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ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL MALAY BUILDINGS IN GOMBAK DISTRICT, SELANGOR

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Malay buildings are rooted in history and represent the local identity, beliefs, and culture of the area. Each building is often associated with a specific state. However, in Selangor, the architectural identity of traditional Malay buildings is relatively scarce and needs more explicit characteristic mapping. There are fifteen common decorative elements found in traditional Malay buildings across Malaysia, namely—*tunjuk langit*, *sisik naga*, *sulur bayung*, *ande-ande*, *papan pemeleh*, *kepala cicak*, *tiang gantung*, *kekisi*, *gerbang*, *gerbang pintu*, *sesiku keluang*, *kepala pintu*, *kepala tingkap*, and *pagar musang*. The objective of this research is to identify the architectural decorative elements of traditional Malay houses and masjids in the Gombak district of Selangor. The research conducted on-site observations of 39 traditional Malay buildings (34 houses and 5 masjids) from 13 villages in Gombak. The research identified eight common architectural elements in Gombak's traditional Malay houses and masjids. These architectural elements add to the aesthetic theory and philosophy of traditional Malay houses and masjids in Selangor and should be preserved.

Keywords: *Architectural elements, traditional Malay house, masjid, heritage buildings, Gombak.*

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional Malay buildings in Selangor exhibit a blend of different styles from neighbouring states, particularly Perak and Melaka, with some influence from Negeri Sembilan. One type of traditional house found in Selangor is the "extended front" style house known as *Rumah Potong Perak*. Another type of house is *Rumah Bumbung Panjang* Selangor (Figure 1), which is influenced by the *Rumah Bumbung Panjang* Melaka style and is also referred to as the traditional Bugis house. Additionally, a few Minang-style curved-roof or *Bumbung Lengkuk* houses can be found in the southern parts of Selangor, bordering Negeri Sembilan (Ahmad Najib, 2013).



Figure 1: Example of *Rumah Bumbung Panjang* or *Rumah Bugis*, Selangor



Figure 2: The front view of *Rumah Penghulu Haji Abbas* before destroyed by a fire in 2003.
Source: *Warisan Seni Bina Selangor*

Among the famous *Rumah Potong Perak* type in Gombak was *Rumah Penghulu Haji Abbas* or famously known as *Rumah Pak Ali* (Figure 2). The house, which is in Kampung Kerdas, was built and designed in 1875 by the owner, Penghulu Haji Abbas bin Haji Abu Bakar. The *design of the house features* a unique blend of Perak and Sumatran architecture, using Chengal timber as the primary building material. Tragically, *Rumah Pak Ali* was destroyed in a fire on 20 October 2003.

The traditional Malay house and masjid are significant components of Malaysia's architectural heritage. The design and construction of the buildings using local materials and techniques often involved the occupants or owners in the process of showcasing the aesthetic skills of Malay vernacular architecture. One of the unique features of Malay architecture is the decorative elements found on the interior and exterior of the buildings. These elements are based on timber carving art and can be applied to walls, doors, windows, and roofs. The timber carving art of traditional Malay buildings is heavily influenced by the daily life, customs, and Islamic beliefs, resulting in geometrical, natural, and Islamic pattern designs (Amir and Dalilah, 2012). These decorative elements serve as a vernacular feature creating visual interest and reducing glares while also enhancing natural ventilation (Wan Ismail, 2005). Furthermore, these traditional aesthetic elements can be isolated and defined in any visual design or work of art and are the main structure of the work, carrying various messages. However, in Malay design, functions take precedence over decorative elements and often express the product's intrinsic value (Sabrizaa et al., 2018; Wan Ismail, 2005). Sabrizaa (2018) identified 15 common decorative elements found in traditional Malay architecture, which are listed in the following Table 1:

