



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XL No. 61

December 1989



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Luhat, H. O. (1989). Some Aspects of Belaga Kajang Ethnohistory. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XL (61): 49-56

SOME ASPECTS OF BELAGA KAJANG ETHNOHISTORY

Henry O. Luhat

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INTRODUCTION

An ethnographical account of the Kajang and the investigation of their cultural heritage are some of the main issues of great social significance in Sarawak today. This paper is an attempt to present a brief ethnohistory of the Kajang with special reference to the Punan, Kejaman, Sekapan and Lahanan of the Belaga District.

The later part of this paper deals briefly with the traditions, cultural heritage and challenges of the Kajang. I have also put forward broad strategies which can be adopted as a framework for an integrated and progressive cultural policy for these people.

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WHO ARE THE KAJANG?

The term Kajang was introduced in the sociological literature by Edmund Leach to designate six minor ethnic groups of central Sarawak — the Punan, Kejaman, Sekapan, Lahanan, Seping and Bemali (Leach: 1948: 266). They reside in the Belaga District except for the Punan, whose settlements are also found along the Kakus, Kemana and Jelalong rivers in Bintulu Division. The term Kajang is also applicable to other small groups living along the Rajang River like the Sihan, Ukit, Tanjong, Kanowit and the Bukitan (Nicolaisen, I, 1976: 63). The Bemali who have become culturally extinct during the last generation, and the Seping who are almost extinct are also part of the Kajang people.