

# STUDY OF BIMA TEMBE AND ITS RELATION TO BELIEF SYSTEM IN BIMA

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**Abstract:** *Bima Tembe is an excellent sample of cultural artifact that many people regard it as: (1) manufactured by a traditional loom techniques, (2) contained with variety forms and great philosophical motifs, and (3) having valued functions related to women status in the society. In the other side, the religion system in Bima is influenced by the introduction of Islam to the region of Bima since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This research examined the relation between the elements of Bima Tembe and one of its functions. The elements include: (1) the traditional techniques of making Bima Tembe, (2) the variety forms and philosophical motifs of Bima Tembe, (3) the function of Bima Tembe that is associated with Rimpu. Rimpu, is a one way of how local women in Bima daily get dressed, which use the major contribution of Bima Tembe.*

**Keywords:** *tembe, religion system, rimpu*

## 1. Introduction

Bima (*Mbojo*), as one among other 1.340 tribes that exist in Indonesia, has its culture developed well on the eastern coast of Sumbawa Island, an island that is located in the central part of Indonesia. In the province of West Nusa Tenggara, the local citizens of Bima are known as *Dou Mbojo* or Bima people who speak their own language, Bima language (*Nggahi Mbojo*). The government system in Bima regency was the sultanate, ruled by a Sultan, and also has becoming a symbol of its religion system, which is Islam. Islam has a great influence to the culture of Bima, and one of them was cultural product called Bima Sarong, or usually known by the local citizens as *Tembe*. This research will examine how a belief system in Bima could have a major impact in the creation, philosophical value and also the function of *Tembe*, as an Indonesia's cultural artifact.

## 2. The Belief System in Bima

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, traders from various regions came to Bima, Bima's natural assets that produced resources such as Sapang wood, yellow wood, teak, candlenut, rattan and resin have made it as a potential destination for economical transaction (Ismail, 2006). As a trading route, Bima has encountered an acculturation, which was effecting the current beliefs. Beside of the economical factor, the belief system in Bima was also influenced by the government system at that time. In his book, M. Hilir Ismail (2006) [1] stated that, "Politically, Bima can be divided into some state eras, and here are the chronological eras of its government's political system; *Naka* era (pre-history), *Ncuhi* era (proto-history), Monarchy era and Sultanate era". The belief system that evolved in the Sultanate era was Islam, therefore, the developing culture at that time was acculturated to the Islam religion. Other cultures were adopted from the local rules and adjusted to the Islamic system.

### 2.1. The Arrival of Islam in Bima

Before the arrival of Islam in Bima, the local citizens believed in *Makamba* and *Makimbi* (dynamism and animism) (Ismail, 2006)[1], a belief built upon agreement and shared spirit. While the entry of Islam, was indicated by the emergence of Sultanate of Bima. Sultanate of Bima was began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, precisely in 1609 BC, when the King of Bima agreed to accept Islamic doctrine into the kingdom (Mutawali, 2013)[2]. When there was a fight over the throne between King La Ka'i, who ruled the kingdom, and his uncle, who wanted to take over his position. However, King La Ka'i initiatively asked for support from the King of Makassar across the ocean, and he would help King La Ka'i if he agrees to learn Islam. After both of the Kings agreed, King La Ka'i regained the throne with the help of King of Makassar. After the fight, King La Ka'i got his territory back, and crowned as a Sultan of Bima I and has given a name Sultan Abdul Kahir. That was the end of Monarchy era, replaced by the new government system, Sultanate, a government system that is based on Islam and cultural (tradition) system that is oriented to the norms of Islam (Mutawali, 2013)[2]. Undeniably, King of Makassar, who had embraced Islam earlier on, had a major contribution on the entry of Islam to Bima in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The agreement led King of Bima to learn Islam and carry it inside the kingdom, until it changed the government system into Sultanate, which was the symbol of Islamic throne[3].

## 2.1 The Evolution of Islam in Bima and Its Influence to the Local Culture

Not only affecting the government system of Bima, the role of Islam also affected its local culture. The cultural element that was influenced by Islamic belief was cultural artifact of Bima. The sultanate objects that were used during traditional ceremony as well as objects that were being used in the society, they were having philosophical values related to Islam as their belief. Based on the author's observation, one of many artifacts that has a high philosophical value and also greatly associated to Islam in Bima, is *Tembe*, a special textile from Bima in a form of colorful fabric, that serves as daily apparel in the society.

## 3. Bima *Tembe* as An Artifact of Bimanese Culture

Bima *Tembe* has becoming one cultural product in the society, and its existence has been since the *Ncuhi* era in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the people started to create clothing by woven<sup>[1]</sup>. The shape, philosophy and etiquette of using *Tembe* have been through many changes until today. It depends on the natural conditions and the current system of belief. Here are some brief explanations about Bima *Tembe* in general.