Table 1: Common decorative elements in traditional Malay architecture

No	Element	Description
1	Tunjuk Langit	There are two significant forms of <i>tunjuk langit</i> ; namely the vertical rod shape (<i>bentuk batang</i>) and rounded-shape (<i>bentuk bulat</i>). These forms are Also known as <i>buah buton</i> in Kelantan and <i>buah gutung</i> in Terengganu.
2	Sisik Naga	The decorative element installed along the ridge of the roof (<i>perabung</i> and <i>rabung atap</i>) and also known as <i>kemuncah</i> , <i>naga-naga</i> and <i>puncak rabung</i> .
3	Sulur Bayung	<i>Sulur bayung</i> is a decorative element located at the corner of each roof edge which is also known as <i>sulo bayung</i> , <i>sayap layang-layang</i> and <i>ekor itik</i> .
4	Ande-ande	The horizontal decorative timber plank covering the end of roof rafters or fascia board.
5	Papan pemeleh	A pair of timber planks on the gable roof (<i>tebar layar</i>) and also known as <i>peles</i> , <i>pemeles</i> and <i>papan layang</i> .
6	Kepala Cicak	<i>Kepala cicak</i> (<i>head of lizard</i>) can be found on the edge of roof eaves.
7	Tiang Gantung	<i>Tiang gantung</i> is commonly found in Negeri Sembilan' Malay traditional houses and looks like a small carved hanging column. Also known as <i>saka bentung</i> , <i>tiang gantung</i> and <i>tiang satuh</i> .
8	Lebah Bergantung	A decorative element that is located at the bottom of every meet point of crossbeams. It is usually shaped like a pumpkin.
9	Kekisi	The balustrade of timber rods that functions as the window grills.
10	Gerbang	The timber arch located at the main entrance of the building.
11	Gerbang Pintu	The decorative arch timber located on top of the door opening.
12	Sesiku Keluang	A decorative timber element usually shaped in the form of a triangle that is fixed to the column and beam.
13	Pagar Musang	Balustrade of timber rods or timber planks that functions as the safety features of the large window openings.
14	Kepala Pintu	The decorative timber panel on top of the door opening. It is commonly carved with floral patterns, Quranic verses calligraphy or lattice pattern.
15	Kepala Tingkap	Same feature and function as <i>kepala pintu</i> ; however, it is precisely for the window opening.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research involved a combination of literature review and onsite observation methods. However, due to the movement control restrictions of COVID-19, onsite observations were postponed and rescheduled several times. During the onsite observations, photographs of the identified houses were recorded using a smartphone to document the houses' current condition and structure. This research focused on only thirteen (13) villages in Gombak from three subdivisions: Setapak, Hulu Kelang and Batu (Figure 4), as these sub-divisions were the early Malay settlements of the original Gombak district (Table 2). Thirty-nine (39) traditional Malay buildings, which consist of thirty-four (34) houses and five (5) masjids, were selected based on specific criteria such as historical and cultural significance. These buildings were then observed using a prepared building element checklist, which was developed based on literature and expert consultations.

