

The Sarawakiana Series - Culture & Heritage

SARAWAK MALAY CULTURE

Tudung Keringkam





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The
Sarawakiana Series
Malay Culture
Tudung Keringkam

Pustaka Negeri Sarawak



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Tudung Keringkam

Kamil Salem



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Foreword

'Keringkam Sarawak' is an extraordinary intricate handicraft of Sarawak Malays that combines beautiful patterns into informative culture presentation. This publication hopes to draw attention of everyone, from school children to researchers, likewise, to an almost forgotten, yet, precious handicraft.

Culture grows on the shoulders of the community. Its development and sustainability is not a placid travel but an awesome awakening that endures millenniums.

Pustaka will continue to collaborate with our partners in the documentation of local and indigenous knowledge as one of the ways to preserve our culture and heritage for future generations.

Rashidah Haji Bolhassan

Chief Executive Officer

Pustaka Negeri Sarawak

Introduction

'*Tudung Keringkam*' is a traditional headscarf of Sarawak, and is widely worn by the local Malay women. Handcrafted with fine embroidery work, using gold and silver-coloured coarse threads, *tudung keringkam* can be classified into two types: '*selayah*' (veil) and '*selendang*' (shawl).

'*Selayah Keringkam*' is generally worn as a veil which covers the head right down to the shoulder. Although serving the same function as the former, '*Selendang Keringkam*' is relatively longer and is worn right to the waist level.

How did '*Tudung Keringkam*' derive its name?

The word '*keringkam*' is not found in the Malay dictionary. The nearest possible root word is '*kelingkam*' which bears similar meaning as that of '*kerikam*' or '*keringkam*': that is, coarse thread coated with gold or silver used for embroidery (*Kamus Dewan edisi keempaf*). Hence, there is good reason to believe that the term *tudung keringkam* comes from the name of a thread. In Sarawak, the headscarf or veil is referred to as *tudung keringkam* or, simply, '*keringkam*'.

One may also wonder whether there is a possibility of the word '*keringkam*' originating from the combination of two words, namely, '*keling*' and '*torn*'. '*Keling*' is a widely-used term to describe Indians who originally came from southern India (*Kamus Dewan*). They came as traders and settled down in South East Asian countries such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia.

The term '*keling*' has been used by the Malays (Star 2006) for a long time, even before the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and British in the Malay Archipelago. Interestingly, even in Bali can be found a traditional fabric called '*keling*'. However, the Bali version of the fabric has distinguishable stripes, unlike the motifs found on the embroidery of '*kelingkam*', and is usually worn at religious functions. It is believed that the fabric was brought to Bali by the early Hindu traders from India.

"Most of these fabrics have multicoloured stripes in the warp, others have small checks, and both are generally referred to in 'Nusa Penida' as 'keling'. These were formerly made exclusively from handspun local cotton, but are also woven today from industrially spun yarns."

Bali Travel News 2007

The word 'torn' is said to have derived from the ancient Cambodian language and it meant a type of cloth. 'Cam' could also mean a place or an area (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamboja>). In the Thai language, however, 'torn' or 'kham' means gold or anything that is pleasingly attractive and good.

Is it possible then that the words 'keling' and 'torn', when combined, embrace an extended linguistic dimension to mean Indian fabric embroidered with gold? What is certain is that 'kerikam' or 'kelingkam' is found in India. Most of the 'kelingkam' which find their way to the end users in Sarawak today are produced and supplied by Lallubhai & Brothers in India, which has a branch in Singapore. Every skein of gold or silver yarn is labelled either Imitation Golden Halffine Lametta or Imitation Silver Halffine Lametta.

