

## **NAWAWI Norwani (UK)**

### ***Ikat Limar : The Past And The Future - paper***

*Ikat Limar* is a Malay weft ikat fabric. The term '*ikat*' comes from the Malay expression '*mengikat*' meaning to bind, knot or wind around. In principle ikat or resist dyeing involves the sequence of tying and dyeing sections of bundled yarns to a predetermined colour scheme prior to weaving. Technologically, this weaving refer to thread-resist textile.

Malaysia is a country with a rich culture heritage that includes exquisite woven textiles. As part of this heritage, *Ikat Limar* is one of the finest fabrics woven in Malaysia. The nobility commonly used it as dress fabric and ceremonial attire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, today little is known about *ikat* textile in Malaysia, principally because there are no written documents on its practice and development. Malay weavers traditionally passed their knowledge only to their family members. The teaching of *ikat* weaving was restricted to close family members and was only on an oral and practice basis. With the advent of industrialization the art of ikat weaving has been forgotten, thus leading to stagnation. Though there are still hand-woven *songket* (supplementary weft in gold threads) in Malaysia, lack of documentation on the *ikat limar* technique led to the slow disappearance of this *ikat* tradition in Malaysia nowadays.

Understanding the historical background of the Malay textile will lead to an appreciation of the design in *ikat limar* fabrics and of the tedious work involved in making it. Many writers have described on '*kain limar*' fabric but little has been said on its beautiful motifs and patterns. In *ikat limar*, there are many types of patterns such as '*limar corak penuh*' meaning limar with full-patterned design, '*limar corak bertabur*' meaning limar with scattered motifs or spotted pattern and for striped pattern the design is known as '*limar corak jalur*' or '*limar tenggarun*' if the stripe *ikat* mixed with *songket*, a supplementary gold weft weaves. The motifs in *ikat limar* are mainly derived from flora, fauna and some are from the ancient beliefs. It is interesting to note that some motifs that were from the old belief have change their names and forms to suit the environments and new belief. Typically, the motif in *ikat limar* is known as '*bunga*'. Nevertheless most motifs in *ikat limar* are mainly named after flowers although some are plants like the '*pucuk rebung*' meaning bamboo shoot and '*pucuk susut sembunyi*' meaning the hidden flower buds. The motifs are done by tying the weft yarns and dyeing them in many colours of natural dye. The

patterns are then woven into beautiful and classic setting which in the past were reserved for the nobility and the royalty. Most of these beautiful *ikat limar* can now be found in Museums, personal collections and in antique shops.

To see *ikat limar* appear again, we need to trace back its production technique, which has disappeared in the late 1920s. Most of the master ikat weavers are now gone and no one knows of the traditional ikat weaving. The studies of ikat fabric from neighbouring countries like the *madmee* from the Thailand and *ikat* weaving from the Indonesian islands could help in tracing back the technique for making *ikat limar* in Malaysia. This could also lead to the development of the proper technique as well as more advanced techniques. Research and experiments are carried out and designs are recorded into digital media technology for future references. These studies could help the cottage weaving industries in Malaysia and would also be a wealth of knowledge for anyone wishing to learn on weft *ikat* weaving. It is important to maintain the traditional patterns and motifs as the main Malaysian identity of the *ikat limar* fabric. At the same time it is also interesting to explore with new designs and colours for the future generation like having contemporary *ikat* design for fashion and art décor for wall hanging and furnishing fabric. Traditional and new designs could go along with new product so that the technique can be enriched and *ikat* technique will not diminish in time to come.

I am a textile lecturer at the School of Art and Design, University Technology MARA, Malaysia and I am currently a research PhD student in the School of Textile and Designs, Heriot-Watt University, UK. My research is on a Malay traditional fabric known as 'Ikat Limar'.

---