

Tengkolok as The Heritage of Perak Darul Ridzuan: The Binder, Techniques, Manner & Amp; Taboo

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ABSTRACT

Tengkolok is a unique head covering for Malay men and it is still worn to this very day. However, its adornment only is limited to certain functions and events. With this, this article is written to document in further detail the binders of the Malay-inherited tengkolok especially in the state of Perak Darul Ridzuan. Some questions need to be answered, such as 'who are the tengkolok binders in Perak?', 'how are the tengkolok-folding techniques used?' and 'what are the etiquettes and taboo in the making of tengkolok?'. Offering explanation, a qualitative cultural approach will be adopted. Both interview and observation will be used to obtain data either in writing or visually. The observation done has suggested that there are four tengkolok binders who are still active in Perak. Each of them has their own respective tengkolok folding techniques. This article will discuss the work of these binders, their folding techniques, the manner and etiquettes as well as the taboo in tengkolok-making. It is anticipated that this article would be able to catch the interest of researchers especially those studying Malay textiles and clothing also the younger generation in order for them to know tengkolok better and at the same time to learn this skill. Our observation is also of high value as it is able to contribute to the sustainability of tengkolok-binding heritage that has long been of 'low-profile and not really popularised among the younger people nowadays. The documentation of this tengkolok binder would serve as one of the ways to appreciate tengkolok-binders as part of the Malay priceless heritage.

Keywords: Binder, Technique, Manner, Taboo, Tengkolok, Perak heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The culture of a nation normally carries with it a high value and thus, it must be inherited by the society today. For the Malay race, initially it was only wrapping the head with a piece of cloth to keep the hair neat, but gradually the wrapping experiences change and up until today has become an art and a Malay trademark

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(Mohamad Nazri Ahmad, 2000). Masda Mahmud (1994) states that tengkolok-wearing is one of the symbols of the national identity. Tengkolok-wearing years and years ago could give one an idea of the status of the wearer as well as his rank and position. Tengkolok is also inextricably linked with the palace and heroism and is worn in official functions and customary events, Maruwiah Ahmat (2012).

This Malay traditional head covering or adornment is very special, with a form of binding and placed on the head of the wearer. This head 'accessory' is called tengkolok. Tengkolok is a head cloth worn a long time ago by the palace people, the dignitaries and Malay grooms at their weddings, Hamidah Husain dan Mohamed Roselan Malek (1995). It has some other different names too like *tanjak*, *destar*, *semutar*, *bulang hulu* and *sapu tangan*. These terms differ according to the state for example we use the term *tanjak* in Selangor and tengkolok in Perak, Azah Aziz (2006). Despite the various terms used to reflect on this Malay identity, its purpose is clear- that it is worn to cover and protect the head. Tengkolok is the Malay art that is priceless. The intricacy behind tengkolok-making tells a lot of different stories and backgrounds which reflect on the wearer, Utusan Malaysia, 5 Jun 2013. It is created manually in the form of folding and shaped using hand and knee. It cannot possibly be folded and made up using the latest technology like the machine or robot. This skill of binding the tengkolok is typically a male-dominated skill. Following Mohamad Dzulkarnain Osman, in a personal interview on 6 March 2014, tengkolok-wearing originates from the clothing of the commoners. Traditionally, it was only a piece of cloth wrapped around the head to neaten the hair when commoners made a visit to the palace to see the Sultan. From this wrapping, soon after the palace people began to make tengkolok one of the official clothing in the palace as it does make the hair tidier. Starting from there, tengkolok binders have begun to create various types of interesting, beautiful tengkolok.

The creation of such a wide array of *tengkoloks* reflects on the binders' high level of thinking. Looking at the intricate nature of the processes of folding and shaping the tengkolok, other than artistry, one binder must also possess positive traits, like hardworking, determined, patient and also creative. Tengkolok binders in the old days had chosen nature and the environment as their sources of inspiration in creating a tengkolok as during that time they had no specific references. Thus, it can be said that the Malay community back then was the first community who had instilled the elements of innovation in their creations. From just a plain piece of cloth wrapped around the head, they could create a unique art work that comes in various designs.

Behind the beauty and the distinctiveness of the design, there are people who have taken the trouble and made the effort in preserving and sustaining this Malay tengkolok heritage. They are tengkolok binders from Perak namely Toh Seri Wangsa Hj. Abdul Rahim Bin Mohamad, Mohamad Dzulkarnain Bin Osman, Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid and Haji Mohd Basri Bin Ngah Mat Ali. To every binder, they have various basic folding techniques such as three-finger folding, rolling and triangle-folding. Other than these basic art, there are also manner and taboo that accompany the folding and accessorizing of tengkolok.

