

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



**MJSSH**  
Muallim Journal of  
Social Science and Humanities

## A RESEARCH ON ARAIMUDI OF TAMILS AND CAPING OF MALAYS

**Prakashdas K. Ramadas\*<sup>1</sup>; Mohammad Nazzri Ahmad <sup>2</sup>;  
Nur Yuhanis binti Mohd Nasir <sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sosio Culture - Malay Arts, Academy of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email: [prakashdasvasi@gmail.com](mailto:prakashdasvasi@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sosio Culture - Malay Arts, Academy of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email: [nazzri@um.edu.my](mailto:nazzri@um.edu.my)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Sosio Culture - Malay Arts, Academy of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email: [yuhanis83@um.edu.my](mailto:yuhanis83@um.edu.my)

\*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/216>

### Abstract

People have relied on personal ornaments, more generally known as jewellery, for hundreds of years to meet their basic needs. Jewellery predates modern humans as a genuinely universal type of ornament. Necklaces, rings, and bracelets are examples of jewellery that are made of or contain gems and metals. This research is about the *araimudi* of Tamils and *caping* of Malays. *Caping*, which is classified as jewellery, is a disc worn by children, especially in Peninsular Malaysia. *Caping* was first used in India, where it was known as *araimudi*. Indians are thought to have brought *caping* to this country as early as the Sri Vijaya era. The *caping* used by Malays has influences from the Hindu religion.

**Keywords:** jewellery, *caping*, *araimudi*, South Indian Culture, Malay Culture

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License



Received 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022, accepted 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022

### Introduction

Malaysia is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and exquisite handicrafts. Malaysian handicrafts are discrete due to numerous cultures and a variety of tribes that have settled in the country (Sade & Rahman, 2017)<sup>1</sup>. Every piece of handicraft has a story to tell and a justification for being the way it is (Fatimah, 2017)<sup>2</sup>. Malay jewellery is mainly from gold, silver, and brass. Due to the

patronage of the royal households of Kelantan, Kedah, Perak, and Pahang in the 17th and 18th centuries, the art of making gold and silver jewellery began to evolve. The *pending* or belt buckle, which was embellished with precious stones, keris, tobacco box and *caping* was the most common object designed for the Malay aristocrats at the time. Silver artefacts were brought into the Malay Peninsula by foreign merchants during the reign of Buddhist-Hindu kingdoms like Sri Vijaya and Majapahit in the area (Mohd Kassim Haji Ali, 1983)<sup>3</sup>.

Following that, Malay gold artisans started working with silver ingots and bars. The intricate and delicate designs of Malay silverware are well-known. Although the states of Kelantan and Terengganu produce the best silverware in the country, traditional silversmithing is on the decline. Malay royals have played a significant role in patronising many jewelleries which are part of the history of Malaysia and are not used in the current era such as the precious *caping*.

## Methodology

The primary research method for this research is literature review. The resources required for this research were gathered from library and internet. The internet resources are mainly journals and academic writings. Due to limited studies on the topic, adequate resources were not available.

To further enhance the research, collection-based research has been conducted at museums, they are namely,

- 1) National Museum, Kuala Lumpur
- 2) Kedah State Museum, Kedah
- 3) Terengganu State Museum, Terengganu
- 4) Kelantan State Museum, Kelantan

## South Indian jewellery history

Indian jewellery has an ancient legacy, almost of the nation itself. People's urge to adorn themselves arose about 5000 years ago, resulting in the invention of jewellery. Indian jewellery is one-of-a-kind in terms of style and craftsmanship (Madhavan & Chitra, 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Jewellery is available in a variety of styles, ranging from religious to purely aesthetic (Pradesh, n.d.)<sup>5</sup>. Since ancient times, when Rajas and Maharajas fought for the most beautiful pieces, royal class people have supported the art of jewellery.

Regional variations in the development of jewellery can be seen due to differences in geography, people and culture (Dwivedi, 2016)<sup>6</sup>. Based on Assif (2002)<sup>7</sup>, the Sangam era, which lasted roughly from the 3rd century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D., is widely known as the Tamils' 'golden age.' The heroic poetry of this time, which is replete with detailed descriptions of the Tamil

country of South India, its kings, chieftains, and the loves and wars of its various peoples, has preserved for us some insights into the Tamil culture.

### **Caping**

An individual's fashion or clothing style portrays their status which comprises of ethnicity, belief, and social position in the society (Ibrahim & Aziz, 2019)<sup>8</sup>. In the days when children's clothing was scarce, they were fully dressed by wearing a small modesty disc (fig leaf). In the Malay language, the heart-shaped disc is known as a *caping*. It is generally made from a thin flat sheet of material or other solid material.

