

THE RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND CULTURE OF
THE KAREN PEOPLE.

BY

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Introduction

Last year, we, the B.R.E students had the opportunity to choose the topic we wish and submit the outlines of the proposal for the research paper. I had read many books about Christian's faith and political economy, the churches of Europe, America and Asia, the history of Karen religious customs and cultures etc. Among these books I have chosen the religious customs and culture of the Karen people as my topic.

The Karen people had passed through the ages of political oppressions for a long time. As a nation the Karen people had kings, rulers, religions, customs and cultures. In this research paper we can learn a little about the Karen people's understanding of God, their customs and cultures. Most of the present generation of Karen people do not know their ancient people's beliefs, customs and cultures. So it is the intention of the writer to leave some research work which will be beneficial for the generations.

The first chapter presents some facts about our ancient people's belief and worship. In chapter two, some of the interesting festivals and customs are presented. In the last chapter a short history of how the Karen people got their literature and the Karen National Day is recorded. It is the hope of the writer that readers may gain some knowledge from this research paper.

CHAPTER I. THE RELIGION

1. The Understanding of "YWAH".

The ancient Karen people told their children that "YWAH" (GOD) is near, not far from them, living among them and always looking and watching them. Human is unrighteous, so they cannot see "YWAH". He is omni-potent, omni-present and omni-science. He exists by himself, everything that exists, exists by him. He is the source of all creation.¹

There is a poem about the existence of "YWAH", which was written by Thra Htoo Hla E. This poem said that before the existence of "YWAH", there is nothing but only the empty dark space called, "Hey ho, hey lah". After that wind and water exist, then the wind blows upon the water and become the water-spout; in the middle of the water-spout, there emerges the Vortex, and out this came "YWAH"(GOD). "YWAH" is the mixture of two forces; i.e, the wind and water, "YWAH" is omni-potent, omni-present and omni-science. If we ask the ancient Karen people about "YWAH" and His powers, they said that although "YWAH" exists later than wind and water He possesses every power, because He is the source of the powerful forces. They give an example of an egg by saying that although the shell and embryo of an egg exist first, it is not as powerful as a cock or a hen. They also give an example about medicine; although the roots, plants and leaves exist first; there is no benefit until you pound it, boiled it, mixed it to become a medicine, i.e., each has power respectively, but the mixture of them, "Medicine" is the more powerful than the plants and roots.²

Mahn Linn Myat Kyaw, the author of the Karen religious, customs and cultures in his book said that the Karen people worship many gods, they are animists. They believe in Nats, natural forces and think that nats can give them both the good and evil. They also believe the spirits, soul and life, like the Indian they believe the existence of "At-man", i.e., the spirit. So they sacrifice to the spirits of their parents' who had died.³ They said that the trees, plants and animals have only spirits whereas the human has spirit as well as soul. When the trees,

1. Aung Hla; The Karen History' Bassein Press, 1939 P (210)
2. Htoo Hla E; The Golden Book; Rangoon K.B.C Press; 1953..... P (24)
3. Linn Myat Kyaw; Kayin Yocya Thuta Padei Tha; Yangon Zwe Press; 1983. p (50)

plants and animals died, its spirits are lost and disappeared, but when human died his spirit wondered about to have another existence while his soul rested somewhere.¹

2. From Ayae-gyi Bartha to Animism.

As the Karen people had emigrated from Unan, China they respected their parents. When their parents died they cremated them and took the bones, ashes and buried it in the "Lotic" (cemetery) and covered it by the earth and stones. They built a hut and inserted the dead's clothes, weapons and properties which were used by the dead, it was to pay respects only but not to worship it. In lower Burma, Thaton the Telegu Indians who came from Madras stayed along time, and later they conquered Thaton. They took Power over the Karen, forced labour and tortured them. They called their priests from India to teach and force the Karens to worship the religion of Buddha, they brought three volumes of "Pitakas" from Ceylon. The Sgaw, Pwo and Pao, (Karens) were forced to worship Buddha and to leave the worship of "YWAH". Those who ran away from Thaton to the deep forests and mountains still worshiped and sacrificed to "YWAH" according to their customs. As the time passed the Karens were tortured and forced by the Indians, those who reached and lived in the jungle forgot how to sacrifice and worship "YWAH" and became the false worshipers of fairy and forest nats. Those who lived near towns professed the religion of Buddha up to now.

