



# Apple Falls Near the Three: Minangkabau pantun in Malay Literary Aesthetics

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**Abstract.** Linguistically, Minangkabau is part of the Old Malay (Melayik) sub-family of languages. Therefore, Minangkabau pantun is considered to still contain elements of beauty (aesthetics) of Malay literature. Minangkabau language marriage poems were the object of research in this study. The poem was collected at a wedding ceremony in Air Bangis, West Sumatra. These pantuns were studied based on the beauty principles of Malay literature formulated by Salleh (2006). The research findings show that Minangkabau marriage rhymes still refer to the principle of beauty such as the “vastly condensed world”, “full of allegories”, and “symmetrical forms”. The similarity of philosophy, natural landscape, and culture makes Minangkabau pantun still deeply-connected with the element of beauty in Malay pantuns.

**Keywords:** Minangkabau · Malay Pantun · aesthetics

## 1 Introduction

The definition of pantun is almost as broad as its distribution. According to Fang (2013), pantun is a form of folk poetry that is sung. In contrast to this definition, Piah (1997) states that the word ‘pantun’ comes from the Pampanga language ‘tuntun’ which means orderly and the Old Javanese language ‘matuntun’ which means to lead. Therefore, the pantun is an orderly arrangement of words and aims to lead people towards a noble mind. Another opinion according to a number of linguists and anthropologists is that pantun is a continuation and growth form of proverbs and parables. Thus, pantun have many meanings depending on the people who preserve them.

Besides having a wide range of definitions, pantun also have various characteristics. However, almost all experts agree that the rhyme must have a hook and content and rhyme ab-ab. Some experts claim that hook and content are interrelated (see Pijnappel, 1883; Wilkinson, 1907; Winstedt, 1958); and some argue that the two are unrelated (van Ophuijsen, 1920; Overbeck, 1922; Ashaari, 1961). In short, the pantun is the result of the thoughts and subtleties of the Malay people’s feelings from a long time ago.

Pantun for Malays is an inseparable part of themselves. In the book *Pantun Melayu*, Wilkinson and Winstedt (1914) asserted that one cannot understand the thoughts of the Malays without reading the pantun. Van Ophuijsen (1920) adds that most Western

researchers only know the outer skin of the Malay language and culture, making it difficult to interpret the thoughts behind the pantun.

Minangkabau culture is very similar to Malay culture. Some studies claim that Minangkabau is part of the Malay civilization. The research of Omar, Jafaar, and Mat (2015) emphasizes that the level of similarity between the Minangkabau language and the Malay language is 93% which is one language with the same origin (see also Notofer, 1985). The two cultures influence each other and are influenced to varying degrees. The influence appears in various aspects such as food, clothing, way of life, including the way of literature.

Pantun is one of the traditional literatures in Malay and Minangkabau. It is undeniable that Minangkabau pantun is closely related to Malay pantun. These two nations both place the beauty of language as a beauty which is manifested in the following pantun:

Nan merah iyola sago  
 Nan kuriek iyolah kundi  
 Nan indah iyolah baso  
 Nan baik iyolah budi

It is *sago* that is red  
 and *kundi* that is spotty  
 It is language that is beautiful  
 and *budi* (moral quality) which is good

After the development of the times and the separation due to national boundaries, it is interesting to discuss the relationship between Minangkabau pantun in the aesthetics of Malay literature. The question posed in this paper is whether the current Minangkabau pantun still follows the aesthetic principles of Malay pantun? The examination was managed by discussing the Minangkabau pantun from the point of view of the aesthetic theory of Malay literature formulated by Muhammad Haji Salleh (2006).

Muhammad Haji Salleh (2006) in his book entitled *Puitika Sastra Melayu* explains the difference between the beautiful and ordinary one. Beauty or *yang Indah-indah* (the Beautiful) refers to the nature of the story or language or character that loves the audience, including feelings of sadness, pity, fear, anxiety and others. The ranking for the beautiful is different from the ordinary rank because it contains higher creation techniques and deep contemplation. Therefore, the beauty of superior literature is extraordinary beauty. Actually, Salleh (2006) formulated 6 points related to the value of beauty (aesthetics) in Malay literature. Three principles such as “the world is matched”, “music goes hand in hand”, and “appropriate and proper” are not used after some deliberation. Actually, Salleh (2006) formulated 6 points related to the value of beauty (aesthetics) in Malay literature. Thus, in this study only three were used. These three things are:

#### 1. The Vastly Condensed World

This world and universe contains many unique things and interesting experiences. An author and poet must have the ability to simplify these complex and intertwined concepts. Author with a high level of craftsmanship then simplify complex life

concepts into the level of words, phrases and words only. With the brilliance of this technique, literature is considered a complete and intellectual package of beauty.

