

# Bamboo Handicrafts in the Village of Brajan, Sendangagung, Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta: An Analysis of Their Forms and Meanings

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## ABSTRACT

As one of the potential tourist villages in the Sleman district, Brajan has contributed to its community, one of which is in the form of the emergence of human potential. The main human potential that develops in the tourist village of Brajan is that many citizens become bamboo craftsmen. At present, in the village of Brajan, there are approximately 120 artisans and 8 collectors of handicraft products. This study aims to determine the forms of bamboo handicrafts produced by craftsmen in the village of Brajan, Sendangagung, Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta; the process of making bamboo handicrafts in the village; and the meaning enclosed in the works for the craftsmen. The research method used was descriptive qualitative research. Data were collected from selected informants – craftsmen and the local community, the production centers, and documentation of the crafts. Data were collected by interviews and direct observations and analyzed qualitatively. The results of the study show that woven bamboo crafts were made through the process of preparation of tools and materials, weaving, and finishing. Along with the development in the industrial revolution 4.0, the craftsmen began to develop products, in terms of both design and technology. The development of the design is reflected in the form of product variety. Initially the craftsmen only work on the rice baskets, but now they develop bamboo crafts in the form of tissue boxes, decorative lamps, meat containers, plates, fruit baskets, conveyance baskets, bags and other modern handiwork. These woven bamboo handicrafts for the artists act as a system of livelihood, knowledge, bonding between the society and works of art.

**Keywords** – woven bamboo handicrafts, craftsmen, traditions, art works

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian handicraft is currently experiencing rapid developments in materials, techniques and shapes, from the traditional to the modern ones. In fact, many have been used as important export commodities other than oil and gas sold to other countries; these include handicrafts that are made from bamboo [1]. The term “kerajinan” [craft] comes from the Javanese language which means (1) matters, nature and so on; (2) industry or companies that create products using hands, not machines [2].

One of the regencies in Indonesia that create bamboo handicrafts is Sleman, precisely in Brajan Village, Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta. The woven bamboo handicraft industry is one of the sub-sectors of creative industry which has been grouped into 14 sub-sectors by the Government through the Indonesian Ministry of Trade, namely the handicraft sub-sector with natural fiber as the raw materials [3]. Craft is the result of an activity of making an item by weaving certain materials with diligence, accuracy, and creative skills.

“Meganyam” is a technique of weaving threads, ropes, strips, ribbons or others, depending on what raw material is woven. The products can be in the form of sheets such as mats, gedeg, braids, woven sheets for chairs or in the form of products such as baskets, bags, hats, household items, decorations and others, by hand or tool [4]. Matting uses materials from bamboo,

rattan, and leaves. The products are usually widely used as tools for daily household needs [2].

Woven craft is basically the product of weaving or arranging warp and weft. Warp is the part of the strip that is arranged longitudinally, while the weft is the part that is arranged transversely. Weaving is an activity of the community in creating a handicraft by inserting the weft over and under the warp [5]. The woven bamboo handicraft is one of the creative industries in Yogyakarta which has a very high artistic and cultural value and is favored by many tourists both local and foreign. In accordance with the origin of raw materials, bamboo is very easy and is often found in rural areas. From various studies into villages, general conclusions can be drawn that the village community in their way of life is self-centered, meaning that the community, in managing their lives, focuses on their own interests.

Village communities aspire to be independent by making do with what they have such as farming, raising livestock and being craftsmen. Seeing the availability of natural resources in villages and added production skills in creating products, many villages are starting to turn into tourist villages as well as industries that produce certain handicrafts. This is the case for the bamboo craft in Brajan tourist village.

Before Brajan Village turned into a tourist village, bamboo crafts were not well known by people both from the village and those from other regions. Most of the craftsmen in the village were elderly people since some of the younger generation had ignored the legacy. Craftsmen also had been facing some

problems in marketing their products because they had to go outside the area whenever they wanted to sell them. These products were usually sold in tourist attractions and souvenir shops. This had weakened the economy of the community and Brajan village artists.

After being inaugurated as a tourist village specialized in bamboo handicrafts, Brajan village have seen many of its people frequently receiving orders from consumers. They do not only sell their products for local customers, but also export them to other countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. This bamboo handicrafts have assisted the development of Brajan village into a recognized tourist village.

The bamboo handicrafts that currently still exist indicate that they have developed both in terms of the shape and function. The manufacturing process, however, remains using a manual technique in all stages starting from weaving, assembly, pattern making, gluing, coloring, drying to finishing.