In upper Burma the Indians (Brahman, Punas) from India, professing the Hindu religion came across Asam-manipura and immigrated into Pagan and brought in the lowest Buddha religion. Their priests were called the Ayae-gyis and the religion was called Ayae-gyi-Bartha. The priests (Ayae-gyi) head-quarters was at the Thama-htit village, a few miles north of Pagan city. The Ayae-gyi kept their beard and longhair. They drank liquor, rode on horses and fought in the battles. The Ayae-gyis were Punas, they could chant and predict. They were twisted, crooked and wore the garments which were dyed with many colours. The people of Pagan were afraid of them because of their evil deeds and bad characters. During his reign the King of Pagan Nyaung Oo Saw Raham (931-964) built a big image of a dragon in his garden. He worshipped it and thought that the image was justice and had power more than the human. This King built five pagodas for the Ayae-gyi and were called Patoe-gyi, Patoe-gale, Patoe-thamya, Thay-lay Patoe and Zaydi - Patoe. The Aris Ayae - gyi from Thama - htit village

¹Aung Hla; 229

²Ibid., 230

instructed him to offer liquor, curry and rice pudding every morning and evening. During the reign of Nyaung Oo Saw Raham, he and his citizens worshipped according to the teaching of Aris Ayae-gyi.¹

Aris Ayae-gyis were cruel, wicked and twisted in making the people of Pagan to believe them. They made a trunk in the tree, put their written words and kept it until the trunk was filled with its own flesh-wood. Then they pretended to have a vision from god and ordered their followers to go and cut open the tree before other people. They took back their written words and read it before the people and made it into laws for them. All the people of Pagan had to obey their words. Sometimes they made holes in the trees and put stones and iron parts. After many years they said that they got visions and ordered their followers to open the trees before the peoples. They got back their stones and iron parts, they told them that these things had powers. They made rules for the Pagan people to worship these things. In this way the words of the Ayae-gyis were regarded as being the truth and they were kept as the representatives of god and thus they rose to great Power.²

In Pagan city, it was said that there were thirty high priests and six thousand followers. They studied the laws and the religion of Aris Ayae-gyi Bartha. Laws of religion were formulated and instructed by the Aris Ayae-gyi as they wished. They preached and taught the false teachings to the people of Pagan. e.g., If any one confessed his sins before them, he was released and forgiven, even if he killed his parents he could be forgiven. Moreover, the Kings and people of Pagan had to send their daughters to Aris Ayae-gyis one night before they got married. This kind of teaching was called "Pan-Oo-Hlut" (Paw-Saw-Sree) the Aris Ayae-gyi slept with the girls one night and let them go home in the morning. This teaching was taught strictly as a discipline and if any one disobeyed, he was punished severely. This Ayae-gyi Bartha was taught in Pagan city, Thama-htit village only. Those who lived outside the Pagan city continued to worship "YWAH". But there were fewer Karen people who worshipped "YWAH". Those who lived in Pagan city believed in the false teachings and sacrificed liquor, curry and rice pudding to the images and pagodas³.

In 1056 ^{A.D.} ad, Shin-Ara-han the son of Brahma-punas who lived in Thaton, arrived in Pagan forest. In Thaton, there were riots and rebellions and so he fled to Pagan. In the forest he met a hunter who took him to his home. Because of the strange

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"Thingan" he wore, he was taken to the King Anawrattar. He told the king about himself and preached the religion of "Buddha". Then he told king Anawrattar about, "Pittakas" three volumes which were kept in the palace of the Thaton King Manuhar. So Anawrattar sent his servants to demand the "Pittakas" from Manuhar-min, but was refused. Anawrattar became angry and commanded his troops to attack Thaton. At last they conquered and brought King Manuhar, Buddhist priests, Pittakas and the people of Thaton to Pagan. The King Anawratta spread the religion of Buddha in his country and the worship of Ayae-gyi Bartha faded away. Although the people of Pagan worshipped Buddha, the Karen people who lived far from the city still worshipped "YWAH".