## 2. Full of Analogies

A superior literary work, in addition to being able to simplify big things, must also be able to convey something subtly or almost imperceptibly. In the pantun, the first two lines serve as shadows. In this shadow, it does not only contain parables, but there are mysterious thoughts and tests the listener's mind so that they can create a magical and magical world. The figure of speech in this shadow serves as an introduction to emotions, whether ridicule, seduction, to moaning. Therefore, figures of speech must be able to reveal and protect the purpose of the pantun.

## 3. Symmetrical Form

In addition to being dense and full of figures, pantun must also be arranged in such a way. The arrangement of syllables, lines, and sounds in the pantun must be of the same size to create harmony. Salleh (2006) states that the lines in the shadow of pantun will have the same number of syllables, the same sound and rhyme. Values like this are important to be manifested because form of pantun will helps to express its beauty.

## 2 Method

The pantun used as the object of study in this study is a collection of pantun appeared in a traditional wedding ceremony in Minangkabau language. The geographical setting of the selected pantun is in Air Bangis, West Pasaman Regency, West Sumatra Province. The total number of pantun collected is 45. These rhymes were collected using the non-involved observation method and note-taking and recording as extensive techniques.

In analyzing the pantun, two methods are used, namely heuristic reading and hermeneutic reading. Heuristic analysis focuses on the formalistic elements that build a poem. In this case it is used in uncovering the "Symmetrical" principal. Meanwhile, hermeneutic analysis seeks to explore more deeply to find the meaning (significance) of a poem. In this paper, it is used to discuss the aesthetics of the "The Vastly Condensed World and "Full of Figure of Speeches".

By examining and applying the three aesthetic principles of Malay literature into Minangkabau pantun, it is hoped that it will reveal the current position of Minangkabau culture. Indirectly, this can also explain the close relationship between Malay literature and Minangkabau literature in the modern era.

## 3 Finding and Discussion

### 3.1 The Vast Condensed World

Like the Malay community, the Minangkabau community is also close to the natural environment that supports it. Everything that lies in the natural surroundings is a school of life that is very rich in knowledge and wisdom. Not surprisingly, the Minangkabau people have the motto "spread out nature is a teacher" as well as a guide in life.

Life lessons derived from the behavior of nature are widely spread and can be chosen according to human needs. Therefore, to understand the aesthetic element of the “vast condensed world”, we can look at the hook of the pantun which contains elements of nature in it. This natural element can be understood as something that has happened and will happen again in the future. See the poem below.

Sungai Deli aianyo tonang  
Mangayuah biduak sabia badendang  
Sungguah kami maghaso sonang  
Kami ucapkan selamat datang

How calm Deli river is  
Paddling a canoe while singing  
We feel very happy  
So we welcome you

The above pantun is a welcoming pantun that is delivered to the *marapulai* (groom) when it comes to the bride’s house in the Minangkabau wedding ceremony. In the sampiran/hook of the pantun above, it can be seen the use of natural elements, namely the Deli river. The river was chosen by as the main symbol in the hook of pantun. In this case, the river represents the journey taken by both parties for the same goal of marrying their children.

Associated with the principle of “The Vast Condensed World”, the element of the river is seen as a symbol of the journey of both parties in completing the marriage bond. Similar to wading through a river, the marriage process in Minangkabau is certainly accompanied by a number of obstacles and challenges. If one is not careful, one can be drowned by the dangers that lurk like rushing waves to crocodile attacks. However, if both parties manage to work it out, then the journey will be exciting. The situation of a smooth and pleasant trip is analogous to wading through a calm river accompanied by feelings of happiness (emphasized by the “badendang/singing” activity).

**Inggok di ghantiang si kamuniang**

**Tobang ka bale kayu tuo**

Ambo manyiram bogheh kuniang  
Tando mak pole baghu tibo

Perched on a *kemuning*/orange jasmine branch  
Then fly to Kayu Tua market  
We throw yellow rice  
The sign of groom has arrived

The next natural element that is used as a symbol in the sampiran of the poem above is “kamuniang” (orange jasmine). The Minangkabau people have long used the *kemuning* (root) for knife and machete stalks. In addition, *kemuning* is also a flowering plant that

is beautiful and smells good. This beauty association is emphasized in this sampiran pantun. The kemuning in this pantun refers to the beauty of the *marapulai* (groom).

Regarding the principle of Vastly Condensed World, the yellow element is seen as a symbol of the beauty of the bride and groom who are both young and fresh. The two brides who sat on the aisle were likened to something striking beauty “perched on a *kemuning* branch”. In addition, the wedding party also aims to spread the news to the general public which is like “Then fly to Kayu Tua market” which is crowded with people.

### 3.2 Full of Analogies

The quality of the beauty of a poem is tested from the figures of speech used by the speaker. These figures of speech are considered a necessity that must be followed because the vagueness of speech implies subtlety and politeness. Through allusions and suggestions, a pantun can draw the listener into a mysterious realm as well as challenge the listener. Take a look at the following examples.