The following are the addresses of the company in India and Singapore:

Lallubhai & Brothers
 2/48, Bahari Building Tokershi,
 Jivraj Road Cotton Green,
 Sewri Mumbai-400015, Maharashtra. India
 Telephone: +91 22 23669484, +91 22 23668401
 Fax: +91 22 23691789

Lallubhai & Brothers
 103 Arab Street, Singapore 199799
 Telephone: +65 62938656
 e-mail: sharda@pacitic.net.sg

Worthy of note is the German-made 'keringkam' of the rifle brand which was marketed in Kuching from the 1950s till the early 70s (Hajah Mastura 2006). Even the white-coloured 'tudung keringkam' (veil) was at one time brought in from Saudi Arabia many decades ago. Margaret Brooke, whilst wearing a Malay dress complete with a 'tudung keringkam', wrote:

"A gauzy scarf of white and gold, obtained from Mecca, covered my head, and a wide wrap of green silk and gold brocade was flung over the left shoulder ready to cover my head and face when wearing the dress in my walks abroad."

(Margaret Brooke, 1887)

Interestingly, the intricate craft of embroidery is also found in some states in Peninsular Malaysia, such as Johore and Perak, but the art is not as actively pursued as in Sarawak and Brunei Darussalam (Dr Nazlina Shaari, Norhayati Suleiman, 2005).

From the aforesaid background brief, it can be deduced that the art of embroidery thrives in some countries as well as in several other states in Malaysia. However, when the art was introduced to Sarawak, it was adapted, in terms of design and usage, to suit the local cultural conditions.

'Tudung Keringkam' (shawl) of the early years

Tudung keringkam is said to be popular in Sarawak during the early years before the war. It was always worn together with a *'baju kurung'* and long *'kebaya'*. During the period from 1920s to the 40s, *'tudung keringkam'* was widely used by Malay women from the aristocratic circle. As the price of the fabric was considered to be exorbitant then, most of the ordinary Malay women, who were just housewives, could not afford to buy one. The average income of the ordinary household was relatively low. In the 1950s, many of the Malay men from villages on the western bank of Sarawak

river earned their living as unskilled labourers (A.Zainal Abidin, Abdullah Salleh, 1953).

Among the noble Malay women who wore *'tudung keringkam'* during the reign of Brooke were Datu Isa (wife of the Datu Bandar), Datu Siti, Dayang Sahada and Dayang Lehut (Margaret Brooke, 1886). According to records, Margaret Brooke, who was the wife of Charles Brooke, had the honour of being dressed up in a Malay costume complete with *'tudung keringkam'* by Datu Isa and her assistants. As further proof of her affection for *'tudung keringkam'*, Margaret Brooke wore the traditional shawl when she once posed for a photograph (Margaret Brooke, 1886).

It was said that one of the *'keringkam'* pieces that Margaret Brooke wore was the product of a local Malay embroidery craftsman from nearby Kampung Sungai Bedil Besar (Kamil Salem, 2004). The village grew famous in history as it was the place where James Brooke took refuge after escaping from the marauding Chinese rebels from the goldmines in Bau who had wanted to topple his administration on February 19, 1857 (Alice Yen Ho, 1998).

Also known to have worn *tudung keringkam* were Gladys Brooke, wife of Captain H.H. Bertram Brooke and fondly referred to as Dayang Muda Sarawak (Gladys Brooke, 1929). Margaret Brooke was fascinated by the fine craftsmanship in embroideries of the Malays in Sarawak then.

"It always surprises me when I consider, given the idea that Sarawak was such an uncivilized country when the first Rajah went there, and that its people were sunk in a state of barbarism how it was possible that the womankind of the Malay population living in the place evolved the marvelous embroideries and brocades that nearly all the women of Sarawak are capable of weaving." (Margaret Brooke, 1886).

According to Margaret Brooke, trade links between Sarawak and the outside world were already established during the reign of the Brooke regime in Sarawak. Merchandise such as silk from India and China and 'sarung' cloth from Java were available in Sarawak, and most of them were brought in through the sea trade routes.

"... all kinds of boats are anchored, bringing produce from the interior of Sarawak, from the Dutch Settlement, from Singapore, and

from adjacent islands; these boats are picturesque in the extreme"

(Margaret Brooke, 1886).

It was possible that during the same period, gauze cloth (*kain kasa*) and gold and silvered-coloured yarns for making *tudung keringkam* (shawl or veil) were brought together through Singapore.

