

Negeri Sembilan Traditional House and Minangkabau House in Sumatera: The Assimilation of Matrilineal in the Architectural Sustainability

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Abstract

This article examines the architectural concept in Negeri Sembilan traditional house and Minangkabau house in Western Sumatera. Both houses are interconnected to one another. This traditional house is inhabited by a community originating from Minangkabau offsprings who adopt a similar Minangkabau traditional system known as matrilineal. The uniqueness of the architectural elements in the interior design of both houses is not naturally formed, but it is built through the compatibility of an authentic Minangkabau matrilineal system from Western Sumatera and assimilated with local matrilineal system in Negeri Sembilan which forms a unique traditional house. However, many are not able to relate the philosophical values and connection between these two houses. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyse the distortion in the assimilation of matrilineal custom that exists in the architectural elements in Negeri Sembilan Traditional House and Minangkabau house. Among the aspects that are scrutinized in this study concern the entire organization, circulation and architectural elements. This research needs to be disclosed to the public in order to preserve the elements of matrilineal system on the sustainability of its architecture. This study operates with review methodology, literature review and ethnography method of research. The data were simultaneously obtained in the research area. The results from this study will authorize a realistic research finding, as to prove the existent in the assimilation of matrilineal custom and the architectural sustainability of Negeri Sembilan Traditional House and Minangkabau House in Western Sumatera.

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Key-word: - Negeri Sembilan traditional house, Minangkabau house, matrilineal, assimilation and architectural sustainability

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1. Introduction

In a dynamic shift from one region to another, the customs and culture of Minangkabau had sustained the process of assimilation, and several stages as well as its development. According to *Kamus Dewan* Fourth Edition, assimilation is formed through the convergence and consolidation of various cultural elements into one identity. The Minangkabau ethnic Malay in Negeri Sembilan had experienced the assimilation of culture and tradition systematically. The existing matrilineal system in *Perpatih* custom in Negeri Sembilan is more flexible (Ibrahim, 2007) likewise, simplifies the process of assimilation to take place. Furthermore, the custom elements in Minangkabau culture itself are more practical to nature (Nasroen, 1957). The process of assimilation that takes place in Negeri Sembilan has constituted a harmonious environment with the nature, and environmental construction is used as a shelter. According to Soeroto (2005), the refinement in the architectural elements of Minangkabau house had existed through philosophy, ritual, religious belief, social activity, economy and the matrilineal system itself. Thus, previous researcher (Hanafi, 1985; Idrus, 1996), had noticed the composition and interior layout of Negeri Sembilan traditional house and Minangkabau house have its own uniqueness which is closely associated with its traditional system. Its function and interior layout are built and designed to meet the needs and comfort of its residence, dominated by matrilineal women as the sole heir (Azwar, 2001; Ng, 1980).

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this study comprised of references from previous researches and ethnography method. The findings were reinforced through the information obtained from field research. Several Negeri Sembilan Traditional houses and Minangkabau houses in Western Sumatera had been observed and operated as a case study. An interview session had been conducted among indigenous chairmen and villagers. Through this methodology, researchers could explore their thoughts and lifestyle in details. Background information on individuals and community groups will bring physical and social studies to be correlated to one another as to achieve the objective of this study. Visual data in the form of images and house measurements will be collected and documented. All methods of data collection as mentioned will be carried out simulatenously in order for the physical elements of the traditional house can be interpreted through social studies.

3. Matrilineal

Matrilineal lineage system is a social system practiced by the *Perpatih* costum community in Negeri Sembilan and Minangkabau tradition in Western Sumatera. Matrilineal lineage system in both customs has been a life system among the community in Minangkabau and its descendants since hundreds of years ago from the time of their ancestors (Yatim, 2007). According to Hermayulis (2008) and Adil (1981), *Perpatih* custom had been brought and developed by the Minangkabau community from Western Sumatera who migrated to Negeri Sembilan in the 14th century. The identity of Minangkabau community and its descendants can be identified from Figure 1 as below.

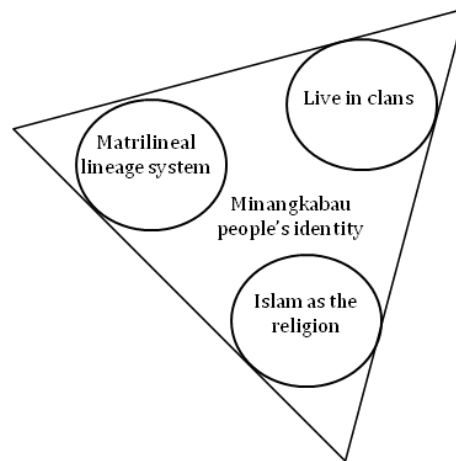


Figure 1 The identity of Minangkabau community
Source: Amir (1997)

