

# Profile of Preservation of Minangkabau Manuscripts: Restoration, Transformation, Transliteration and Revitalization

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**Abstract.** Classical text of Minangkabau in ArabMelayu script, are written in memory of Minangkabau society. The manuscripts are mostly stored in the library of Leiden University and just a little is stored in Indonesia. They are found in the community library of text owner, traditional society, public library, archives and museum. Preservation of this cultural heritage may motivate society especially the youth to relearn the culture of their ancestors and assess which values are better, the old or the new.

*Keywords:* the oral tradition, Minangkabau society, the value of information.

Minangkabau society is a term for a group of people who inhabit most of the province of West Sumatra, Indonesia. They live in the area of 18,000 square meters which stretches from north to south in the Indian Ocean and Bukit Barisan Mountain Range. Minangkabau society is very well known with their oral tradition *kaba barito* that conveys the message by word of mouth. Oral tradition of Minangkabau society is very strong in many aspects of life, for example the tradition *Maota di lapau*. *Maota di lapau* is having a small talk with friends in bar which is one way for men in Minangkabau to communicate and socialize.

On its development, the oral tradition of minangkabau could be grouped in four of the most common type such as, the oral tradition in a traditional ceremony which tend to be formal, oral tradition relating to the association in people's daily life, oral tradition of mantra, and the oral tradition in art performances.

All forms of oral tradition in Minangkabau society contains many values such as the religious values, historical values, customs and values of society, values that incorporate local wisdom in the daily life of the community, as well as information containing genealogical or history of family in the society. The oral tradition has been around since the start of the establishment of Minangkabau community. The tradition was handed down from generation to generation. Most of the existing oral tradition in Minangkabau society is still a tacit knowledge that is stored in the memory of the older generation. There are only few of the various type of oral tradition has been formed into explicit knowledge and are well documented. For example, the oral traditions of indigenous rhymes, *sambah kato*, *barabab*, *badendang*, or *barandai* are only known by several people, especially the older generation of Minangkabau.

Oral tradition could be found only in some cultural activities that are held in the community. This phenomenon caused negative impact in preserving oral tradition in Minangkabau. There have been only limited number of people who know, understand and master the tradition. Inheritance of the traditions are only handed from certain people who are having kinship relation with the owners' knowledge. Besides, the oral tradition has begun to be abandoned and forgotten by young generation in Minangkabau society. The existency of oral tradition in Minangkabau society not is only effected by metanarrative discourse shaping public opinion about the insignificance of local traditions, but also by rapid development of information and communication technology leading to the lack of transfer of information of oral tradition. Therefore, the necessary actions should be taken in maintaining and preserving the oral tradition. Preservation is not just limited to keeping the form of oral tradition in the community, but the values that are contained in the oral tradition.

## A. Oral Tradition in Minangkabau Society and The Risk of Loss

Oral tradition contains historical events, moral values, religious values, customs, fantasy stories, songs, spells, proverbs, and ancestor's advice. Oral tradition has been around since humans have the ability to communicate. The inheritance process that has been run for generations and the direct interaction between the speakers and their communities are the two main things in the process of creating an oral tradition in the community. Oral tradition refers to the processes and products that are unwritten. For example, the myth, genealogy or family tree, the images are revealed in a particular community about its history, the forms of knowledge and other oral narrative.

Ki-Zerbo argues that the oral tradition can be interpreted as a testimony delivered verbally from one generation to the next, which tends to the verba and the way how messages are delivered (Ki-Zerbo, 1990: 54).

Oral tradition can also be interpreted as a form of a number of customs that have been established in certain communities, a series of belief, the routines which is performed repeatedly to show the continuity through the spoken word or phrase by mouth (Errington, 1984).

It is concluded that oral tradition is a form of practice in conveying messages or verbal testimony about the things that happened in the past or the present to be passed on to the next generation.

Minangkabau society is one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia who use oral tradition. Minangkabau society is very famous for its tradition of *kaba babarito* and *maota di lapau*. There is an assumption at the level of masculinity in Minangkabau society about the degree of socialization. If there is a man who was never involved in *maota di lapau*, then that person would be considered as unsocialized person in the group, even he is not to be accepted as part of the community.

In general, the oral traditions of Minangkabau society can be grouped into four types. *First*, the oral tradition in traditional ceremonies, such as *batagak pangulu* ceremony, and ceremonies are closely related to daily life, such as upacara *turun mandi* (baby blessing ceremony), wedding ceremony, and funeral ceremony. The oral tradition in these ceremonies tend to be formal such as adage custom, customary speeches, and *sambah kato*.