'Tudung Keringkam' today

According to Madam Hajah Mastura binti Sidek, an exponent in embroidery and a instructor in the art, most women in the Malay villages across river (on the opposite bank of Kuching) were actively engaged in the delicate embroidery work for the production of '*keringkam*' from the 1950s till the 60s. Among these villages were 'Kampung Lintang' and 'Kampung Tanjung'. Apart from putting to good use their leisure time by engaging in creative craft work, they were also getting relatively good financial returns from the sale of their products. However, the average price of '*keringkam*' then was far lower than what it is today. Little wonder that the price of a skein of gold-coloured '*keringkam*' then cost about 2 dollars while the silver-coloured ones cost only 80 cents a skein.

Most of the *tudung keringkam*' during that period were sold at Indian shops along India Street, Kuching in the price range of 10 to 20 dollars each, and were available in white, red and blue colours as they are today. Madam Hajah Mastura recalls that the fabric used in the 1950s was rubberized gauze, unlike today when '*rubia*' gauze is widely used.

Also available during the 1950s and 60s was '*keringkam*' of the Rifle Brand, imported from Germany. It was of a higher quality, more lasting and did not bleach, if compared to the '*keringkam*' of the Lorry Brand available in the local market today. As the German-made '*keringkam*' is not readily available in the Sarawak market, the majority of the local producers of *tudung keringkam*' have to settle for the Lorry Brand '*kerikam*' from India.

According to historical records, Margaret Brooke in 1927 wore a *tudung keringkam*' which was bought in Mecca, Madam Hajah Mastura agreed with it, adding that in the 1950s and 60s most pilgrims returning from the Holy land would bring back the *tudung keringkam*' which was white in colour and laced with gold-coloured '*keringkam*'.

For Madam Hajah Mastura, the knowledge and skills in the embroidery work for '*keringkam*' were passed down from one generation to the next in her family, and for her, she learned the basics from her late mother, Puan Aisah binti Awet who was a renowned exponent in the art of making *tudung keringkam*' in "Kampung Lintang' in the 1950s. Among her contemporaries was the late Allahyarhamah Puan Mariamah from Xampung Tanjung', who kept alive the skills and i3Chnique of '*keringkam*' embroidery within the 13mily by passing them down to Allahyarhamah Pojiah binti Jaya and thereafter to the latter's daughter Rubyah binti Bojeng. Another well-known personality who excels in embroidery work is Johara Othman, 59, from "Kampung Lintang', and she acquired the artful skill in '*keringkam*' embroidery from her mother since she was 18 years old. (Utusan Malaysia, 29 July 2000).

They are among the women, albeit small in number who have passed down their knowledge and skill in '*keringkam*' embroidery to the younger generation. Hajah Mastura, for example, has trained more than 80 young women throughout Sarawak. They are also assisted by several government agencies such as Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia

(Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation), Weda and MARA. These agencies assist in organizing long-term and sustainable programmes which will contribute towards ensuring the survival of the traditional art of 'keringkam' embroidery and preserving yet another unique feature of the local Malay culture. Efforts are also being made to promote the art to non-Malay women and among them who have ventured far and passionately is Puan Doris Hilda Reji, 38, who was introduced to the art of 'keringkam' embroidery in 2002, Doris operates a business outlet dealing in embroidery products at the Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia Cawangan Sarawak (Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, Sarawak Branch). She was among those who participated in a handicraft exhibition in conjunction with the National Handicraft Day at the handicraft Complex in Kuala Lumpur (Bernama, 7 March 2006).

At the Ninth Parliamentary Session (Second Term and Third Meeting), the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industries, Datuk Rohani Karim, urged the Ministry of Art and Culture to document and record the cultures and age-old traditional arts of all ethnic groups in Malaysia.