This lineage system gives advantages to the women. The descendants of the family will be in line with the mother's genealogy, all men have to stay at women's house after married and economic power and assets will be inherited by the mothers (Amir, 1997). Privileges granted for men are only given to maternal brother or known as *mamak* to be appointed as a leader to lead traditional rites for Minangkabau community (Asri, 2004). Meanwhile, a father to his children or a husband to his wife is considered as "*urang sumando*" or "*orang menumpang*" (Selat, 1975; Ibrahim, 1993). According to Hermayulis (2008), mothers from Minangkabau have strong leadership and they are a wise planner, thus they are highly respected and acknowledged as "*bundo kanduang*". They can control the economy and guard their inherited assets and become a mother and a wife who can preserve their family custom and religion very well (Hermayulis, 2008; Asturi & Soedarsono, 2006)

4. Traditional House of Negeri Sembilan

Since hundreds of years ago, Negeri Sembilan traditional house had been inhabited by Minangkabau ethnic Malay. The uniformity in Negeri Sembilan traditional house design can be easily spotted everywhere. The uniformity does not occur by accident but it is planned and understood through each point of view with an identical philosophy. This design can offer prosperity and harmony in every individual, family and society. The general public normally refer these traditional house as Minangkabau Negeri Sembilan house. It is believed that the roof design on Negeri Sembilan traditional house was influenced by Western Sumatera Minangkabau house which is curvy and seemingly pointy (Ariffin, 2001). The uniqueness of this traditional house is often associated with its matrilineal lineage system.



Figure 2 Types of Negeri Sembilan Traditional houses

According to Idrus (1996), Negeri Sembilan traditional house is composed of a house with and without patio. A house with patio is basically a house that revolts from previous house without patio (Idrus, 1996). A traditional house without patio is acknowledged as the original version of Negeri Sembilan traditional house, while a house with patio is an additional modern version. However, regardless of its varieties, these traditional houses have existed since centuries ago.

5. Minangkabau House

In general, Minangkabau house comprises of two kinds which are ; “a house without *anjung*”, which in accordance with the common law of *Bodi Caniago* and “house with *anjung*” which follows the common law of *Koto Piliang*. *Bodi Caniago* Minangkabau house does not have a patio on the left and right sides of the house (Figure 4). Nevertheless, the architecture and design of both *Bodi Caniago* Minangkabau and *Koto Piliang* houses have a lot of similarities. The size shape for Minangkabau house in Western Sumatera depends on the number of available spaces and normally it comprises of three, five, seven until nine spaces and the biggest size is with twenty spaces in it (Soeroto, 2005). The physical state of Minangkabau house is in a rectangular shape and elongated.



Figure 3 Types of Minangkabau house in Western Sumatera

6. Assimilation of Matrilineal in the Architectural Sustainability

In general, Minangkabau descends have a firm principle against their traditional matrilineal system. The assimilation of matrilineal custom which develops among the community in Negeri Sembilan has become a pinpoint for a universal life. This traditional system gives more freedom to its local community in determining the rules and laws that must be carried out within its area. All the established rules and laws must be authorized collectively. It applies likewise in the physical culture depicted in a form of Negeri Sembilan traditional house and Minangkabau house. Thoughts and procedures on the construction of a traditional house on both areas have a harmonious

sustainability and in accordance with the nature which based on its matrilineal tradition. Its design is geared to provide welfare to its residence and regional culture. According to Nafida (2007), the descendants of Minangkabau have an immense and harmonious philosophical view, which strikingly depicted in their traditional house that holds natural elements in it and make the house more unique and have its own identity. Its architectural elements could provide an enormous impact in yielding a design that is sustainable with the environment.

The orientation in the interior layout of a traditional house in the matrilineal society has been divided into private room, public and semi-public. Matrilineal women are the privileged one and their chastity must be protected. Referring to Figure 4, the private room of Minangkabau house is located in *'lanja'* a space situated at the very back of the house that served as a personal space for mothers and daughters. From a social relationship viewpoint, the purpose of constructing such interior layout is for the men who sit at *'lanja'* located at the very front of the house to be able to protect the women who were in the back. As a concept of social propriety and decency, the following *'lanja'* which situated in front of the room is known as *'lanja bandua'* which serves as a semi-public room and functions as a place for women to bide their guests and in accordance with the personality of women who are full of gracefulness. Subsequently, the very front *'lanja'* is known as *"balai"* which is regarded as a semi-public space, and functions as a space for male guests during festive celebration and traditional rite. The guests of honor with highest rank such as *'Penghulu Pucuk'* will be placed at the patio, particularly because a patio is considered as a private room that is appropriate with the high status of a head of customs.