According to Mohd Kassim Haji Ali (1983)<sup>3</sup>, before the reign of Long Yunus (1763-1798) of Kelantan, the local silversmith was granted the privilege of having an unlimited amount of time to design any item demanded by the king to ensure that the product was of the highest quality. The activity persisted in the royal courts' patronage of the arts.

Married couples used to yearn for a baby girl in the family, particularly in most parts of the East Coast, so that she could grow up to help with household chores and lend a helping hand to the rest of the family. Since the men spent most of their days fishing in the oceans, the young women were known as the family's "backbone." When a woman was pregnant, it was customary for the couple to make a promise that if a girl child was born, a *caping* would be made immediately after the birth and later given to the child to wear during a simple ceremony.

The *caping* was normally made of gold or a combination of gold and silver if the child was born to royalty. Royal families rarely use *kulit karah*, a spotted, variegated tortoiseshell or a river turtle shell, known to local Malays as *kulit karah*. A wealthy family would choose silver or copper, while a poor family, such as fisherman or farmer, would make their own *caping* out of a hard coconut shell painted with simple fretwork carving, or a flat piece of wood or seashell.

Different groups of people had different ways of wearing this simple disc; for example, for the loyal family, some customaries had to be watched, particularly when it came to the cord for tying the *caping* around the waist. Anyone with the requisite skills could perform the ritual, but it was usually done by a skilled practitioner. In different parts of the world and from one practitioner to the next, the rituals involved appeared to vary. The use of *caping* is believed to be continued till the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV (1899-1920) in Kelantan. After that, *caping* is no longer in use.

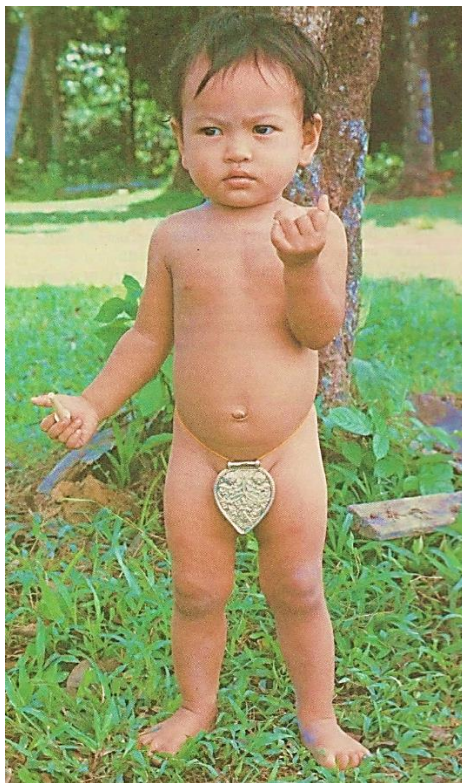


Figure 1: A Malay Child wearing a Caping picked from page xii from the book *Caping, Modesty Disc* (Mohd Kassim Haji Ali, 1983)<sup>3</sup>

### ***Araimudi***

The *Araimudi* (*caping*) is a small silver metal plate shaped like a heart or a fig leaf that was once worn by young girls in Tamil Nadu, India. "Arai" refers to the loin, while "mudi" refers to the cover (Winslow, 1979)<sup>9</sup>. The *araimudi* is also known as the "genital shield" or "caping" (Hussein, 2011)<sup>10</sup>. *Araimudi* is used to cover the nudity where a piece of string around the waist holds the *aramudi* or heart-shaped piece of silver. Little children, up to the age of about 3, wear nothing but the little heart-shaped piece of silver suspended by a waist-cord. Little girls carry a gold or silver shield or codpiece with an obscene image engraved on it, while a boy's ornament, often made of gold or silver, is a replica of the member it is intended to represent.

### **Hindu Influence on Malay Culture especially on *aping***

According to Malaysian history, no proof suggests the dates of the arrival of the first Indian traders but historian estimates that the arrival date should go back at least 2000 years ago. Bujang Valley still standing as a great proof with its inscriptions and clay brick monument for our maritime trading partnership with the South Indian kingdoms since the second century. The heightening growth of trade with India has attracted many of them to immigrate to the coastal regions and hold

upon Hinduism. Hindu religion and cultural traditions began to spread across the land. For example, local kings began referring to themselves as "raja" and more desirable aspects of Indian government were adopted.

Thus, it is fundamentally regarded as Malaysian history where the beliefs of Hinduism can be found in the Malay lifestyle. Hindu rituals have been assimilated into Malay's ceremonies such as king crowning ceremony, palace ceremonies, social events, and other family practises that were all done in the Hindu style. Malays have been inspired by some of India's mouth-watering cuisines and colourful outfits. The *caping* ceremony is one of the important in a family for both parents and children as well. Thus, a trained medicine man or shaman is required to perform the *caping* ceremony. Before the ceremony starts, one of the many steps is to attract spirits to the region in which an offering of food was required (Aishah & Abd Aziz Haji, 2012)<sup>11</sup>. The food offering comprises of 3 jackfruit fleshes with seeds, 3 different types of local fruits, 3 lumps of salts, 3 combs of banana in which are Pisang Nangka, Pisang Raja, and one other local banana, and 3 candles made of bee's wax.