### 3.1 Production Techniques

Bima *Tembe* was made through a weaving process. This weaving activity has been practiced in Bima since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which generally conducted by the women. The equipment used was loom or usually called loom *Gedongan* (backstrap-loom). *Gedongan* is a traditional loom without using any machines. To use this loom, the weaver has to sit on the floor and work with several heddles. The fabric's position is looped on the weaver's hip, so that there will be a connection between the weaver and the fabrics. The local weavers use *Gedongan* until today, in some area throughout Bima region.

### 3.2 The Types of Bima *Tembe*

Bima *Tembe* can be classified based on its origin and growth, such as: *Tembe Rakyat* (Public *Tembe*) and *Tembe Istana* (Palace *Tembe*). Detail explanations are presented in Table 1.





**Table 1:** Classifications of Bima *Tembe*

Type of <i>Tembe</i>	Time of Creation	Character	User	Material
<b><i>Tembe Rakyat</i></b> <b>(Public <i>Tembe</i>)</b>	This type of <i>Tembe</i> is the oldest one in Bima, and commonly being wore in the community non-palace.	This type of <i>Tembe</i> is the oldest one in Bima, and commonly being wore in the community non-palace.	This type of <i>Tembe</i> is the oldest one in Bima, and commonly being wore in the community non-palace.	This type of <i>Tembe</i> is the oldest one in Bima, and commonly being wore in the community non-palace. This <i>Tembe</i> has been existed since before Islam entered Bima.
	This <i>Tembe</i> has been existed since before Islam entered Bima.	This <i>Tembe</i> has been existed since before Islam entered Bima.	This <i>Tembe</i> has been existed since before Islam entered Bima.	
<b><i>Tembe Istana</i></b> <b>(Palace <i>Tembe</i>)</b>	This type of <i>Tembe</i> emerged in the Sultanate era, when Islam has entered Bima region.	Bright color, because it used spun gold and polyester.  Strong fabric, because it used spun gold.	The Sultan, palace staff & citizens	Spun gold & colorful polyester

### 3.3 The Motifs of Bima *Tembe*

Bima *Tembe* has various motifs, depend on the various types, natural conditions, also social and political situation (the belief system) at that time. Some motifs can be seen in the Table 2.

**Table 2:** Sample of Bima *Tembe* Motifs

Type of <i>Tembe</i>	Motifs	Image
<i>Tembe Istana</i>	<i>Nggusu waru</i> <sup>[6]</sup>	
	<i>Samobo Flower</i> <sup>[6]</sup>	
<i>Tembe Rakyat</i>	<i>Nggoli</i>	
	<i>Salungka</i>	

The others motifs of *Tembe Istana* are *Sakato flower*, *Aruna flower*, *Kakato Flower*, *Gari*, *Nggosu Toli*, *Nggosu Upa*, and *Pado Waji Motif*.

Up the year of 1980's, only a certain community commonly wore *Tembe Istana*, which were the aristocrats. However, H. Nurdin, who was the Head of the Department of Industry and Trade Regional Government of Bima at that time, attained to bring *Tembe Istana* out from the palace and could be worn by any community, even by the common people. As a matter of course, H. Nurdin did this with permission from the palace. Until today, any level of society can wear *Tembe Istana* openly.

### 4. Bima *Tembe* and Its Relations to the Beliefs System in Bima

Islam has been impactful for the growth of *Tembe* in Bima. In the beginning, people only knew and produced *Tembe* as daily apparels, and so did the palace. However, when Islam came in and the government system was changed into Sultanate. Then the Palace released a new cultural product with its new concept and philosophy, according to Islam belief, and it was called *Tembe Istana*. *Tembe Istana* represented the new system in the government of Bima, which was the acceptance of Islam as a religion of government.

Here is the analysis of changes and impacts from new belief system in Bima, to Bima *Tembe*:

#### 4.1 The Philosophy of Bima *Tembe* Motifs and Its Correlation with Islam

*Tembe* Istana, as a new cultural product at that time, contained a deep philosophy, especially in the essence of Palace belief (sultanate), which was Islam. The decoration motifs of *Tembe* were shaped from the sultanate faith of good hopes that was reflected through Islam. Even *Tembe* Rakyat adjusted its value with the Islamic philosophy. The explanation of motifs philosophy from *Tembe* Istana and *Tembe* Rakyat and its correlation with Islam, will be presented in the Table 3 below<sup>[4]</sup>:

**Table 3:** The Meanings of *Tembe* Istana and *Tembe* Rakyat Motif

Nama Ragam Hias	Arti	Makna
<b><i>Samobo Flower</i></b>	A piece of flower	As a social beings, beside of being beneficial for him/herself, humans need to be useful for the others too. Like a piece of flower that produces fragrance for its environment.
<b><i>Sakato Flower</i></b>	A footstalk of flower	As a family life symbol and be able to establish happiness within the family and society. Like a footstalk of flower that always spread its fragrance to the environment.
<b><i>Aruna Flower</i></b>	Pineapple flower	A pineapple has 99 tough & waxy leaves, which means 99 symbols of Allah (God)'s beautiful names and attributes (Asmaul Husna), that must be followed by human beings in living the life to achieve a happy life and hereafter.
<b><i>Kakato Flower</i></b>	Bamboo sprout	Implies a dynamics of life that must be encountered vigorously.
<b><i>Gari</i></b>	Line (Geometry)	Human beings have to be honest and firm in performing his/her job, like a straight line
<b><i>Nggusu Tolu</i></b>	Triangle	In a cone-shaped, means that the highest power is in Allah's hand. It is being symbolized with a pointed peak of cone.
<b><i>Nggusu Upa</i></b>	Square	A symbol of togetherness with neighbors and relatives.
<b><i>Pado Waji Motif</i></b>	Parallelogram	Almost the same as Nggusu Tolu, but besides admitting the power of Allah, also admits the power of a leader by drawing the two obtuse angles in its left and right position.
<b><i>Nggusu Waru</i></b>	Octagon	A leader has to meet the 8 requirements, which are: Faithful & Piety, Na Mboto Ilmu Ro Bae Ade (Having extensive knowledge), Loa Ra Tingi (Smart & Ingenious), Taho Nggahi Ra Eli (Smooth-spoken & polite), Taho Ruku Ro Rawi (Behave politely), Londo Ro Dou (Derived from a good ancestry), Hidi Ro Tahona (Healthy physically & spiritually), Mori Ra Woko (Capable to meet the daily needs).

#### 4.2 The Usage of Bima *Tembe* as Rimpu, A Status Symbol of Women in Bima

The influence of Islam was not only seen in the growth of decoration and philosophical shape of Bima *Tembe* decoration. Islam thought, which was reflected through Rimpu, also has influenced the function and usage of it. Rimpu was a way of how women in Bima wear their daily outfit, which is using Bima *Tembe* as its basic material. To wear Rimpu, women draping *Tembe* onto their head, covering all hairs with a certain technique, until the head are fully covered, except for the face area. Before Islam has arrived in Bima, this tradition was not emerged yet. People has been using *TembeNggoli* for their daily activities, but the women did not wear it as Rimpu, they wore *Tembe* not more than covering their body from chest until their feet. In her research, Rahmi (2010) stated that within the society, Rimpu acts as an obedience symbol of women in Bima to their religion, includes the obligation in Islam for women to cover their private body parts (aurat). The usage of Rimpu also reflected status of women in Bima, by wearing Rimpu, they will be considered following the religion sincerely <sup>[5]</sup>.



**Figure 1:** The usage of Rimpu among Bima community. a. The women in Bima are wearing Rimpu (front view). b. The usage of Rimpu (from behind).

There were two ways of wearing Rimpu: (1) *Tembe* was draped over the head, covering the hair and face areas except for the eyes, (2) *Tembe* was draped over the head, only covering the hair and still showing the face. The difference between those two ways of using *Tembe* would indicate the social status of a woman in Bima. For the usage number (1), it represented that she has married and has a family, while the usage number (2) was showing that she is single and has never been married before. This manner was aligned with the Islamic thought where single women have to be more cautious in wearing clothes and showing their body. Therefore, the usage of Rimpu has becoming an obedience symbol as well as self-respect for women in Bima. In addition, *TembeNggoli* was the one that being used as Rimpu, which is worn by the common people. The palace citizens did not wear Rimpu for their daily activities.

## 5. Conclusion

There are some conclusions that can be drawn from the study above about Bima *Tembe*. From its creation, it is known that weaving a fabric in *gedongan*, a traditional loom, can make a Bima *Tembe*. Using human hands in the making, Bima *Tembe* has various types of motif, which were influenced by the nature and philosophical values to human character according the Islamic thoughts. The existence of Bima *Tembe* in the society was closely related to the arrival of Islam in Bima region since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the beginning of women wearing Rimpu, until today. Rimpu has been described as an obedience symbol of women in Bima. The usage of Rimpu also indicates a social status, depends on how a woman wears it. Through this study about the elements of Bima *Tembe*, the usage of Rimpu and also the correlation between belief system and cultural point of view in Bima, the author is hoping that it would create a public interest to know and understand deeply about Bima *Tembe*, as one of the extraordinary cultures in Indonesia, especially in traditional textile.

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