Picture 1. Oral tradition in *Sambah Kato*

Second, the oral tradition in context of *dendang-dendang perintang hati* which singing a song in rhyme, example *batintin* and *bajoden*. This oral tradition is performed in various daily activities and more informal. The rhymes were generally sung as a joke or a poem that accompanied by music which is related with daily activities of Minangkabau people.



Picture 2. Oral Tradition in *Barabab*

*Third*, shamanism in the form of spells which have its own characteristics and language structures. Spell contains mystical elements and certain rituals. At first, mantra is a form of oral traditions containing certain rituals which used to deal with mystical interests, such as witchcraft or pellets. But there is also a spell in the form of verses for healing of various diseases.

*Fourth*, oral performances such as *barandai*, *barabab*, and *bakaba*. Oral performances is incorporating between the oral tradition of rhymes or tales with performing arts, such as dance, music, and martial arts.



Picture 3. Oral Tradition in *Randai*

All types of oral traditions in Minangkabau society has meaning and value. Value that contained in the oral tradition of minangkabau society can be found in religious knowledge, history, politics, customs, economic, war tactics and the values of philosophy in social life.

However, these values are uncommon to be listed explicitly. It is because the Minangkabau society are people using high-level communication in the context of everyday life. Minangkabau people are familiar with the metaphor, parable, as well as courtesy in communication. It is clearly seen in the oral traditions of society using metaphor and allegory in conveying something.

Examples of rhyme in oral tradition of Minangkabau society:

*Kaluak paku kacang balimbiang*  
*Tampuruang lenggang-lengangkan*  
*Anak dipangku kamanakan dibimbiang*  
*Urang kampuang dipatengangkan*

meaning:

Trunk of fern , nut of starfruit  
 Coconut shell was swayed  
 Child was on laped, nephew was guided

Villagers were considered

Commentary Content:

*Anak dipangku, kamanakan dibimbiang, urang kampuang dipatenggangkan.* These rhymes are one of the customary rules having matrilineal characteristic in Minangkabau. In matrilineal, the tribe or lineage is based on the mother instead of father. Therefore, the Minangkabau men, not only have the responsibility to educate their children but also their nephews. In addition, the Minangkabau men should be concerned with the environment surrounding the communities. Customary rules described in these rhymes, explain the level of obligations, foremost among them is 'on the lap', lower than it is 'guided', and the last is 'considered'.

There are two basic understanding of the rule:

1. The level of concern about dedicating men's life to others his children at foremost, then his nephews, and the last is the community.
2. Men should try at every level to build his presence that could be felt by everyone. If it is not possible with the money, at least with guidance, caring, and advice. (Darwis St. Sati, 2007)

Oral tradition of the Minangkabau need to be preserved not solely because it is a cultural treasure. Oral tradition also contained lots of values that play important roles in people's daily activities. Besides, the oral tradition is a form of identity of *Urang Minang*.

The existence of oral tradition is important in creating the name of Minangkabau society in the world community. Oral tradition of the Minangkabau, either in the form of customary speech, mantra, pertunjukkan art, tale, and rhyme is a very valuable asset. If they lose their oral tradition then the very existence of Minangkabau society will be questioned as well.

Oral tradition is not only related with form, like rhymes, poems, spells, kaba, but is also customary speech. Notably, they contain various values of the society such as religious values, political values, economic, social culture, philosophy about life and other moral values.

The main problems in the preservation of oral tradition is most of the form of the tradition were in tacit knowledge. So, only few people know exactly the meaning and values containing in the oral tradition. Finally, because of the limitation of public knowledge about the oral tradition, there are several details that should be present in oral tradition that has began to be forgotten or left out because ignorance.

As an example, in the form of spells of oral tradition, such as *gasiang tangkurak*, the person executing the oral tradition should use human skulls to meet the condition based on rules of the tradition. In addition, there are other conditions that must be fulfilled in order to implement these traditions. However, these conditions were known only to certain people.

The loss of these knowledge affected the significance of the ceremony. It has reduced the essence of the oral tradition that already existed and developed in the community. It also has cultivated the plagiarisms and recognitions from others when the public ignore the oral tradition. If the tradition had not been handed down immediately and spread out among the next generation, then values in the oral tradition will begin to be translated and interpreted with different meaning according to the knowledge and understanding of the people.