The fact that bamboo handicrafts still exist and have developed to this day in the village of Brajan has motivated the authors to further investigate this phenomenon. This study aims to find out the forms of bamboo handicrafts produced by craftsmen in Brajan Village, the process of making bamboo handicrafts that they go through, and the meaning attached to bamboo handicrafts from the perspective of the craftsmen in this village.

## 2. METHOD

This study was carried out from March to June 2019 in Brajan Village, a tourist village specialized in bamboo handicrafts located in Sendangagung, Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta. It employed qualitative descriptive technique, where the research object was investigated in its natural setting. Thus, it was started by describing the topic and what was unfolding at the time. The interpretive research did not distinguish between dependent and independent variables but merely focused on the complexity of the emerging attitude of the participants [6].

The data were gathered from informants and documentations. The informants consisted of the craftsmen and the local people while documentations comprised the bamboo handicrafts along with the tools and materials for making them. The data were collected using interview and observation techniques.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1.1 *The Forms of Bamboo Handicrafts in Brajan Village*

Bamboo handicrafts in Brajan Village are made with a weaving technique, an applied work that has been around for a long time. The craft-making knowledge and technique was passed down from one generation to the next. This is the reason for the development of Brajan village into a tourist village with a unique focus on bamboo handicrafts. As a tourist village, Brajan has contributed in developing the potential of the local people by attracting them to become bamboo craftsmen. At present, there are approximately 120 artisans and 8 collectors of handicraft products.



**Figure 1** Brajan's Bamboo Craftmen

In this regard, Mr. Sulisman, who was interviewed in April 2019, explained a number of perspectives on people's lives and craftsmanship process in the Brajan village. With the new demands from modern consumers, the bamboo craftsmen began to develop a variety of products with various designs assisted with the new technology. The technology here is used in coloring stage and marketing (through social media). In the coloring process, craftsmen do not only use natural colors from bamboo, but also give a variety of colors using varnishes or artificial dyes so that the results have an aesthetic value.

The design development is reflected in the forms of the handicrafts produced. Initially, the craftsmen only worked on and produced rice baskets but now they created many products from bamboo such as lampshades, meat containers, delivery places, bags, shelves, and other modern items (as shown in Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Brajan's Bamboo Handicraft products

### **3.1.2 The Process of Making Bamboo Handicrafts in Brajan Village**

The process of making bamboo handicrafts involves the manual technique of weaving. Based on the researchers' observation and learning experience in making bamboo handicrafts in Brajan Village in March until June 2019, these handicrafts are made using some main tools such as hand saws, machetes, knives, scissors, measuring devices, sandpaper and others.

The main material is bamboo imported from Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta. Craftsmen only choose good quality bamboo. In order for the product to be of high quality, the bamboo to be used as a raw material must meet several requirements: the length of the segment (in order to obtain fabric in accordance with the desired size) and the strong and dense fiber [7].

The bamboos that are then processed into small sheets. These small bamboo sheets will later be processed by the residents of Brajan Village into bamboo handicrafts (as shown in figure 3). The method of splitting bamboo is done as follows: First, divide it into two equal sizes. Then, each section is divided in half again so that each section is a quarter in size. The next step is to divide each part into two smaller parts. After reaching one-sixteen parts, the material is dried or placed in the open (but careful not to expose it to rain). After being laid out for five or seven days, we can then continue processing this material [8].



**Figure 3** Processing Bamboo into Smaller Sheets

After being processed into small sheets, bamboo is then dried. In this process, they can just simply be sun-dried, no specific drying tool required. Seasonal factors, however, greatly affect the drying process, with the time needed for drying ranging from 1 day to 3 days depending on the weather. The drying stage is carried out to eliminate the water content of the bamboo so that it is not easy to mold. The next step is to whittle the bamboo, aiming at softening the surface of the bamboo.

As explained earlier, the drying process is intended to obtain a strong bendability so that the bamboo does not break easily. To avoid the possibility of breaking, split the latter halves into two halves of the same thickness (but be careful not to break) [9]. Then each of these halves is further divided into two parts, and so on. The next step is the weaving process. In making this craft, craftsmen can use any technique that suits a particular form or product. The technique chosen here is important for craftsmen to produce works that have functional (physical) and beauty values. For example, to produce a meat container,

craftsmen start by weaving five pieces of bamboo in a weft and 5 pieces of bamboo in a warp. This is done by a single cross (as shown in figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Weaving the base part

Single cross woven is done by inserting and overlapping flat objects (weft and warp) in different directions. This initial weaving process is carried out to produce the base part in accordance with the desired size (as shown in Figure 5).