"As is the case in Sarawak, I am very concerned if the old traditional art of embroidery and weaving culture of the Malays, that is the making of head scarf called keringkam, gradually disappears especially among the younger generation. I am in the midst of planning some activities which will instill interest and passion in the young people to conserve and promote some of the old cultural and traditional arts and practices ... and will be done on an adhoc basis"

(<http://www.parlimen.gov.my/hindex/pdf/DR-06-11-1996.pdf>)

Functions Of '*Tudung Keringkam*'

'Selendang Keringkam' - '*Selendang*' is a term to describe a long piece of tailored material which serves as a shawl to cover the head and also the shoulder and waist. Usually, it measures 158 centimetres x 77 centimetres, and is relatively longer than '*selayah*' (Hajah Mastura, Rubiah Bojeng, Rokiah Haji Jeraie 2006).

In the days of old, the headscarf would be usually worn by a Malay woman for important functions such as meetings with State dignitaries and attending wedding ceremonies of women from the noble Malay families. However, today, '*keringkam*' is commonly worn with '*baju kurung*' on such grand occasions as '*Hari Kebangsaan*' (National Day) and when receiving visiting dignitaries to the State. The costume of female dancers performing the traditional Sarawak Malay dance is also not complete without '*seiendang keringkam*'. (Ramli Ali, 2006)

'Selayah Keringkam' - '*Selayah*' can be described as a piece of material that is worn over the head and covers the shoulder. Most '*selayah*' pieces measure 55 centimetres wide and 95 centimetres long and are smaller than '*selendang*'. Although '*Selayah*' is generally oblong in shape and longish, with embroidery

work usually incorporated on all four corners, there are today '*selayah*' pieces which depart from the traditional designs, including taking on a distinctive triangular shape which tapers at one end. Also embroidered on '*selayah*' are various types of interesting motifs which include, among others, chicken feet, mountain, irrigation canals, scissor lace, beans, creeping plants, flowers, orchids and geometric patterns. (Dr Nazlina Shaari, Norhayati Suleiman, 2005).

Nowadays, '*selayah*' is worn for wedding receptions, ceremonial visits, '*akad nikah*' (religious ceremonies on tying of the knots) and official government functions. It can also double up as one of many gifts that can be presented at a wedding ceremony. For example, before the entourage of the bridegroom proceeds to the home of the bride, several representatives from the bride will deliver to the home of the bridegroom a '*mengkuang*' (*Pandanus atrocarpus*) mat wrapped with '*tudung keringkam*' that is replete with embroidery work of gold-coloured yarns. The traditional practice of delivering the '*mengkuang*' mat symbolises the readiness of the bridal party to receive the entourage of the bridegroom. (<http://malaysia.pnm.my/01/melayusarawakjnljsperkahwinan.htm>)

The Many Uses Of 'Keringkam' In Modern Times

Although it is extensively used for embroidery in the making of *tudung* (shawl or headscarf), 'keringkam' now enjoys wider application as it is also used for other purposes. For instance, 'keringkam' is used in, edges of picture frames, pencil box covers, calligraphy, 'baju kurung' or 'kebaya' and many others.

Patterns And Motifs Of 'Keringkam' Embroidery

Motifs, based on a variety of natural or still objects, create an appealing symbol or image for a given pattern. Hence, motifs, themes and selected subjects constitute an intended image created within a composition, whether they are at variance or constructed on a repetitive pattern. Siti Zainon Ismail (1986) is of the view that when several types of motif are arranged in a specified space, a certain pattern will be created on the surface of a piece of craftwork.

Nevertheless, the beauty and aesthetic value of a *tudung keringkam* are also dependent on the creativity of the embroidery work, especially when the embroider designs or arranges the embroidery pattern and motifs on such fabrics as voile, 'rubia' gauze or that of higher quality.

In the early years, most of the women embroiders in Kuching were from villages on the bank of Sungai Sarawak, surrounded by fruits trees, vegetable gardens, scrubs and undergrowth. Because of that, most of the motifs depicted on the *tudung keringkam* were influenced by the major elements in the natural environment. These motifs included bamboo shoots, beans, creeping roses, 'bunga kenanga' (Ylang-ylang), orchids and 'bunga tanjung' (a type of climbing plant) which were then found in abundance in 'Kampung Lintang' and 'Kampung Tanjung' on the western end of Sarawak river, directly opposite Kuching city.