In 1115 AD, Shin Araham died at the age of eighty-one. During the reign of King Anawratta, the Karen people were tortured and forced to labour. They were forced to leave their worship of "YWAH" and instead to worship the religion of Buddha. Their literatures which were written on leather were burned and spoiled by the King. The Karen culture, customs and religions had been written in the leather books. These leather books were lost and later the Karen people forgot how to worship "YWAH". They were captured and forced to build the pagodas and the images of Buddha in Pagan. The majority of the Karen people in Pagan and around the city left their "YWAH" and worship Buddha. The Karen people and the Indian Funas lived together and later all the Karens became Brahmesse people. The minority who fled from the reign of Pagan Kings, continue to worship their "YWAH". The priests who led them to sacrifice and worship "YWAH" were killed by the Pagan kings. As time passed the Karen people who were living in the deep forest and mountains did not know how to sacrifice and worship "YWAH", correctly and became the false worshippers of "forest nats, fairies and mountain nats".¹

Now we can see the majority of the Karen people worshipping Buddha and Nats, Aw-Buatt (Nat-Sar) they said that in their hearts there is a "YWAH". Although they had "YWAH" in their hearts they said that they had to live among spirits and had to be afraid of these devils which could harm them, so they had to offer the images and nats and the spirits with liquor, curry and rice pudding to appease them. They were afraid of the Pagan Kings, Ayae-gyis and their followers and moreover they had lost their leather books and did not know how to worship "YWAH". These leather books included

knowledge, wisdom, customs, culture and religions practices which were written only on one side. The only that ancient Kearen people could do was to tell their grand children stories and poems and only the oral tradition could be retained. In their hearts there is "YWAH" and it is expected that one day he will come again and save them from the spirits and the devils.

As the Karens were tortured forced to labour to built the images and pagodas and to worship Aris Ayae-gyis and the images they fled from Pagan city and were scattered in the thick forest and mountains. As their priests were killed and their leather books were lost they did not know how to sacrifice and carry out the rites and rituals of "YWAH". In their rough lives in the thick forests they were influenced by the natural disasters and thought that forests and mountains had gods (nats) and sacrificed to them. To appease the nats they sacrificed to the nats by offering liquor, curry and rice pudding. In this way the Karen people in Upper and Lower Burma became the false worshippers of the images and the natural nats.

3. Nat worship

After the fall of Thaton and the reign of Pagan Dynasty, the Karen people fled away the cities and lived in the forests and mountains. They were afraid of everything which they confronted and thought that the natural forces, the mountains and the forests had nats (gods). They believed that these nats could help as well as hurt them. So they worshipped many kinds of nats.

(a) Pee-bee-yaw Nat-Thamee

She was a Nat-Thamee who blessed the crops. It is celebrated at the 1st day of Pya-Tho month in various regions. She was a merciful "grandmother" who helped the poor and orphans! Once there were two orphans, (brother and sister) in a village and they were very poor! There was a famine for three years, because the weather was bad and the farmers could not cultivate the paddy. The villagers were starving and they stole each other properties. The orphans had good moral character and did not steal that which belong to others. One day an old lady came into the village and no one accepted her, but the orphans fetched her to their hut. Although they had a little to cook for once, and after that they would have to face starvation and death, but they prepared to feed the old lady.