GOMBAK DISTRICT ZONAL MARKING

AS PER 31/JULY/2020

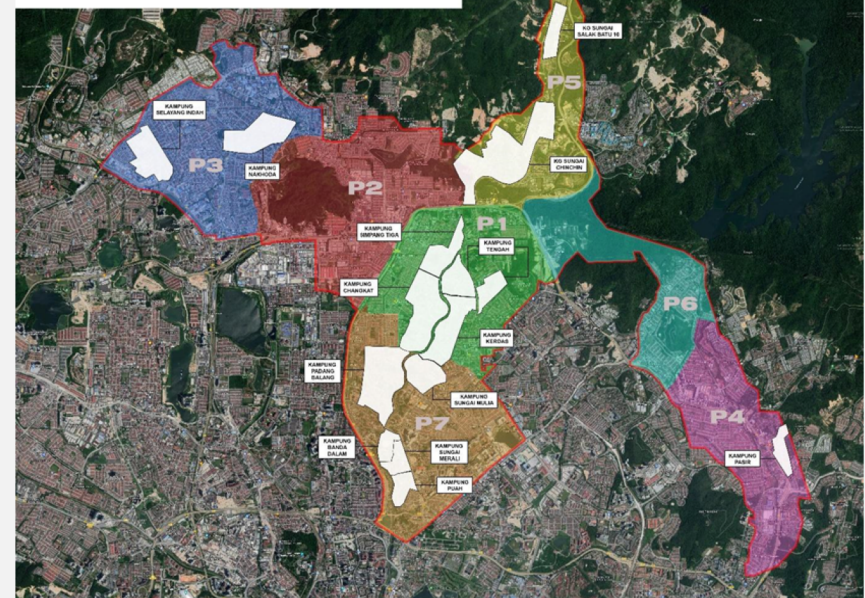


Figure 3: Gombak District Zonal Marking

Table 2: List of the selected traditional Malay houses and masjids in Gombak

ZONE	CODE	VILLAGE NAME	GPS COORDINATE
P1	KCR1	Kampung Changkat	3°13'18.6"N, 101°42'25.2"E
	KCR2		3°13'23.5"N, 101°42'15.1"E
	KCR3		3°13'13.8"N, 101°42'10.1"E
	KCR4		3°13'14.9"N, 101°42'10.5"E
	KCR5		3°13'15.3"N, 101°42'10.6"E
	KCR6		3°13'15.9"N, 101°42'11.1"E
	KCR7		3°13'29.3"N, 101°42'21.4"E
P1	KKR1	Kampung Kerdas	3°12'59.5"N, 101°42'20.7"E
	KKR2		3°13'16.3"N, 101°42'39.0"E
	KKR3		3°13'29.1"N, 101°42'50.1"E
	KKR4		3°13'29.5"N, 101°42'50.1"E
	KKR5		3°13'08.7"N, 101°42'40.0"E
	KKR6		3°13'17.4"N, 101°42'46.1"E
P1	KKM1	Kampung Simpang Tiga	3°13'24.2"N, 101°42'49.8"E
	KSTR1		3°14'01.6"N, 101°42'33.0"E
P1	KTM1	Kampung Tengah	3°13'41.5"N, 101°42'48.5"E
	KTR1		3°13'38.4"N, 101°42'47.9"E
	KTLR1		3°13'30.4"N, 101°42'51.9"E
	KTLR2		3°13'39.9"N, 101°42'49.3"E
P3	KNR1	Kampung Nakhoda	3°14'56.9"N, 101°40'42.9"E
	KNR2		3°15'04.3"N, 101°40'29.1"E
	KNR3		3°15'07.4"N, 101°40'29.5"E
P3	KSIR1	Kampung Selayang Indah	3°15'08.9"N, 101°39'40.7"E
	KSIR2		3°15'08.0"N, 101°39'41.3"E
P4	KPHKR1	Kampung Pasir Hulu Klang	3°12'01.2"N, 101°45'49.0"E
P5	KSCR1	Kampung Sungai Chinchin	3°14'47.5"N, 101°43'05.1"E
	KSCR2		3°15'13.5"N, 101°43'32.7"E
	KSCR3		3°14'49.6"N, 101°43'22.3"E
	KSCR4		3°14'40.3"N, 101°43'05.2"E
	KSCM1		3°14'45.3"N, 101°42'57.9"E
P5	KSSR1	Kampung Sungai Salak Batu 10	3°15'53.4"N, 101°43'31.2"E
	KSSM1		3°16'06.9"N, 101°43'37.0"E
P7	KBDR1	Kampung Banda Dalam	3°12'51.6"N, 101°42'23.2"E
P7	KPBR1	Kampung Padang Balang	3°12'50.0"N, 101°41'55.5"E
	KPBR2		3°12'26.7"N, 101°41'55.8"E
	KPBM1		3°12'51.3"N, 101°41'48.3"E
P7	KPR1	Kampung Puah	3°11'53.0"N, 101°42'12.9"E
P7	KSMR1	Kampung Sungai Mulia	3°12'51.6"N, 101°42'23.2"E
	KSMR2		3°12'39.8"N, 101°42'24.4"E

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the onsite observations (of the houses and Masjids) in the thirteen (13) villages, only eight (8) elements identified from the buildings namely, tunjuk langit, ande-ande, papan pemaleh, kekisi, gerbang, kepala pintu, kepala tingkap and pagar musang (Table 3). However, due to the major renovation on most of the buildings, many of the elements have been replaced with modern materials with limited decorative timber carving patterns compared to the other vernacular traditional Malay houses and masjids in other states of Malaysia such as in Perak, Negeri Sembilan, Terengganu, Kelantan and Melaka. Hence, the existence of traditional timber elements of Malay heritage buildings in Gombak is relatively minimal.

Table 3: Summary of decorative elements of the traditional Malay buildings in Gombak

