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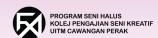
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EVOLUTION OF KAFTAN IN MALAYSIA

a chapter by

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Introduction

Malaysia is a multiracial society country that is rich in traditions, culture, foods and clothing. Malays are the majority community of Malaysia and Islam is the official religion of this country. Baju Kurung is one of the main traditional costume in Malaysia. However, the changing times and current trends now days, gave way to kaftan designs began to sprout and gain a place among Malay women, whether from teenagers, adults to the elderly. Kaftan is seen as a style of choice that is become increasingly popular especially for the festive season such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri and also Aidiladha. It is also an option for women in Malaysia to wear it while going to work, attending parties, religious ceremonies, attending formal events, graduation ceremonies and some even make it as their daily wear. This is one of the evolution in the world of fashion clothing in Malaysia, which describes that kaftan design as meeting the criteria of an elegant, simple look but stylish and comfortable to wear.

Origin of the Kaftan Globally

In Malaysia, mostly know that the word of 'baju kaftan' comes from the word of baju kelawar. Baju kelawar was originally worn by women in the east coast of Malaysia from the state of Terengganu and Kelantan. This baju kelawar is a dress worn at night or more easily called pyjamas. According to Face Book Page Nai Collection HQ October 2019 states that "The term kaftan, which is a term for baju kelawar used by Indonesians, is often misunderstood by Malaysians. Actually kaftan means baju kelawar, only the language is different. In terms of the general meaning, a kaftan is a long women's shirt like a robe, but it means more like a baju kelawar. However, the kaftan language itself comes from

the Turkish language." Referring to Lina Rosli through an article she wrote in September 2021 about the Origin of the Kaftan, she stated that "Kaftan or also spelled as Caftan is a garment used by men in Ancient Mesopotamia. The name kaftan comes from a Persian word meaning a long dress coat. It is described as a calf-length or below-the-knee robe with openings in the front and sleeves slightly cut off at the wrists." The writer of the Kumparanwoman blog in May 2021 also agreed that "The kaftan itself comes from the Persian language, while this fashion style is believed to come from Ancient Mesopotamia. The Ottoman sultans from the 14th to the 18th century wore elaborately decorated caftans." At this time, kaftan was made from silk, wool or cotton and was often attached around the waist. Kaftan is not only worn by women, but it is also worn by men in countries such as Iran, North Africa, and West Africa



Figure 1: Kaftans for Noble Men Foto: istockphoto.com/Duncan (1890)



Kaftan is one of suitable clothing to be wear when cold and hot weather. Its long and loose design provides excellent ventilation when dealing with hot weather situations. In the past, caftans were only worn by the aristocracy or rich people because of its luxurious and exotic designs with beaded detailing and thick patchwork. There are three countries widely known and popular in wearing kaftan are Turkish Kaftan, Algerian Kaftan and Moroccan Kaftan. Here are examples of the three caftans in figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4



Figure 2: Turkish Kaftan, Women's Kaftan /Foto: kolkozy.com (2019)



Figure 3: Kaftan el kadi (Eastern Algeria, Constantine) wife of Houari Boumediane, President of Algeria between 1967–1978



Figure 4: Bohemian Moroccan Kaftans Foto: instagram.com/kaftanelegance (2018)

According to Agneta & Beata in their writing about History of the Kaftan in June 16 2019 state that "The kaftan design started to become a global fashion trend when the famous international fashion designers called Christian Dior and Balenciaga highlighted the kaftan design as an upper-class fashion in the 1960s." A string of caftans originating from Middle Eastern countries followed by other designers and became a craze for many women to wear it especially during formal occasions.

Variations of Kaftan Designs in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the exposure to the kaftan dress is widely known originated from the baju kelawar. As state before, baju kelawar were only worn by women when stay at home, especially as pyjamas. Mostly shows, baju kelawar design had batik motif of flora, fauna and geometric. Nowadays the baju kelawar is also referred to be called as batik kaftan. However, fauna motifs are less prominent on batik kaftan because animal drawings are not encouraged in Islam to be placed on clothing. Now days batik kaftan can be seen in 2 variations namely batik canting and digital batik. Digital batik is usually used to produce kaftan designs in large quantities or in bulk which is referred as mass production. However, the digital batik Kaftan designs are less special in terms of uniqueness and value because they are produced in large numbers, repeated the same motif and only different in terms of colour. Different for batik canting kaftan which is more exclusive because it is produced manually using hand drawing. It's shows different motif even produced by the same person and difficult to imitate. Batik kaftan are usually produced from fabric silk, crepe, chiffon, jacquard, cotton viscose and rayon fabrics.

One of the reasons how kaftan design become increase in Malaysia is from batik kaftan itself. From that, there are various kaftan designs have started to develop rapidly by local fashion designers whether in mass production or individually called made to measure. The design of the kaftan which originally had a wide neck opening has been varied by attach zip at the centre front of kaftan. This pattern created because to allow mommies' feel easier to feed their babies while wearing the kaftan. There a more evolution is produced with a contemporary touch, including in terms of patterns, fabrics, embellishment such as beads and patchwork to make a kaftan design even though look simple but still unique, elegant and stylish. The new kaftan design can be seen whether it is with motif or plain. Each has its own uniqueness and value in the eyes of different individuals. Price of kaftan with a motif or pattern is usually more expensive than a plain kaftan. Plain kaftan is easier to produce in bulk because it used simple pattern and easy to produce in various sizes or free sizes. There are more variety of fabrics used to produce kaftan now days such as chiffon, Como crepe, satin crepe, satin silk, cotton, linen, jersey, lycra and silk. Here is an example variation of kaftan in Malaysia.



Figure 5: Kaftan Batik Canting Terengganu by Ruzimabatik 2023



Figure 6: Satin Crepe Kaftan (Digital Batik Print) by Seindah Batik Collections 2023



Figure 7: Kaftan with left and right pockets from Hasnuri 2023



Figure 8: Exclusive Kaftan from Daisy Kaftan 2023



Conclusion and Recommendation

The changing era of the fashion world makes the kaftan go through various new evolution with an alluring contemporary touch. Kaftan is preferred because it is not hot, loose, comfortable and suitable for day or night wear. It's simple with easy pattern makes the kaftan suitable for all types of body shapes, be it plump, thin, tall or short. The kaftan design is very suitable for women who wearing hijab because the cut covers all parts of the body except the face and wrists. Muslimah who wear hijab are encouraged to choose a kaftan from a fabric that is not thin, see through and not lycra because lycra makes the kaftan worn reveal the shape of the woman's body and look sexy. This is to meet the demands of Shariah-compliant clothing for the appearance of Muslim women not only in Malaysia but all over the world for Muslim women.

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