THE TENKOLOK BINDERS OF PERAK DARUL RIDZUAN

The beauty of the tengkolok designs as the heritage of the Sultanate of Perak is the fruit of labour of binders that have made sustainable the skill of binding tengkolok. They are tengkolok binders who have their own creativity in folding the tengkolok. The outcome of the observation finds that the state of Perak has four tengkolok binders especially tengkolok for the Sultanate of Perak Darul Ridzuan. They are Toh Seri Wangsa Hj. Abdul Rahim Bin Mohamad, AMP,PKH known as Tok Ayah or Pak Tok Ibrahim, Mohamad Dzulkarnain Bin Osman known as Pak N or Nain, Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid known as Ku Ayah or Ayah Jed dan Haji Mohd Basri Bin Ngah Mat Ali, PJK,PPT known as Haji Basnee. Their skills are very important especially for award and dignitary medal conferment ceremonies in conjunction with the Birthday of the Sultan of Perak. In these ceremonies, they will receive orders from medal recipients to make them tengkolok, an item of clothing that serves as an important element for customary events for Perak royalty. The Perak Sultanate has two Sultans skilful in binding tengkolok and they are Al Marhum Sultan Idris Murshidul'adzam Shah I and Al Marhum Sultan Idris Iskandar Al Mutawakkil Shah II.

They are among the individual pioneers in elevating the status of the tengkolok-binding skill as the heritage of the Perak Sultanate. Their effort and enthusiasm must serve as an example to the younger generation so that the art can be sustained and preserved and inherited from one era to another. Each binder has his own way and technique in folding and accessorizing tengkolok. These skills were obtained from different "Tuan Guru" or teachers although basically the main binders had learned from Al Marhum Sultan Idris Murshidul'adzam Shah I. The difference between all these basic folding is an effort exerted by the tengkolok binders in enhancing and facilitating the art of tengkolok-binding and at the same time preserving its heritage.

a) Toh Seri Wangsa Hj. Abdul Rahim Bin Mohamad

He is 89 years old and is more familiarly known as Tok Ayah or Pak Tok Ibrahim. He is one of the 16 Dignitaries (Orang Besar 16) also functioning as the Deputy Royal Shaman of the Sultanate of Perak. Other than having the skill of binding tengkolok, he is also skilled at traditional healing. Tok Ayah is a very lucky man as he has had the opportunity serving under four Sultans namely Al Marhum Sultan Yussuf Izzuddin Shah, Al Marhum Sultan Idris Iskandar Al-Mutawakkil Shah II, Al Marhum Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah and Sultan Dr. Nazrin **Muizuddin Shah**. **He is also among significant individuals in the customary events for Perak royal family as he works to ensure that every practice follows correctly the tradition that has been passed down from one generation to another, Utusan Malaysia, 21 June 2011.**

According to Tok Ayah, in a personal interview on 1 May 2014, after the reign of Al Marhum Sultan Idris Iskandar Al-Mutawakkil Shah II, there was no more Perak Sultan who had the skill in tengkolok-binding and the task had been given to binders that he had decided upon. During his ruling, every tengkolok that is to be worn is

bound by himself. Thus, Tok Ayah had learned the way of binding tengkolok informally from Al Marhum Sultan Idris Murshidul'adzam Shah I when he was working in the Iskandariah Palace as the Ship Captain. At the age of 89, Tok Ayah is still able to bind and fold tengkolok and also happens to have an excellent memory. Tok Ayah is an individual who is really serious about keeping alive the art of binding tengkolok so that it will not become obsolete or carried off by the surge of modernization.

b) Mohamad Dzulkarnain Bin Osman

Mohamad Dzulkarnain Bin Osman is one of the staff of the Iskandariah Palace, Kuala Kangsar also a Senior War Chief at the palace. He is called Toh Panglima or Pak Toh. He is 37 years of age and has served at the Palace from the year 2000 up until now. Throughout his years of service as the Sultan's personal assistant for five years, a *bentara* or Custom and Etiquette Officer for another five years, *Panglima Perang Kiri* or Guard to the Queen for a year and now as Senior War Chief which is basically preserving the security for the Sultan of Perak. He has developed the skill of binding tengkolok directly from Tok Ayah. Dearly called as Pak N, he is one of the people who are close to Al Marhum Majesty of Sultan Azlan Shah during his ruling. At first, he was only working as a personal assistant to Al Marhum Majesty Sultan Azlan Shah only, but upon his recommendation, he was given the mandate to bind the tengkolok for the Majesty. According to Pak N, in a personal interview dated 6 March 2014 not anybody can bind and accessorize His Majesty's tengkolok as it is believed that anyone who binds the tengkolok without the Majesty's permission will be in trouble or become ill-fated. This is because every attire worn by the Majesty is safeguarded and protected by the invisible and this is a well-kept secret for the government of Perak.