Implements And Materials Used In The Production Of '*Tudung Keringkam*'

1. '*Pemidang*'

'*Pemidang*' or '*Pedangan*' in the Kuching Malay dialect is a type of wooden frame used for stretching out the cloth on which embroidery work will be done. Usually, it is designed and made to cater to the size of the cloth for embroidery. There are two types of '*pemidang kayu*': '*Pemidang berkaki empat*' and '*Pemidang berkaki tiga*'.

- '***Pemidang Berkaki Empat***'

(Four-legged '*Pemidang*')

The implement measures 180 centimetres x 84 centimetres in width and 35 centimetres in height. It is utilized mainly when embroidery is being done on the four-sided '*selendang*' (shawl) and '*selayah*' (head-scarf). You can make one of the '*pemidang*' on your own or you can opt for it to be made by a skilled craftsman. A set of the implement costs RM90 but reservation has to be made with the retailer, TIHE Enterprise, which is a beneficiary of the incubator programme of Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia Sarawak. (Azran,2006)

'*Meranti*' wood (*Shorea Albida*) is widely used for making '*pemidang*' as it is easily found in Sarawak. The low '*pemidang*' enables

the women embroiders to sit cross-legged comfortably on the floor when they carry out their '*keringkam*' embroidery work,

- '***Pemidang Berkaki Tiga***'

(Three-legged '*Pemidang*')

The three-legged wooden '*pemidang*' is 84 x 84 x 84 centimetre long and 35 centimetre high. It is only used when embroidery work is being done on a three-sided '*selayah keringkam*'. If sufficient notice is given, a local skilled craftsman will be able to make a good finished piece of three-legged '*pemidang*' and the cost is relatively cheaper than the four-legged '*pemidang*'.

2. '*Kain Dasar*' (main fabric)

According to Hajah Mastura Sidek and Rubiah Bojeng (2006), the main fabric or base material that is popularly used today for embroidering '*tudung keringkam*' is the '*rubia*' gauze. Most of the '*rubia*' gauze fabric used for '*keringkam*' embroidery in Kuching comprises 67 percent polyester and 33 percent cotton and is produced by Mafatlah Industries Limited, Ahmedabad, India. It is among the cheapest of the '*rubia*' fabric, compared to the type of a higher quality from Switzerland, Japan or China.

In India, the term 'rubia' is said to have originated from a type of plant called '*rubia cordifolia*', which is used as a dye. In China, the same type of fabric is referred to as 'luo' and in Japan as 'sha' or 'no'. (Yuko Tanaka, 1994).

The loose texture of the 'rubia' fabric makes it easy for an embroidery artisan to insert the needle and thread as she works on a particular motif or pattern (Azran Bojeng, 2002). 'Rubia' fabric (*Kasa Rubia*) is available in hundreds of colours.

"In Rubia Cotton, Terry Rubia, we have a colourful range of more than 200 colours to practically cover all shades"

(Matulya Processors Pvt Ltd, 2007)

Nevertheless, the colour of choice in Kuching today is dark red or blood red, as most women feel that the colour can give a clear contrasting effect when embroidery work, utilizing '*keringkam*' and gold thread, is done on it.

However, during the 1960s, '*tudung keringkam*' that used white fabric as its base material was popular. Probably, this was because the price of a white '*tudung*' or shawl was much cheaper than the ones which were red in colour. (Hajah Nen Kana, 2006).

Today, 'rubia' fabric is the preferred choice of many in India.

"Majority of women prefer cotton because it absorbs sweat easily. Otherwise, wearing synthetic clothes in this scorching heat is very difficult. Varieties like voile, rubia 2x2, chanderi cotton, south cotton, popper cotton are also much in vogue among women"
(www.tribuneindia.com, 2006)

Apart from 'rubia' fabric, the other type of material used is voile or '*kain bawai*' in Kuching Malay dialect (Rubiah Bojeng, 2006). The material also has fine texture and is made from cotton or synthetic fibre or '*sakhiaf*' (Encarta, 2005). It derives its name from the French word 'Vo/Ver' which means 'to cover'. (World Book, 2004).