Building Code	Decorative Elements							
	Roof		Wall		Door	Window		
	Tunjuk Langit	Ande-ande	Papan Pemeleh	Kekisi	Gerbang	Kepala Pintu	Kepala Tingkap	Pagar Musang
KCR1						•	•	•
KCR3			•			•	•	•
KCR4			•			•	•	•
KCR5			•			•	•	•
KCR6			•			•	•	•
KCR7		•	•			•	•	•
KKR1		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
KKR2		•	•			•	•	•
KKR3		•	•		•	•	•	•
KKR4		•	•	•		•	•	•
KKR5		•	•		•	•	•	•
KKR6		•	•			•	•	•
KKM1	•	•						
KSTR1		•	•			•	•	
KTM1	•	•	•			•	•	•
KTR1		•	•					
KTLR1	•	•	•		•	•	•	•
KTLR2	•		•	•				•
KNR1		•	•			•	•	•
KNR2		•	•		•	•	•	•
KNR3			•			•	•	•
KSIR1		•	•			•	•	•
KSIR2		•	•			•	•	•
KPHKR1		•	•	•		•	•	•
KSCR1		•				•	•	•
KSCR2		•	•			•	•	•
KSCR3		•	•			•	•	•
KSCR4		•	•			•	•	•
KSCM1	•	•				•	•	•
KSSR1							•	•
KSSM1				•			•	•
KBDR1						•	•	•
KPBR1		•	•			•	•	•
KPBR2		•	•			•	•	•
KPBM1	•	•						
KPR1		•		•			•	•
KSMR1		•	•			•	•	•
KSMR2		•						
TOTAL	6/38	28/38	28/38	6/38	5/38	30/38	33/38	23/38
%	16	73	73	16	13	79	87	61

The findings of this study demonstrate that the *tunjuk langit* (finial) element is present in six out of 38 buildings (16%). This element is typically located at the apex of the roof. The shape and design of *tunjuk langit* vary depending on the function and significance of the building. For example, the *tunjuk langit* of a masjid have a more prominent and elaborate design than that of a typical house, reflecting the importance of the building as a place of worship and community gathering. Two prevalent styles of *tunjuk langit* were identified in the traditional Malay houses (see Figure 4), namely the rod type (*jenis batang*) and the rounded type (*jenis bulat*).

The ande-ande element is another common feature found in most buildings, with 28 (73%) buildings having this element installed. However, only nine houses have the decorative design of ande-ande, while the remaining buildings have the plain longitudinal timber plank covering the roof rafter. The ande-ande element is typically located at the lower part of the roof, near the eaves, and it serves to cover the roof rafters.

Many of the buildings, both houses and masjids, have undergone renovations over the years, and as a result, some of the decorative elements have been replaced with simpler designs. This is particularly evident in the case of the papan pemeleh element, which is present in 28 (73%) of the traditional buildings surveyed. However, only two buildings have the decorative papan pemeleh, while the rest have two plain timber planks covering the tebar layer of the roof. The papan pemeleh in Gombak is distinct from the one found on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. In Kelantan and Terengganu, the papan pemeleh is typically located at the roof edge to cover and beautify it. However, in Gombak, the papan pemeleh is located under the apex of the roof, which makes the sheet of the roof edge visible. This style is similar to the one found in Perak and is viewed as a unique feature of Malay vernacular architecture in Gombak.