¹Linn Myat Kyaw; Kayin Yoeya Thuta Padei Tha; Yangon Awe Press; 1983. - 114

The old lady knew their difficulties and asked them to cook only seven grains of rice. They did as they were told, they saw the rice pudding rising and filling the pot. Every day they did as the "grandmother" told them. The other villagers knew it and invited the old woman to stay with them, but she refused. When the weather was favourable for cultivation the villagers ploughed the land and cultivate the paddy. The orphans also did as the "grandmother" told them. At harvesting the orphans got a lot of crops and piled it in the farms. At night their crops were stolen and the "grandmother" asked them to bring a coil of rope and a cane. Then the "grandmother" shouted, "rope ... rope ... bind the thieves and cane ... cane ... beat them". It happened as the "grandmother" shouted and the thieves confessed their sin. The orphans restored their crops and lived happily with the "grandmother". This "grandmother" was known as "Fee-bee-yaw", Pwa-pwa Nat-Thamee who blessed the crops and helped the poor orphans. Now-a-days, Pee-bee-yaw Nat-Thamee's festival is held on the first day of Pya-Tho month every year. She is believed to be the spirit that blessed crops and harvests.

(b) Phu-baw Nat (Bo Bo Gyi Nat)

Phu-baw Nat is celebrated in the month of Wa-Kaung and in the raining season. Many kinds of vegetables are growing in the forests; the frogs, fishes and water-creatures are also breeding. So the people could get the curry for their meals easily. It is a time when they could enjoy good food. But they are worried that in this season the evil spirit nats such as Yoke-Soe and Mye-Poke Belu would join them and ate with them. So to drive away the evil spirit nats they built Phu-baw Nat palace (Bo Bo Gyi Nat-Kun). They offered a little liquor, curry and rice pudding to Phu-baw Nat's palace yearly and the rest they drank and ate it happily and cheerfully. "Phu" means grand father and "baw" means yellow. That is yellow grand father or Bo Bo Gyi Nats. They pleaded Phu-baw Nat to drive away the evil spirit and nats, so they would not be disturbed by them when they eat at home.

(c) Taung-Ya Hsauk Nat

It is celebrated in the month of Ta-goo and Ka-sone. They believed that these nats are good which could protect and watch their farms and paddy -plants. Before they plough and cultivate the paddy-plants, the farmers had to sacrifice to Taungya-Hsauk Nats. The sacrificials are liquor, fowl or pork curry and rice pudding. They sacrifice a little and all the rest they drank and ate it happily. When the farms got enough water,

they plough and cultivate the paddy-plants. When the plants were six inches long they transplanted them in the paddy field. Before the transplantation they sacrifice to the spirits of the paddy. They believed that all the paddy plants had spirits respectively. They sacrificed to the spirits of the paddy plants for their aim was not to retain the spirits in the plants and that they might not die.

In Ta-zaung-Mone and Nat-daw month it was the times of harvest. Again the owner of the farm had to sacrifice to Taung-ya-Hsauk Nat. When the crops were ripe; they reaped a little crop and sacrificed it to the nats to bless them, i.e. to get a lot of crops. In the month of Wa-soe and Wa-kaung the farmers are freed from work and guessed that their spirits have wandered away from them and so the whole village have to celebrate the ceremony of "Calling Spirits". Then they built new houses and asked the "Aing-Hsauk-Nat" to look after them and protect them from the evil spirit and nats.

(d) Yearly Village Nat Sacrificial

The people who lived on the mountain celebrated the yearly "Village Sacrifices". They called the spirits of their parents and grand-parents spirit to come and eat the sacrificial meal which they offered. They also called "Thay-ko-Mu-gha" or the powerful good nats to come to their sacrificial meals to bless and to protect them from the evil spirits. If they are sick or one of their family gets sick they believed that the evil spirits are giving them trouble. They are afraid of the evil spirit nats and so they celebrated village yearly sacrifice. The Thai-Karens also celebrate this feast in the same way that the Burma-Karens do, but it was a little different because of their different regions!