Even then, there are some people who are of the opinion that 'voile' originated from the old French word, 'veile' which, in turn, was derived from the Latin word 'vela', both of which share the same meaning.

(<http://www.stitchnsave.com/Voile.asp>).

Notwithstanding the contestation on the origin of the word, there is little difference in terms of texture between voile and 'rubia' fabric.

Sometimes, 'chiffon' cloth, which is made from cotton or silk or synthetic fibre, is also used for 'keringkam' embroidery. Most of the 'chiffon' cloth available in Kuching is made from polyester, and characteristically, it is slippery and develops creases and folds easily when embroidery is being done on it (Hajah Mastura, 2006). Because of that, it is seldom used for 'keringkam' embroidery. Interestingly, the word 'chiffon' originates from a French word which means a piece of rag.

Where to buy the fabric.

In Kuching, the 'rubia' fabric can be bought at Jasmin Textile, and Salih Ahmad at India Street at the following price per metre (2006):

'Rubia' made in Switzerland	: RM49 to RM58
'Rubier' made in Japan	: RM18.50 to RM38
'Rubia' made in Thailand	: RM7.70
'Rubia' made in India	: RM5.50 to RM15

3. 'Kain Penghubung' (joining cloth)

The piece of cloth serves as an important connector and binder between the 'rubia' fabric and the wooden 'pemidang'. Popularly used is the thick unbleached cloth locally known as 'kain belacu'. The cloth is raw beige and uncoloured but is strong and resilient when it is stretched (Azran, 2002). Before it is placed on the 'pemidang', the unbleached cloth is firstly folded into two. The sides which are gathered have to be sewn and connected to that part of the 'rubia' cloth on which embroidery work will be done. In between the folds of the unbleached cloth is placed a cylindrical piece of wood. Afterwards, all the four pieces of wood inside the folds of the connecting cloth will be tied with a strong piece of string. Unbleached cloth and 'rubia' fabric will be made strong.

"The cloth has to be fully stretched otherwise, if it is loose, the result of the embroidery will not be fine and this lower the quality of the embroidery"

(Doris Hilda Reji, Bernama 2006).

Any type of string can be used but what is important is that it must be able to withstand the pressure caused by the stretching of the unbleached cloth tied to the wooden frame of the 'pamidang'. Apart from unbleached cloth, cotton cloth is also used as the connecting cloth.

Place to buy the fabric

In Kuching, the unbleached cloth can be bought at Salih Ahmad, India Street at a price of between RM1.50 and RM2.50 per metre for the fabric imported from China. (Azran, 2006)

4. Flat Needle (*Jarum Pipih*)

Doing embroidery work on a '*keringkam*' requires a flat needle which can be made from silver or bronze and measures 3-centimetre long and 0.3-centimetre wide at its base. The flat needle, which has two eyes for inserting the '*keringkam*' threads, is not easily available at the normal retail market but it can be purchased from a expert artisan after having made proper reservation and costs approximately RM5.00. (Azran Bojeng, 2006)

Where to place order for '*Jarum Pipih*' (flat needle).

- Haji Wasir Mumi, 'Kampung Hilir', Sibü
- At goldsmith shops (a sample of the flat needle must be brought along)

5. '*Keringkam*'

'*Kelingkam*' or '*keringkam*' is a gold or silver ribbon which constitutes a prerequisite item in the embroidery of headscarf or shawl. A skein of '*keringkam*' consists of 15 strands of gold or silver ribbons. The overall length of the ribbon is 914 centimetres. However, after it is cut, each piece measures about 61 centimetres in length.

The '*keringkam*' that is popular today is the one that is made in India, and distributed and marketed under the Lorry Brand by Lallubhai & Brothers, Singapore.