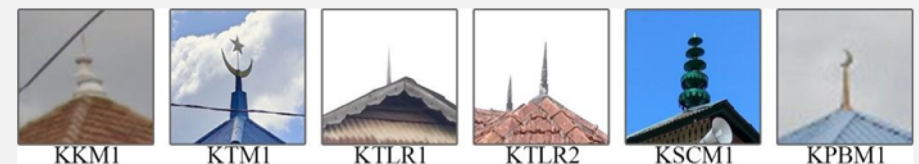


Figure 4: Tunjuk Langit

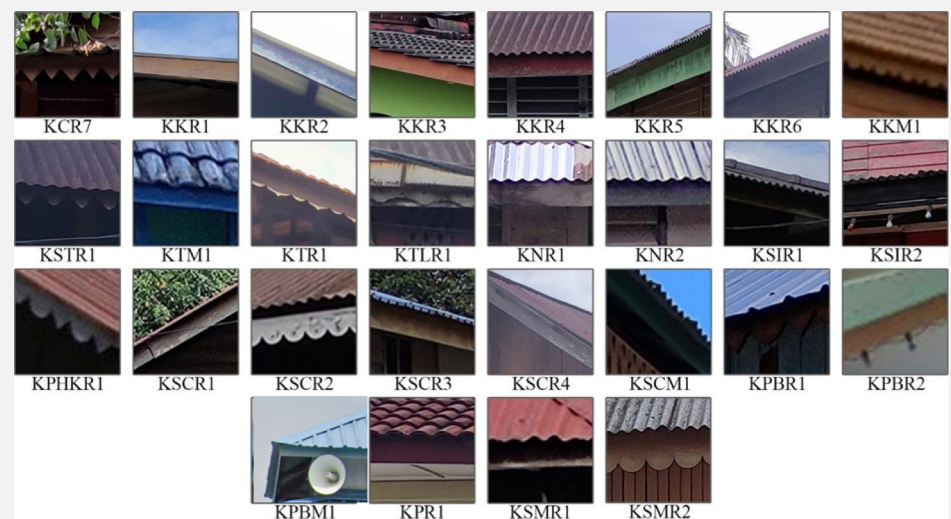


Figure 4: Ande-ande

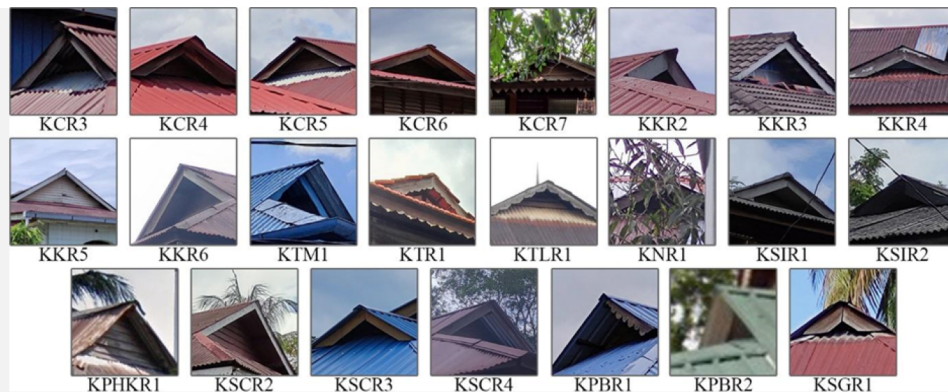


Figure 5: Papan Pemeleh

On the wall component, six (16%) houses were found with *kekisi* elements. In traditional Malay architecture, *kekisi* functions the same as window grills in the modern world for safety purposes. It is commonly found in houses with half-length windows (500 – 900mm) in the form of plain metal rods that fill up the window openings (refer to Figure 7). *Gerbang* is the least element found in traditional heritage buildings in Gombak, with only five houses (13%) (refer to Figure 8). Two out of five of the houses' *gerbang* has been replaced with modern concrete archway but still retain the same function.



Figure 6: Kekisi



Figure 7: Gerbang

Furthermore, the common decorative element in Gombak's traditional heritage buildings is *kepala pintu* and *kepala tingkap* (refer to Figure 9 & 10). These two elements have the same function to allow cross ventilation into the buildings located on top of the doors and windows, respectively, spanning till the *alang* or the beam. From the analysis, the two types of design of *kepala pintu* and *kepala tingkap* found are lattices and louvres made up of timber planks. Finally, the decorative element that existed was *pagar musang* (refer to Figure 11). About 23 buildings (61%) have *pagar musang* at their windows. The function of *pagar musang* is very similar to *kekisi*, which is for safety reasons. However, *pagar musang* is located at the bottom part of a full-length window, whereas *kekisi* is located in the void of window opening of a half-length window. Upon examination, it was noted that the design of the *kekisi* appeared to correspond with the social status of the house's occupants.



Figure 8: Kepala Pintu



Figure 9: Kepala Tingkap



Figure 10: Pagar Musang

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The architectural identity of Malay traditional houses and masjids in Gombak is a crucial element of the cultural heritage of Malaysia that needs to be documented and preserved. The traditional Malay architecture in Gombak can still be observed through the remaining decorative elements, although many of them have been adapted to simpler and more functional decoration styles. The research findings have contributed to the discovery of the architectural features of Malay traditional heritage in Gombak, highlighting the need for immediate preservation and conservation efforts to protect this cultural heritage for future generations. The design of the decorative elements appears to be correlated with the social status of the owners of the house, as observed during the study.

Despite the importance of preserving traditional Malay architecture in Gombak, many of the traditional buildings in the studied areas have undergone significant renovations, resulting in the loss of their authenticity in traditional architectural style. For instance, houses built during the 1960s and 1970s (post-independence era) were found to have almost no decorative elements due to several factors, such as the introduction of new materials, high timber prices, lack of local carpenters, and the influence of modern architecture style. Additionally, some houses were found in poor conditions and were at risk of collapse.

Therefore, it is necessary for local authorities such as the Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) and organisations related to heritage tourism to take appropriate action to preserve this built architectural heritage. Conservation efforts should include measures such as strict regulations to control renovation activities, periodic maintenance, and the establishment of a heritage management system to monitor the condition of the buildings. Furthermore, public awareness campaigns and education programs can help to increase the level of people's appreciation of the cultural significance of traditional Malay architecture in Gombak. Such initiatives can ensure that this valuable cultural heritage is safeguarded for the benefit of future generations.

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