## **B. Preservation Measures in Preserving Oral Tradition of Minangkabau Society**

The start of the disappearance and forgetting of oral tradition in Minangkabau society is not only related to the loss of a cultural asset in the community, but also by the loss of values and local wisdom which is preserved in that tradition. There are plentiful values in the oral tradition that is still relevant to everyday life. However, the limitation of public knowledge about the traditions and values has been eroding because of a lack of awareness of the existence of the local culture in society.

Knowledge related to the oral traditions of Minangkabau society is mostly tacit knowledge, that is stored in memories of the older generation. Only a certain person has known surely about the procedures and implementation of the oral tradition, the terms of condition of the oral tradition, as well as the meanings, values and philosophies contained in the oral tradition. The death of that certain person will cause the loss of knowledge if such knowledge is undocumented or has not transferred well to the next generation. Therefore, the

oral tradition of the Minangkabau really need to be sustained and preserved, not only in the context of the form, but also in the context of the values that hold on the oral tradition.

According to Karsono about the methods in preserving the knowledge which is tacit, then there are eight steps that can be taken in preserving the value and knowledge of the oral traditions of Minangkabau society, namely:

1. *Knowledge capturing*, is activity in capturing and identifying all existing oral tradition in Minangkabau society and making the list of the people who mastered the oral tradition. Minangkabau is divided into several small areas, such as the *Padang, Pariaman, Agam, Tanah Datar, Pesisir Selatan* and *Lima Puluh Koto*. Each areas has a different tradition and culture, including their oral traditions. In the oral tradition, geographical of *lorong* or neighborhood influences the way people speak in the area. The differences are related to vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, and the meaning of the word. For example, the manner of people who lived in *Pasisia* (coast) is different with the manner of *Darek* people (the community living in mountains). The word *litak* for *Pasisia* means exhausted, while for the *Darek* means starving.

Therefore, it's necessary to identify and inventory the oral traditions in each area in Minangkabau. The purpose of this activity is to determine the assets of the oral traditions that are owned in each region, such as the varieties and diversities of the oral tradition as well as the prominence of oral tradition that became the characteristic of the area.

After identifying the oral traditions of each area, we also have to identify the elders who are expert in oral tradition. Making a list of people who understand the oral tradition is an important point in preservation activities.

2. Codification of identified oral tradition

Codification is an activity in converting tacit knowledge which is possessed by the elders about oral tradition into the knowledge which allows for the transfer into explicit form. As Faust (2010) states, "the conversion of tacit knowledge can be done with two approaches that is socialization and externalization."

Socialization is an activity in transferring the tacit knowledge from one individual to others, in this case, the knowledge was transferred from elders to those who do preservation. The transfer can be done through direct interaction with the elders, the imitation of all actions and activities performed by the elder in relation to oral tradition, and taken experience. The series of activities can be done through job-shadowing. Externalization is transfer activities of tacit knowledge that has been owned by individuals who do preservation into explicit knowledge.

This codification activities according to Faust, can also be done by observation of the mentor and the knowledge possessed by the elder, conducting seminars and knowledge transfer activities conducted directly by the people who are experts in the oral tradition. Virtual reality is gained through experience in the job activity-shadowing, as well as designing the questions to be asked in connection with the acquisition of knowledge.

3. Documenting oral tradition of Minangkabau

In oral tradition, there is lost or reduction of the message over time in the transfer process. To maintain the retention of the meaning of the message, there should be documentation of oral traditions that exist in Minangkabau society. This documentation can include printed documents and electronic documents and audio-visuals. The merits of the implementation procedures and meaning in oral tradition is not degradation, although it has been done in a very long time span.

4. Debriefing and repackaging oral tradition of Minangkabau

Oral tradition in Minangkabau society should be packed into an attractive shape, so it's easy to learn and understand. Repackaging of oral traditions, in addition to the historical value and the value of local information for the community was expected to become a commodity that can bring benefits to the user community tradition. For example, the rhymes that used in the oral tradition *parintang*, can be collaborated with the art of music using modern instruments and presented in a more varied way without destroying the meaning of the poem. Use of the media is more familiar with today's society. It will facilitate the transfer of oral tradition to the next generation because it's easier to become accepted and understood.

5. Personalization, a knowledge-based activity to build the tandon to the nature of connectedness between people.

This personalization of activities can be performed among others by entering into the oral tradition of competence in formal education, mentoring of persons or groups who are interested in oral tradition, as well as establishing a consistent community conservation and development of the oral tradition.