All the offerings were placed in one corner of a chosen and blessed field which is close to an incense burner containing burning coal, on a container weaved using Pandan leaves. The characteristics of animism that exist in the Malay community is influenced by Hindus. According to Mohd Taib Osman (1988)<sup>12</sup>, Malays also do believe in spirits as Hindus because both entities are supernatural, have magical powers and can incarnate in shapes of objects such as trees, rocks, hills, rivers and so on. Thus, its crystal clear that the ceremony of offering fruits and candles for *caping* was influenced by Hindus.

On the other hand, the design on the disc has a very strong influence on the Hindu religion. According to the research by Mohd Kassim Haji Ali (1983)<sup>3</sup>, the two embossed floral motifs, which are mangosteen calyxes or clove flowers at the top of the discs and the pointed oval "bamboo shoot" motif at the tip. The female breast and vulva which is also known as yoni are thought to be represented by these symbols. The yoni is a symbol of the female generative power which is sometimes reproduced in combination with the lingam a Hindu phallic symbol that once closely resembles the penile anatomical shape. The Hindus most likely introduced these symbols to Peninsular Malaysia around the same time as *caping*. The Malay craftsmen closely followed the Indian *caping*'s basic design, by just changing the motifs to reflect items found in the local environment. With the arrival of Islam, any designs which denotes the human form was prohibited.

## Conclusion

In a conclusion, *caping* or modesty disc is only one of the examples which were inspired by the Indian culture. Many pieces of jewellery can be compared to such as hip chains, crowns, necklaces and many more. Jewellery especially gold jewellery is also like fine wine as years go by its price

and worth is only escalating. Thus, as we invent new designs and technologies in the jewellery industry, we should not neglect history.

Royal patronages in the jewellery industry have contributed to a great extent in bringing in designs and innovations from all over the world. *Caping* can be considered as one of the jewellery which has seen extinction. Although it is impractical to wear *caping* in today's era, we must research these traditional ornaments to preserve the culture, knowledge and skills behind it. Furthermore, awareness about this traditional jewellery must be imparted on the minds of our younger generations.

## References

1. Sade, A. B., Rahman, M. S., Tan, S. K., & Hassan, H. (2017). Preservation of Malaysian handicraft to support tourism development. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 32(3), 402. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijesb.2017.10007375>
2. Fatimah, A. H. N. (2017). The Sustainability of Malay Traditional Craftsmanship As a. January.
3. Mohd Kassim Haji Ali. (1983). *CAPING: MODESTY DISC*. Malaysia: Museum Association of Malaysia.
4. Madhavan & Chitra. (2005). *History and Culture of Tamil Nadu: Vol. 1 (Upto C. Ad 1310)*. Delhi: D. K. Print World (P) Limited.
5. Pradesh, M. (n.d.). *History of Indian Jewellery Significance of Indian Jewellery Indian Jewellery Types of Indian Jewellery*.
6. Dwivedi, J. (2016). Indian Tribal Ornaments; a Hidden Treasure. *IOSR Journal of Environmental Science Ver. II*, 10(3), 2319–2399. <https://doi.org/10.9790/2402-1003020116>
7. Assif. (2002). Ancient Tamil society as reflected in Sangam literature. Retrieved April 06, 2021, from <http://www.worldgenweb.org/1kawgw/tamil.html>
8. Ibrahim, N.I., Ab. Aziz, A., Abd. Aziz, M.K., Khalili, S.H.M., Zamri, Z.M. (2019). Children customary clothes in Malay ceremonies of Adat Memijak Tanah; baby's first step ceremony and Adat Bertindik; ear-piercing ceremony. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, 7 (6), pp. 792-797.
9. Winslow, M. (1979). *Vinulōvin Tamil - Āñkila akarāti = Winslow's a comprehensive Tamil and English dictionary* (p. 974 pages). Putu Tilli: Ēciyan Eṭukēṣanal Carvīs
10. Hussein, A. (2011). *Sarandib: An ethnological study of the Muslims of Sri Lanka*. Battaramulla: Neptune Publications. isbn:9559726226, 9789559726227
11. Aishah @ Eshah Haji Mohamed & Abd Aziz Haji Bidin. (2012). Tumbuhan dalam Upacara Pembomohan: Kes Main Teri di Kelantan. *Geographia Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 8 (4), 56-63.
12. Mohd Taib Osman. (1988). *Bunga Rampai: Aspects of Malay Culture*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.