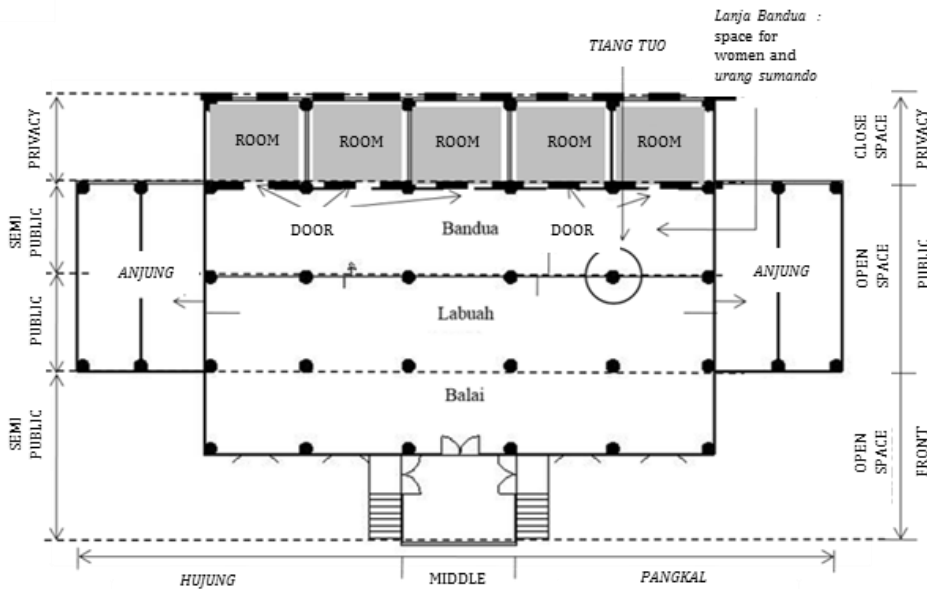


Figure 4 Floor plan for Minangkabau house

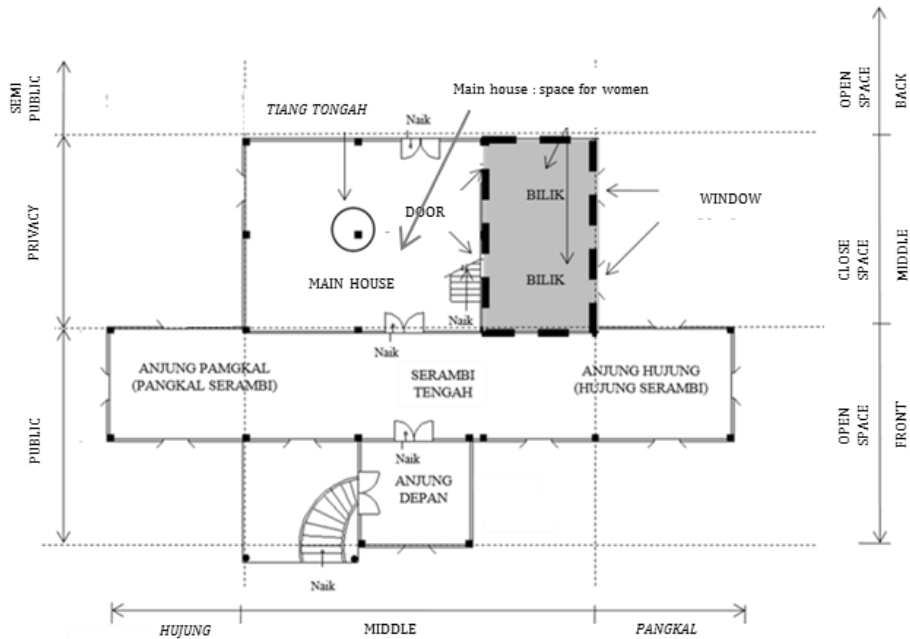


Figure 5 Floor plan of Negeri Sembilan traditional house

The concept of private room, semi-public and public also occur in the orientation and architectural and design philosophy of Negeri Sembilan traditional house. A private room to locate the daughters is situated at the centre of the house. This space is guarded by a porch situated in the front, kitchen in the back and main house on each sides of the house. This concept is also influenced by the Islamic elements and matrilineal custom that restrict any intercommunication between male and female. Women are not supposed to be disclosed publicly to their non-muhrim. Hence, main house is made as a semi-public space for the women. Public space or patio situated in front of the house is built for male guests specifically the headmen and head of customs. Its position arrangement is from the tip to base. Meanwhile, the head and tail porch or *anjung* will place the headmen and the highest rank head of customs such as “Datuk Lembaga” tribes, and scholars when the custom rite is being held. In terms of its architectural concept and design, this arrangement is convenient for the gateway at the entrance located at the base of the porch as it does not interfere with their sitting arrangement. The effects from matrilineal assimilation are based on the philosophy and values, thus the overall concept and the orientation of the interior layout in Minangkabau house and Negeri Sembilan traditional house almost have a similar resemblance.