In Kuching, it can be purchased at Salih Ahmad, India Street, Kuching at the following prices per skein (2006):

- Gold '*keringkam*' : from RM40 to RM50
- Silver '*keringkam*' or '*keringkam tonji*' or '*keringkam perak*': from RM2 to RM3

6. Gold Thread (*'Benang Emas'*)

The gold thread is the same type that is used for the embroidery of *'Kain Songkef'*. Among the brands of gold threads which are popularly used by embroiders in Sarawak are Anchor brand and more currently Lorry Brand. Although its uses are not as many and varied as that of *'keringkam'* gold ribbon, gold thread or yarn is used for embroidery on the edges of the *'rubia'* cloth or voile that has been cut to size from an unbleached cloth. With such embroidery work, the sides or edges of the piece of fabric look attractive and neat.

The gold threads can be bought at Salih Ahmad, India Street, Kuching, and are relatively cheaper than *'keringkam'*.

The multi-stage process in the production of '*Tudung Keringkam*'

To produce high-quality *tudung keringkam*' (veil or headscarf), a lot will depend on the creativity and skill of the embroider (Azran, 2006).

- **First stage**

The unbleached cloth has to be stitched at all four corners of the '*rubia*' fabric, and this means that four pieces of unbleached cloth are required. Before stitching is done, every piece of the cut unbleached cloth is to be folded into two parts. An opening for inserting the wooden cylinder will have been created once the unbleached cloth has been folded into two. This means that at every corner will be inserted a separate cylindrical piece of wood, which will later be tied with a string to the '*pemidang*' or '*pedangan*' (wooden frame for embroidery work). This is done in order to tighten the piece of '*rubia*' cloth before embroidery work is started. A well-stretched piece of '*rubia*' cloth will make the job of counting the number of threads required to make a motif much easier.

- **Second stage**

Basic embroidery is done right across the surface of the '*rubia*' cloth, creating a border along the side of the cloth. This basic

embroidery work is called '*tali air*', and is done together with work on creating the bean motif.

- **Third Stage**

At this stage of the process, 's' type of embroidery called '*Renda Berguntin*' or scissor lace is incorporated onto the '*rubia*' cloth to balance off the straight-line embroidery along the side done earlier on. '*Renda Berguntin*' is shaped like a mountain or triangle. This could possibly be a motif of a bamboo shoot which is commonly found on other local handicraft. There are two types of '*Renda Berguntin*': the three-sided, and the four-sided.

- **Forth Stage**

The process at this stage involves creating a motif of a rose or '*Bunga Mawar*'. The motif serves to cover up the space at the corners in between motifs of strewn flowers.

- **Fifth Stage**

Motifs of strewn flowers are created at this stage. As these motifs are small, they are decorated with the embroidery of various motifs to cover the surrounding space. To produce a closely-knit '*keringkam*', forty

skeins of 'keringkam' ribbons are used. The common strewn motifs depicted in the embroidery work are scattering stars, tall and fine grass (*kepala lalat*), and 'tabor pelayang'. This is the most difficult stage; it requires patience and care and takes a long time to complete.

- **Sixth Stage**

After embroidery work on all the motifs has been completed, gold thread will be used to neatly cover up the side of the cloth and prevent the cloth threads from coming out. The 'rubia' cloth will then be separated from the frame ('Pemidang'] by cutting the joining between the unbleached cloth and 'rubia' cloth. Then, the cloth will be trimmed following closely the pattern of the motif along the side, that is, the scissor lace (*'renda bergunting'*).

- **Seventh Stage**

This is the final stage of the process which involves giving the final touches to the 'keringkam' embroidery. Any residual thread at the edge will be partially burnt so that the embroidery work on the 'rubia' fabric will emerge as a neat and wholesome piece of art.

Time frame to complete a 'tudung keringkam' (Keringkam headscarf)

This is dependent on the following factors:

- Number of flower motifs for embroidery
- Types of 'keringkam' used - whether gold or silver
- Number of bundles of 'keringkam' or yarns used
- Size of the 'tudung' (headscarf)

Normally, it takes about two months to produce a 'seidendang' (scarf) and a month and a half to produce a 'seiyah' (veil).

Price.