Educational institution is one place that is very effective to introduce the traditions and culture to the younger generation, one of which is about the texts that are owned by the Minangkabau society. The recognition of Minangkabau text through an educational institution can be applied through official channels, such as introducing Minangkabau text into General Objectives Instructional of education, or through informal education.

State University of Padang as a public university in West Sumatra has been having a course about Natural and Cultural Minangkabau under the Department of Language and Literature Indonesia since 2005. This study program aims is to create competent educators about Minangkabau culture and society-

Library Information and Archival Study are incorporating in the same department, also has a few subjects that has very close relationship with the presence of Minangkabau text, the bibliography Minangkabausiana and Kodekologi Minangkabau. Through this course, students learn the written texts in Minangkabau and able to make a bibliographic description of the manuscript as well as to being able to read and transliterate the existing manuscripts. Minangkabau culture has also been introduced through educational institutions since elementary school. Subjects like *Budaya Alam Minangkabau* is conducted by local government in their concern on the sustainability of the Minangkabau culture.

6. Tandon knowledge in Library and Application of information and communication technologies in the preservation of oral traditions of Minangkabau

Libraries especially the Municipal Region Library still serves as a repository of existing texts in the community. Libraries only keep those texts as part of the library collection. The library functions should be switched from the repository into local heritage services in order to preserve and sustainable the contents of the texts that were made in the community.

*Local Heritage Services* is a concept of services available in the library with emphasis on the existence of texts that are owned by the public, such as oral traditions and ancient manuscripts. The librarian in this case not only acts as a "signpost" where the text is stored at the library, but more importantly as a person who knows everything about the text. Librarians must master the text, in terms of history, the existence of text, the information contained in the text, as well as other information that comes with the appearance of text.

Libraries must aggressively campaign ing within the framework for preservation activities of the text. the activities could be like,contest in making descriptions of text (bibliographic), the contest in services about ancient texts, the art performances of oral tradition, or other activities.In addition, the most important thing in this era of information mode is to use information technology in the process of acquisition, storage, and sharring information. The database containing everything related to the oral tradition in Minangkabau web and connected to the Internet network, will provide a greater opportunity to introduce the oral tradition not only to the Minangkabau society but also to the world community.

7. Search and Retrieval by providing as much as access to society about the oral tradition of the Minangkabau

8. Actuating in the form of activities to introduce the oral tradition of Minangkabau worldwide

This can be done through cultural activities which is held by the government and the private sector, such as exhibitions, seminars, and cultural performances. To make concepts of local text of Minangkabau accepted globally, could be through various ways:

- a. Conduct seminars on the theme of the Minangkabau culture, especially about the oral tradition of the Minangkabau, both nationally and internationally.
- b. Transliterate the Minangkabau society oral tradition into a foreign language, like English, without changing the content of the manuscript.

- c. Market strategies related to the manuscript culture.
- d. Find the uniqueness of the oral traditions of Minangkabau society, so it could serve as a cultural identity.

### C. Obstacles In Preserving Oral Tradition Of Minangkabau Society

Constraints that may be encountered in the activities and the preservation of knowledge in the oral tradition are:

- a. Lack of awareness of the elder's about the merits of knowledge transfer in preserving oral tradition. As the result, some of the older generation are unwilling to transfer their knowledge to the public. They assume that the knowledge they have is a 'sacred' matter and not everyone can learn about it.
- b. Lack of public awareness about the importance of oral tradition, so the oral tradition is considered as something archaic and unnecessary to sustain, moreover to develop it.
- c. The concern of government is still considered as half-hearted in preserving Minangkabau tradition, especially the oral tradition. This can be seen from the lack of activities which have been undertaken by the government relating with preservation of oral tradition.
- d. The absence of further evaluation of implementation tradition about Minangkabau in curriculum of higher education.

### Conclusion

Minangkabau society is very well known by oral tradition *kaba babarito* that conveys message by word of mouth. All forms of oral tradition in Minangkabau society contains various information such as religious values, information of historical value, customs and practices of public information, information that has the values of local wisdom in the daily life of the community, as well as genealogical information or kinship of a family in the community.

However, degradation of oral tradition has raised as issue at this time. Oral tradition has begun to be abandoned and forgotten by the Minangkabau society. In addition it is being forgotten due to the metanarrative discourse that shape public opinion. There are assumptions that local culture is less meaningful. Rapid growth of information and communication technology and the lack of any activity to transfer oral tradition have affected the existence of oral tradition in Minangkabau society.

Therefore, the oral tradition of the Minangkabau needs to be preserved and sustained not only in the context of the form, but also in the context of the values which is kept in the oral tradition.

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