Besides, the physical elements that have interior layout design such as floor, walls, pole structure and decorations are also influenced by matrilineal values. The floors in both traditional home have been built in terrace. This terraced floor functions as a symbol of differences in status between leaders and the led. In the chief men position, their leadership has been established in a hierarchical system from top to bottom. Meanwhile, for the leadership among the elder and respected mothers are known as *bundo kanduang* in Western Sumatera and *ibu soko* in Negeri Sembilan. Both male and female authority are respected by the matrilineal community. Thus, this terraced floors represent the leadership system in matrilineal. *Lanja bandua* floors have been elevated to 20cm which aims to demonstrate the upmost integrity in matrilineal community especially *bundo kanduang* when they welcome their guests (Asri, 2004). Whereas, a *anjung* which the highest floor will be made into a space to place ‘*Penghulu Pucuak*’ as well as a room for the newly-wed daughters (Figure 6).



Elevated floors between *lanja labuah* to *bandua*



Elevated floors between *lanja labuah* and *bandua* to *anjung*

Figure 6 Floor level for Minangkabau house

Negeri Sembilan traditional house also have a similar concept and philosophical values. The floors in main house are built higher as to place the women specifically *ibu soko*. Similarly, the floors for porch tip or *anjung* are also elevated which place the highest rank of head of customs in the community (Figure 7).



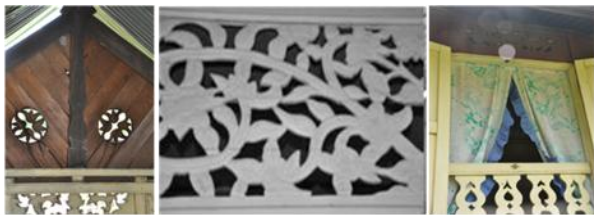
Elevated floors between middle *serambi* to *anjung*



Elevated floors between *serambi* and main house

Figure 7 Floor level in Negeri Sembilan traditional house

The walls in the room at the back of the house does not have windows and its walls are made of bamboos that provide a natural ventilation. Windows are not available for the room at the back, in order to protect the matrilineal women from being invaded through open spaces like the windows. However, it is a different scenario for Negeri Sembilan traditional house that has open windows attached to the entire walls either at the front or at the back of the house. The most striking similarity between Minangkabau house and Negeri Sembilan traditional house is the main pole structure situated at the main house which is at the center of the house. In Negeri Sembilan, this pole is also known as *tiang tengah* while in Minangkabau house, it is called as *tiang tuo*. These pillars are regarded as respected pillar and there have been several spiritual activity has already been held at the pillar. In an architectural concept, main pole is the most firm pillar and it gives confidence for its residence to reside.



Carved motifs in Negeri Sembilan traditional house



Carved motifs in Minangkabau house

Figure 8 Natural ventilation systems with floral and geometrical motifs

Besides that, above the windows and doors attached to the wall, there are light and air holes crafted in various shapes with floral and geometrical motifs as to accentuate the beauty of nature (Figure 8). These elements give an enormous impact on energy saving which oriented technology power and other facility needs to provide air and light in a building area. The carved motif which originates from animism belief or geometrical pattern based on Islamic teaching becomes a firm belief to the tradition that is based on matrilineal lineage. The interior design in both traditional house is built based on tropical climate suitability which provides ventilation in the interior of the house. Carved motifs would usually represent the owner status in their tradition and custom. Its architectural elements does not solely offer basic form and construction of the house but it also displays various decorations that function as an essential main structure of a house.

Conclusions

The assimilation occurred between matrilineal custom system in Western Sumatera and Negeri Sembilan had formed a unique feature and element in the architecture of Negeri Sembilan Traditional house and Minangkabau house. Both designs have an apparent similarity, although there might be few differences. A similar matrilineal custom system have formed a trend of thought, philosophy, ritual and indigeneous people in planning the architectural elements in both traditional houses. The consistency between similar architectural sustainability and matrilineal assimilation has developed a harmony and prosperity among its residence. However, it is undeniable that, the differences in the physical element are due to the thinking of society that undergoes local cultural assimilation process. The basic concept of a society from the perspectives of philosophy and point of view are still similar, especially in developing residential and celebrating traditional ceremonies. If their view on life changed, then all the rules, principles, and beliefs will simulatenously change. However, one thing that will never change a Minangkabau descend is that, they recognize themselves as matrilineal descendants. Traditional house is a cultural form that needs to be conserved as it reflcets the beauty and uniqueness of the community that practices matrilineal lineage system. Both community have to mantain its Minangkabau design in their own style in order for future generation to comprehend the existence of matrilineal system, culture and architecture of Minangkabau house which was once built before.

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