Pak N is also generous enough in passing down all his knowledge about binding tengkolok. If there is any individual or group who has the intention to learn the art of binding tengkolok, he would welcome it very much. He lives by the principle that the knowledge one has should be shared and handed down, and not kept. The knowledge delivered will prosper and this will advance the Malay race in particular.

c) Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid

Ku Ayah or Ayah Jed is an endearing name used to call Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid who is already 74 years old. He was a former Head of War Chief in the Iskandariah Palace. He is a descendant of Sultan Idris Murshidul'adzam Shah I who was one of the Perak Sultans who were skilled at binding tengkolok. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Ku Ayah is one of the men who have the skill of binding tengkolok. He is a prominent tengkolok-binder in Perak and subsequently, has become a point of reference to many people, *Harian Metro*, 11 January 2011.

The skill of binding tengkolok is developed coincidentally from his brother who is Ku Norman or Raja Norman Raja Harun Al-Rashid Ibni Sultan Idris

Murshidul'adzam Shah I. Raja Norman Raja Harun Al-Rashid was also a servant at the Iskandariah Palace as a *Panglima*. Ku Ayah learned the technique of tengkolok-binding through some informal observations while Ku Norman was binding tengkolok. From what he saw, he then tried it for himself and practised the folding techniques. In time, he became interested in learning the skill of binding tengkolok. According to Ku Ayah, in a personal interview dated 22 May 2014 he stated that folding and accessorizing tengkolok require patience and meticulousness. This is because in producing a well-bound tengkolok, only these two traits will facilitate a design that is tidy and beautiful at the same time.

Ku Ayah has a word of advice to novice tengkolok binders that if the outcome of the folding fails the first few times, then the folding process can be neglected temporarily. Ku Ayah also informs us that he used to take a month to produce a tengkolok as the cloth given was very soft and the binding work required his high level of concentration, peace and meticulousness.

d) Haji Mohd Basir Bin Ngah Mat Ali

Haji Mohd Basir Bin Ngah Mat Ali or more amicably known as Haji Basnee is 74 years old. He is also one prominent tengkolok binder in Perak. He was a former staff of the Ministry of Culture of the State of Perak. He is also the Chairman of the Selandang Merah Group, SUK Perak. While serving for the Ministry, he had contributed a great deal to developing the art of binding tengkolok for the Perak Sultanate. He learns the tengkolok-binding skill from Raja Ismail Iskandar who is the brother to Al Marhum Sultan Idris Iskandar Al Mutawakkil Shah II. His talkative and humble nature, make anyone who knows him find it easy to get close and get to know him better. According to Haji Basnee, from a personal interview dated 21 May 2014, he stated that he is really interested in binding tengkolok and will try to sustain the skill so that it will not diminish through time.

Haji Basnee states that in sustaining the design of tengkolok that has gone obsolete is by collecting pictures of all Perak Sultans. By referring to them, he will be able to make a closer examination by replicating the design of the particular tengkolok. With that, obsolete tengkolok will be sustained and the skills get to be passed down to the younger generation. He also hopes that the management of the Iskandariah Palace in Kuala Kangsar needs to play the role as the prime mover in sustaining the identity of the Malay tengkolok. The tengkolok of the Perak Sultanate must be safeguarded by retaining the neatness of every tengkolok designed.



Picture 1: Toh Seri Wangsa Haji
 Abdul Rahim Bin Mohamad,
 AMP,PKH



Picture 2: Mohamad
 Dzulkarnain Osman



Picture 3: Raja Azizulakhir Raja
 Harun Al Rashid



Picture 4: Haji Mohd Basir Bin Ngah
 Mat Ali, PJK,PPT

THE BASIC TECHNIQUE OF THE BINDING OF TENGGOLOK

Every tengkolok binder has a different technique in folding and accessorizing a tengkolok. The basic folding technique adopted by Pak Toh Ibrahim and Mohamad Dzulkarnain Osman is the three-finger technique. In the meantime, the rolling technique is carried out by Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid. The triangle-folding technique used by Haji Basnee differ from the approach adopted by others. Every technique of folding has its own advantages and uniqueness.