The yearly village sacrificial is lead by the woman. She must be the oldest women in the village. In the Karen community we can see that it was the "Matriachal Organization Society". Before they celebrate this sacrificial feast they blocked their villager's gate first. i.e.; They did not want the outsiders to be in their village for they regarded that it was not good to let outsiders participate in the celebration. They warned the other people not to come into their village by hanging the feathers of the fowls at the gate. When the other villagers saw the sign, they did not enter into the village, but keep away from it until the sacrificial feast is over. The villagers also have to stay in the village until the feast is over.

The aim of the "Yearly Village Sacrificial" is for the prosperity of their village and to avoid evil-disasters. The sacrificials were fowls-curry, pork-curry and liquor. They call the good spirit nats to come and eat it and to bless and protect them. They also call the evil spirit nats (Nat-mate Sar) Ta-ta-rei, Ta-takat) and feed them and plead them not to harm and disturb their village. All the villagers are happy after the sacrificial meal is finished and they live in peace and comfort during the whole year.

4. Christianity

Mr. and Mrs. Judson, the first Americans ever to leave their own country as missionaries of Protestant Christian Churches were really reaching Burma at last after having been on the run for months from the British East India Company officials who were dead set against missionaries. They sailed on February 19th, 1812, arriving in Calcutta on June 17, Ann and Adoniram embarked June 22, 1813 on the Georgiana. Ann was soon taken so seriously ill that Adoniram despaired of her life. She was scarcely able to sit up that morning of July 12, as their ship picked up its pilot at the mouth of the Rangoon River. Mrs. Felix Carey welcomed the new missionaries and made them feel at home with true Burmese hospitality. In January 1816, Judson began to translate the New Testament. He also began to write a tract!

On April 4, 1819, Mr. Judson preached for the first time in the Zeyat. During the month that followed a number of curious visitors from Rangoon and the near-by villages come to the Zeyat but only one or two seemed to be sincerely interested. On the last day of the month a quiet and reserved young man Maung Naw stopped to talk for several hours. After daily visit for a week Maung Naw expressed repentance for his sins and faith in the saviour. On June 6, Maung Naw wrote a letter asking for baptism.² The baptism was delayed because of the death of King Bo-daw-paya. After five days on the 22nd of June, Judson baptized Maung Naw in a large pond in the Vicinity. Maung Tha Hla and Maung Pye were baptized at dusk on November 7th, 1819, in the same pond where Maung Naw had been baptized. Maung Tha Hla may be remembered as the disciple who went to bring his close relative Maung Shwe Bay to Christ.³

¹Shwe Wa; Burma Baptist Chronicle; Rangoon, University Press; 1953. 1 -

Judson took Maung Shwe Bay into the service of the mission. He showed more evidence than any other member of the church of being qualified for the ministry in character and gravity of deportment. As a Christian worker Maung Shwe Bay was later to do evangelistic work to help the Moulmein reading Zeyat and to teach part-time in the Moulmein Girls School. It was he who rescued the Karen first fruit, Ko Tha Byu from slavery and turned him over to the Judsons. In this way Maung Shwe Bay was responsible for the beginning of Christian work among the Karens!

Ann's sickness so weakened her that she had a severe recurrence of her liver trouble. She had to be sent to America for treatment. Her health remained far from satisfactory, but she felt a great compulsion to get back to her home and Christian friend in Rangoon. She left Boston on 21, 1823. With her came a new missionary family. Rev. and Mrs. Jonathan Wade who were to become well-known for the help they gave to the young Karen Church for the putting of the Sqaw Karen Language to writing. They arrived in Rangoon on December 5, 1823. On an evening in March 1828, all the members of the missions were talking together in the Bungalow about establishing a branch mission outside of Moulmein. Tavoy was selected as the location for the transplant. The young Boardmans, Maung Pwint and Ko Tha Byu were best fitted and four boys were added to them. The first baptism was that of Ko Tha Byu on May 16, 1828. Ko Tha Byu who was a rough and un-disciplined genius with energy and zeal for Christ became one of the most effective pioneers in the Karen mission work.² (1848, Judson 52,68)