Price is also dependent on the following factors:

- Number of motifs to be made
- Types of 'keringkam' and amount to be used
- Type of gold thread
- Time frame to complete a 'tudung' (head scarf or veil)

Market Price 2006

Selayah

- Motif and water stripes, using gold 'keringkam': RM800 to RM5,000
- Motif made from gold 'keringkam', while water stripes from gold thread: RM500 to RM 1,000

Selendang

- Motif and water stripes, which use gold 'keringkam': RM900 to RM6,000
- Motif made from gold 'keringkam', while water stripes from gold thread: RM600 to RM 1,200

List of active 'Keringkam' producers in Sarawak (2006)

Hajah Mastura bt Sidek

Telephone: 6082 444814
215 Kampung Lintang,
Jalan Merdeka, Petra Jaya,
93050 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Rubyah bt Bojeng

Telephone: 017 8089734
66 Kampung Tanjung,
Petra Jaya,
93250 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Doris Hilda Reji

Telephone: 6082 442436
Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan
Malaysia Sarawak, Petra Jaya,
93050 Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia

Rokiah bt Haji Jeraiee

Telephone: 6082 846411
Kampung Budaya Sarawak.
Pantai Damai, Santubong,
Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Summary

The art of '*keringkam*' today is not only confined to the embroidery of headscarf or veil, but is also exerting its artful presence in various other products. '*Keringkam*' embroidery has also earned its way to become enhancing decorative items for walls, flower pots, picture frames and a host of others.

The art of '*keringkam*' is a proud legacy steeped in traditional values which must be handed down to future generations. The existing women embroiders must adopt an open approach to sharing their knowledge and skills on the art to the immediate community.

In an effort to make the culture of Sarawak Malays more dynamic, the art of '*keringkam*' needs to be expanded and promoted, while upgrading the economic well-being of the families currently engaged in such a handicraft business. The art of '*keringkam*' embroidery, in effect, reflects the culture of Malays in that they are able to display their creativity and innovativeness when putting to good use their leisure time at home. In fact, it makes a husband proud to have a wife who is talented and skilled at doing embroidery work. In the days of old, such a skill was a priceless asset which every young Sarawak Malay girl would like to have and cherish.

Glossary

Akad nikah

Religious ceremonies on tying of the knots.

Baju Kurung & Kebaya

Malay traditional dress.

Kain kasa

Gauze cloth.

Kain belacu

Thick unbleached cloth .

Keling

A widely-used term to describe Indians who originally came from southern India (*Karnus Dewan Edisi Keempat*).

Pemidang or Pedangan

A type of wooden frame used for stretching out the cloth on which embroidery work will be done.

Meranti wood

Shorea Albida

Sarung

Cloth from Java

Tudung

A traditional headscarf of Sarawak, widely worn by the local Malay women and can be classified into two types: '*selayah*'(\e/i) and '*setencfang*'(shawl).

Selayah

Can be described as a piece of material that is worn over the head and covers the shoulder. Most '*selayah*' pieces measure 55 centimetres wide and 95 centimetres long and relatively shorter than '*selendang*'.

Selendang

A long piece of tailored material which serves as a shawl to cover the head and also the shoulder and waist. Usually, it measures 158 centimetres x 77 centimetres.

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He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Graphic Design from UiTM, Master's degree in Music and Film Studies and a doctorate in Visual Communications in United Kingdom.

In the 1970's, he produced poetry, radio drama scripts, composed songs and acted in radio dramas produced by Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) Kuching. Kamil led D'Crescendos which was the first singing group from Sarawak to win the Bintang RTM Singing Contests (1978) in Kuala Lumpur. With D'Crescendos, he recorded two LPs in 1982. He is also a member of Fdam.

Before assuming his current position as Managing Director of Nonakraf Communications Sdn. Bhd., Kamil underwent training at Clio Advertising and ROS & REM, served as designer at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur and was Manager at OBYU Communications Sdn. Bhd., Kuching. In 2003, Kamil was awarded the Ahli Bintang Kenyalang (ABK) by the Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Sarawak.

Apart from his deep interest in singing, he plays musical instruments, composes songs and plays badminton. Currently, he lectures Social History and Advertising at University Technology MARA, Samarahan, Sarawak.

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