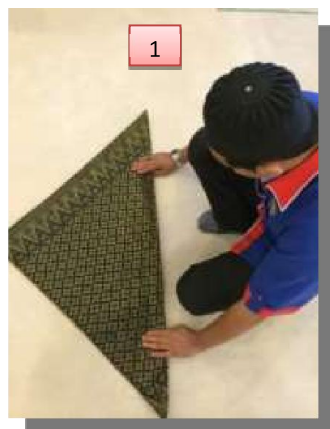
Table 2. The classification of the basic folding technique.

No.	Basic Folding Technique	Binder
1	Three-finger folding	Haji Abdul Rahim Bin Mohamad Mohamad Dzulkarnain Osman
2	Rolling	Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid
3	Triangle-folding	Haji Mohd Basir Bin Ngah Mat Ali

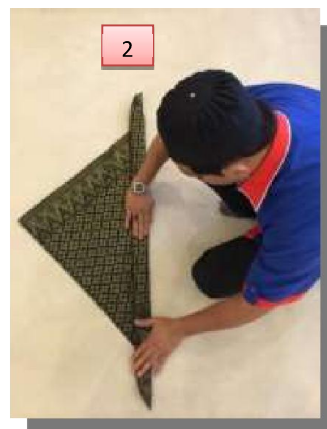
a. The binding technique by Toh Seri Wangsa Haji Abdul Rahim Bin Mohamad and Mohamad Dzulkarnain Osman

Their technique starts with spreading the tengkolok fabric in the shape of a triangle. Having done so, the fabric needs to be flattened so that there is no 'bubble' formed on the surface of the fabric. If there is a bubble, then the folding outcome will not be neat. After that, a three-finger measurement is taken to make the first folding. This first folding will determine the next folding and so on. The measurement of the first folding should begin in the middle part of the fabric and pressed right to the end of the fabric. The three-finger measurement can be taken horizontally or vertically as shown in pictures 2a dan 2b below.

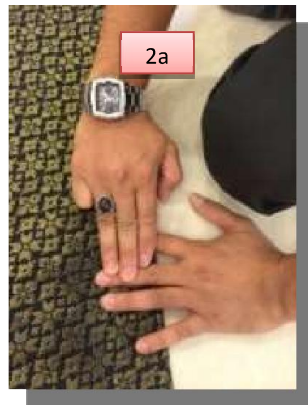
After taking the measurement, the fabrics folded five times, carefully making sure that the measurement is the same. The outcome of these five folding is a small triangle as illustrated in Picture 3. This small triangle is a span from the peak of the fabric. This folding aims to produce a shape of a tengkolok to cater for the ordinary people. This is because the tengkolok design can be the same but the measurement and height cannot resemble the tengkolok worn by Tuanku Sultan Perak. According to Tok Ayah, in the personal interview carried out on 1 May 2014 it is suggested that the creation of the tengkolok must exhibit the wearer's characteristics such as his status also his high position. This will determine how the make-up will be executed. These criteria should be given attention so that the design produced will fit the person wearing it.



Picture 5: Spread the tengkolok in a form of a triangle.



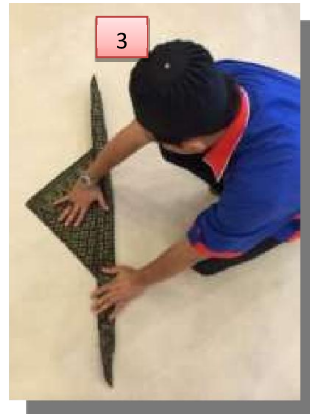
Picture 6: First folding using three fingers



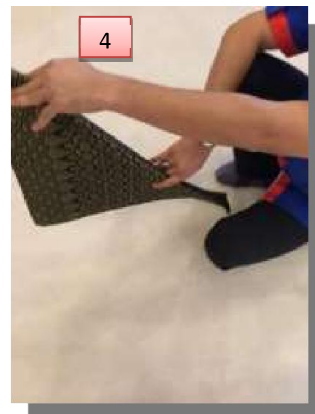
Picture 7: The three-finger measurement done horizontally.



Picture 8: The three-finger measurement done vertically



Picture 9: Hand measurement from the edge of the tengkolok



Picture 10: Lift and turn over the tengkolok.