**Bukan kacang sambaghang kacang**

**Kacang malilik si pohon jati**

Bukan datang sambaghang datang

Godang olek godang ati

Not like any peanut

This nut wrapped the teak tree

This arrival is different

Bigger celebration, bigger happy

The above pantun is spoken by the woman’s family to the man’s family. The pantun’s speaker (from female side) want to convey a wish that they intend to hold a big party for their child. However, this request certainly cannot be said directly and openly. Therefore, they use the metaphor of peanuts as a symbol of demand.

In the *sampiran*/hook section, the speaker gives the impression to the listener that they hope for something big and extraordinary. This great demand is depicted in figurative words such as “a nut wrapped around the teak tree”.

With this figurative imagining method, the male family is expected to be prepared to accept this even though the speaker has not conveyed their meaning. The art of tugging and hiding in the pantun above is a manifestation of the subtlety, respect and politeness of human relations, one of which is marriage.

As for examples of other marriage pantun that show the following figures of speech.

Dibaok pulang samo ampo  
 Sudah dijomua baghu ditompi  
**Anak surang jadi baduo**  
**Bak cando bughuang duo sijoli**

(rice) Taken home empty  
 Dried and cleaned  
 Single child become team  
 Like pair of bird

The pantun above is conveyed by the woman's family to the man's family. Here, the female side express their happiness in welcoming the presence of male side into their house/*rumah gadang*. After the wedding, the woman family will treat the marapulai/groom like their own child. This is expressed through the shadow on the first line of the hook section: "Taken home empty".

The next figure of speech used is a pair of birds. This is existed in the meaning of the poem. The symbol of this pair of birds refers to a husband and wife who will be treated the same way, "dried and cleaned". Their position is also the same as described in the third line "single child become a team". Through the allusions spread starting from the hook to the content, listeners are expected to be able to guess the main purpose of the rhyme speaker even without being explained clearly.

### 3.3 Symmetrical Form

Like a house, the building of the pantun must also be arranged with balance, proportion, and harmony. Through this balance and order, rhymes can find beauty from the very beginning. Readers will more easily catch associations and images that are developed in a harmonious, coherent and interrelated manner. Therefore, the measure of the beauty of the rhyme can be seen from how synchronized the quantity of syllables, sounds, and rhymes is. See the following pantun:

Pake golangl omeh tambago  
 Cincin dijaghil intan suaso  
 Anak surangl jadi baduo  
 Buah hatil cahayo mato

Wearing gold copper bracelet  
 With diamon ring on the finger  
 Once child become two  
 My sweetheart, my beloved

The above pantun is spoken by the woman's family to welcome the arrival of the daughter-in-law to their house. A happy atmosphere is the impression the speaker wants to convey. This impression is imaged in the form of a harmonious and proportionate pantun. This can be investigated from the size of syllables, rhymes and sound repetition.

The pantun above rhymes aa-aa which means to do sound repetitions more than usual (rhymes ab-ab). This is to show the barrage of joy from the speaker of the poem. Likewise, the number of syllables between hook and contents is 4 syllables per line. This implies a harmonious situation which indicates the acceptance of all parties to the process of uniting the two families. This implies a harmonious situation which indicates the acceptance of all parties to the process of uniting the two families. In terms of sound, it is also similar to what is heard from the pair of sounds "golang-surang" and dijaghi-hati" which shows harmony between the bride and groom.

## 4 Conclusion

It is undeniable that the Minangkabau language comes from the Old-Malay (Malayic) language family. Thus, the characteristics of the Malay language including literary aspects are also carried over in it [11]. In research related to the dissection of the aesthetic principles of Malay literature in the Minangkabau pantun, it was re-examined whether the Minangkabau pantun still applies these principles or has undergone modifications.

The findings in the study of Minangkabau pantun in marriage shows that Minangkabau pantun still applies the Malay aesthetic principles as formulated by M. H. Salleh (2006). Minangkabau rhymes use natural elements as manifestations of the vastly condensed world. This is not surprising because both the Malay and Minangkabau tribes both use nature as a source of learning and inspiration for life.

In addition, Minangkabau pantun also still holds the principle of figurative and indirectness in the narrative. It is the same with the belief held by the Malays that the indirectness of language and small talk is a form of subtlety of feeling and intelligence. In Minangkabau culture, this is manifested in the proverb "alun takilek alah takalam".

Finally, both Minangkabau and Malay pantun also uphold the beauty of form as a measure of beauty. Harmony, conformity and harmonization are the keys to the beauty of form. With the same number of syllables, linked sounds, and repetition, the beauty of the pantun is increasingly felt to complement the main purpose of the pantun.

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