Ko Tha Byu started out early one morning to preach the gospel to his fellow-Karens in the jungle. He made his way up the steep mountain trail, now wading in the creek bed and then taking to a dry shoulder of a ridge until he finally reached a Karen village perched precariously on the edge of a gorge through which leaped to a mountain stream. There he stopped to spend a night. The neighbours gathered around him in the evening. They were surprised to learn the subject of his mission and listened with great intentness, for the message which Ko Tha Byu brought fitted so well with their tradition of God, and the lost book which was to be brought back to them by their white brother.¹

A young man named Saw Quala or (Hope) was particularly touched, he believed when he first heard the

gospel message. His father a proud and and bitter man sternly for-bid his son to have anything to do with the stranger and the religion he preached, but his mother quietly accepted the gospel. The father's opposition was so strong that Quala had to go and live with an older half brother on the other side of the mountain. In 1830, several young Karens in the neighbourhood decided to go to Tavoy and Quala accompanied them. There in December he was baptized with eighteen others. Mr. Boardman had repaired the old Zeyat in Tavoy and begun public preaching after the tested Rangoon and Moulmein pattern. His busy programme in town was interrupted from time to time with his preaching trips to jungle villages!

The news of Boardman's death in Tavoy reached Judson in Rangoon in February 1831. The lost of his consecrated and capable co-worker who with the help of his wife and Ko Tha Byu had baptized seventy Karens in three years, was a great loss to the church and personal loss to Judson.

When Mr. Wade arrived in Rangoon in April, 1832, he specialized in working with the Karens. He brought with him from Moulmein Saw Chet Thaing. A year later the Veteran Ko Tha Byu with his wife came up from Tavoy to preach in Karen villages in the Irrawaddy Delta. As this work for the Karens grew Saw Panlah and three younger assistants joined them from the Chummrah area. After the departure of the Wades the Rangoon Mission School had to close due to government pressure, but Karens from the districts continued to come in large numbers to the mission house. Pastor U Tha Aye baptized the first five Karens in the Rangoon Area on November 10, 1833, and as a consequence he was thrown into prison. The following year nearly every Christian in Rangoon was fined by the government. In spite of these repressive measures the church continued to grow; with an English, a Burmese and a Karen Church functioning in Rangoon at the beginning of 1835. In 1836, the church members were widely scattered because of continuing persecution. Ko Tha Byu moved to Hmawbi some twenty miles to the north of Rangoon.

Judson had always apposed a consecration of mission personal in any one place. Now that seven or eight families were in Moulmein, with more arriving he was doubly anxious that they be distributed as widely as possible with one or two families at each central place to collect a church and an interest group, to help the national leaders.

Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Abbott gave their time to the Karens travelling often to Hmawbi and Pantanaw. From November 1837 to September 1838, Mr. Abbott baptized 117 persons and one of them a woman in Pantanaw, aged 120 years. In August four Karens were imprisoned for becoming Christians. In addition to his evangelistic work Mr. Abbot conducted a school for pastors with 25 students. In November 1838, the missionaries had to leave Rangoon when Tharrawaddy's restrictive policy came into force there. Burma proper was now closed to all missionaries effort and the churches had to be left in charge of national pastors.¹

A year later Kincaid and Abbot pay a visit to Rangoon and found only fourteen left in the Burmese church, but the Karen churches had a membership of 387, with several hundred awaiting baptism. Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Abbott began working in Sandoway in 1840. Their work developed quite different from that further north for the emphasis was almost entirely on helping the Karen refugees who had fled across the mountains from Bassein District, and on training the Karen pastors and evangelists. Its importance lay in the preparation for the blossoming of the Karen churches in the delta of Irrawaddy River. At the close of the 1852, when all the delta-south of Prome and Toungoo came under the British Administration. Sandoway lost its importance as a Karen-mission Station. Ko Tha Byu and his wife came to Sandoway along with the Abbotts. He suffered with rheumatism and walked with difficulty. After reaching Arakan he settled down in a little village near Sandoway where he led many Karens to Christ, just as he had done in other places. When finally he caught a violent cold and pneumonia set in, he approached death without fear. He died in Sandoway on September 9, 1840. (1945, a stitch '89). Mr. Abbott recorded of him, "no mound marks his grave, no stoned urn his resting place; but eternal mountains are his monuments and the Christian village that clothe their sides his epitaph"²