**Figure 5** The result of the base part weaving

The second weaving process is carried out to produce a body part by starting weaving from the corner (as shown in figure 6).





**Figure 6** The weaving of the body part

After the weaving process is complete, proceed with the installation of the frame on the top and base. The frame referred to here is a decoration made to be attached to the top and base. This frame serves to strengthen and provide an aesthetic value (as shown in figure 7).



**Figure 7** The Installation of the Frame

The final stage is finishing, which is divided into three steps. The first is the polishing process using sandpaper, which aims to make the resulting product have a smooth surface (as shown in Figure 4). Then, the coloring or painting process is done with natural bamboo varnish or brownish yellow color (as shown in figure 8). The last process is drying the product under the sun (as shown in figure 9). After the drying process, the product is ready to be marketed (as shown in Figure 10).



**Figure 8** Coloring



**Figure 9** Drying the Products



**Figure 10.** Final Products

### 3.1.3 *The Meaning of Bamboo Handicrafts for Craftsmen in Brajan Village*

For craftsmen and local people, this bamboo craft has quite layered meanings that are inseparable from the socio-cultural and geographic conditions. Their meanings include livelihoods,

social organizations, knowledge systems, and works of art. As explained in the literature, culture in any region must have seven cultural elements, namely language, custom, social organization, government, economy, religion, and arts [10].

In an interview in April 2019, Pak Sulisman and the craftsmen in Brajan Village explained that they were aware that they were part of the community so that in making these crafts they were dependent on other parties. Interwoven relationships between people involved in the making of this craft lead to group cooperation. This group work naturally requires an organization whose members are bound to one another by their goals, rights and obligations. That is why Brajan Village has an organization that specializes in managing bamboo crafts.

This handicraft is also meaningful as a knowledge system. The system referred to here is the knowledge acquired by the craftsmen that underlies the attitude in making bamboo crafts or other things related to it. The current knowledge system that still underlies the process of making bamboo crafts is the knowledge of materials.

One example is the decision of the craftsmen to choose bamboo that is mature (but not too old) and large, with segments of the same length. Bamboo that is not too old was chosen as a the material because it is easier to process and does not crack when split. Other knowledge is the process of coloring with varnishes and other artificial colors that aim to provide an aesthetic value. In reality, bamboo crafts are made solely in order to make money to sustain the lives of the craftsmen and the welfare of the community in general. Brajan tourist village has positive impacts on people's lives, one of which is through entrepreneurial activities for Brajan villagers, the majority of which work as bamboo craftsmen. Mr. Sulisman, as a craftsman and head of the tourist village, added that the entrepreneurial activities carried out by the villagers were in the form of a home industry.

Before Brajan became a tourist village, local people had to leave the area to sell their handicrafts at tourist attractions and souvenir shops. Bamboo craftsmen also take advantage of this change into a tourist village by opening a course to make bamboo crafts so that tourists, in addition to buying this handicraft, also learn to make it directly from the craftsmen. The opening of this course increases the amount of income earned by craftsmen.



**Figure 11** Craft-making Course in Brajan Village.

## 4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that, along with the diverse functions of bamboo crafts and modern consumer demand, craftsmen in the Brajan tourist village have begun to adapt to the needs of modern society, as indicated by the resulting design which has developed from initial simple designs. In the beginning, craftsmen only worked on rice baskets, but now they are developing bamboo crafts in the form of decorative lamps, plates, meat containers, fruit baskets, delivery baskets, bags, racks, lampshades and other modern items.

The production process of these forms begins with the preparation of tools, such as hand saws, machetes, knives, scissors, sandpaper and others. The next step is the preparation or collection of bamboo material obtained from Kulon Progo. After that, the bamboo is cut or sliced into small pieces, then dried and cut into even smaller sheets. The third step is the weaving process where the craftsmen use the weaving technique according to the product they want to produce. The technique here is important for craftsmen to successfully create products that have a functional value and beauty value. For example, to produce a meat container, weaving using a single cross begins with five pieces of bamboo in weft and 5 pieces of bamboo in warp. This is done by overlapping them. The process of weaving is carried out according to the desired product shape. The final stage of work is refinement by sanding the product and painting with bamboo natural or brownish yellow color. Then the finished products are dried in the sun.

For local residents, this handicraft has quite a variety of meanings that are inseparable from the socio-cultural and geographic environment. The meaning of this craft includes livelihoods, social organizations, knowledge systems and works of art.

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