Picture 11: The tengkolok is placed on the right knee.

b. The basic folding technique by Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al Rashid

he folding technique is the technique used by Ku Ayah in folding a tengkolok. According to Ku Ayah, in a personal interview dated 22 May 2014, the rolling technique facilitates the folding of a *tengkolok* as one does not have to count the number of times that the folding has to be done. There are various ways how a binder can make the tengkolok. Ku Ayah himself is capable of making tengkolok in a standing or sitting position. Through observation, Ku Ayah is able to make the tengkolok while standing as shown in the picture below. Ku Ayah spread the tengkolok fabric and made the first roll as illustrated in Picture 12.

The rolling technique does not necessitate the number of roll to determine the excess fabric at the edge of the tengkolok. When rolling this tengkolok, the excess fabric as shown in picture 13 is the last roll. Afterwards, the fabric is reversed to face the front side of the binder and at the time, the pressing done also the folding will be of the same size, as in picture 14. The tengkolok that is completely folded is then lifted and placed on the right knee as in Picture 15. Ku Ayah also emphasises the aspect of neatness and the precise technique in producing tengkolok.



Picture 12: The first roll



Picture 13: The last roll that leaves a small triangle on the upper part of the fabric



Picture 14: Tengkolok fabric reversed on the body of the binder.



Picture 15: Tengkolok fabric placed on the right knee.

The Folding Technique by Haji Basnee

Based on observation, it is found that the basic folding technique adopted by Haji Basnee differs from the basic technique used by other binders. Haji Basnee starts the basic folding technique by spreading the tengkolok fabric and flattening it (Picture 16). After that, the measurement of three fingers is taken and both hands holding the fabric as shown in Picture 17. The tengkolok fabric is folded three times and excess fabric will be pulled and it will form a triangle as shown in Picture 18.

The difference would be apparent in the excess fabric that has been folded. Excess fabric at the edge will be pulled and folded into a triangle as in Picture 18. Then, the tengkolok fabric will be lifted and placed on the knee in a cross-legged position, as shown in Picture 19.



Picture 16. The first folding of the tengkolok fabric that has been spread



Picture 17. Both hands at the end of the folded fabric



Picture 18: Tengkolok fabric folded into a triangle



Picture 19: Tengkolok placed on the knee

c. The mannerism of tengkolok-making

The Malays have been very well reputed for their good manner and politeness. In line with this, there are also etiquettes or mannerism that must be adhered to in the making of tengkolok so that everything done is in the mercy of Allah SWT. According to Haji Basnee, in a personal interview dated on 21 May 2014, there are several rules that he follows and practices in making tengkolok. He begins with a *Bismillah* reciting Al-Fatihah, prayers on the Prophet Muhammad Sallallah Alaihi wassalam and with a clear intention.

He also warns that no tengkolok-making carries 'dark' elements as it is a deviant practice. It has nothing to do with superstition or myths as it starts with bismillah and prayers to the Prophet of Muhammad Sallallah Alaihi wassalam; these are good practices and are blessed, Raja Azizulakhir Raja Harun Al-Rashid, personal interview (22 May 2014).

d. Taboo in tengkolok-making

Anything and everything related to Malay life does not escape the sentiment of taboo. It is indeed, commonplace in Malay ways of life to have all sorts of taboo. For instance, girls (or unmarried women) are not allowed to sit on the stairs for fear that they will not get any suitors. Such is the beauty of the taboo set by our forefathers as to safeguard the dignity and the code of ethics of girls during that time.

Similarly, with this art of tengkolok-making, there are also several taboos that need to be obeyed. In a personal interview with Ku Ayah, on 22 May 2014, in folding and accessorizing the tengkolok, one should bear in mind not to put the tengkolok at the feet. This is because it is always known as a head gear, as it is with songkok and kopiah, thus it is seen as a show of disrespect if it is trampled upon. If hand-folding and shaping the tengkolok fails to create a good folding, then the knee can be used to press the fabric.

CONCLUSION

The art of folding tengkolok is one of the Malay skills that must be preserved. This art has become a Malay heritage with a high value. Therefore, all parties are responsible to sustain this art of folding tengkolok. The younger generation is among the target group that must be prioritised to inherit this beautiful skill. This skill does not dictate that only the aristocrat must learn how to master this art, but what remains as important is the fact that they are Malays who still treasure their land and their heritage. Therefore, the younger people of today are recommended to learn this skill so that it can be passed down from one era or generation to another.

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