Three features of particular interest engaged the attention of the missionaries and the pastors of the rapidly growing Karen Christian growing. (1851, Annual Report 9.10)

The organization of associations of churches with their annual meeting. The effort to settle the Karens both refugees and others in permanent villages of a sufficient size to make possible the support of schools, churches and daily industry. For Karens custom had been to live in very small villages which could be easily shifted as the jungle was out for new mountain

¹Ibid., 113

²- 164

fields. This did not permit social economic or social religious co-operation. There was the development of self-support for church and school and the sending of evangelists to other groups than their own. A Karen Home Mission Society was formed among them to make it cooperatively possible to send home missionaries to other regions. Such was the development of the Sandoway Karen Mission when in 1852. The British and the Burmese fought their second war. As soon as the British had re-established order in Bassein, the Sandoway Karen Mission had served its purpose; now Burma was again opened and Bassein was to become the centre for Karen Work rather than Sandoway.

As Mr. Vinton's suggestion in 1854, the Karens of Rangoon District organized the Rangoon Karen Home Mission Society, on this lines of similar Societies already started in Tavoy, Sandoway and Bassein. In 1856, there were forty-two Karen Churches with over 2000 numbers working together. There were thirty-nine Karen preachers and thirty six village schools.²

At the third quarterly meeting of the Ministerial Conference and Home Mission Society at Naw-P'-Eh in October, 1854, a great forward was taken which marked a new era in the history of missions, when it was decided that the churches would undertake the entire support of native preaching both in the churches and among the non-Christians. On christmas day 1857, Mr. Thomas White, on a trip, found in the village of Hawkaw-p'-Gah, the wife of Ko Tha Byu, the first Karen convert. She had moved back across the mountains to this village not long after her husband had died in Sandoway and was still living in this village in 1882 and planned to remain there until God called her.

The Bassein Karen Home Mission Society took particular interest in sending Karen missionaries to other parts of Burma to preach the gospel. In 1853-56, ten Home Missionaries from Bassein together with the workers in their district were all supported by the Home Mission Society. (1883 carpenter-253)

A consultation of Burma Baptist leaders which had been planned from 1864, had to be postponed till October, 1865, when missionaries and national leaders met for a week in Rangoon to form the convention. Messrs. Beecher, Luther and Vinton of the free Baptist Mission were also present and took an active part in working-out the details of the constitutions. Even

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those people who were the most conservative and cautious, finally were well satisfied and happy with the out-come; 360 people were attended the first Annual Meeting of the Convention in 1866 on the present Baptist Head quarters compound.

Mr. Bennett of the Mission Press acted as Chairman at the meeting and was elected the first president. The four vice presidents were Thra Quala, Saya U En, Thra Po Kway and Rev. J. S. Beecher.

Although there has a good deal of interchange of workers and communications between the different Karen fields from the beginning, a formal organization of all of them is of recent origin. The annual meetings of the Burma Baptist Convention organization in 1865, gave opportunities for Karens from the different fields to get together informally. However, we now have no records of the early beginning of a separate Karen Convention. In the Burma Annual for 1928, while in also An Historical sketch of the Karen Mission 1828-1928 is the note. The Karen Conference now called "Karen Baptist Convention" has for several years carried on mission work for its own in Siam and bids fair to be the body which will take a constantly increasingly part in the life of the churches.²

The Karen Baptist Convention composed of all the Karen field groups except the Pwo's who have their own Pwo Karen Baptist Conference. The Karen Convention has the staff of seven workers six of whom are full time. General Secretary, youth Secretary, Women's Secretary, a Cashier-Accountant and a Typist. The Treasurer is a retired-government official who gives Part-time.

The "Go Forward Press" which publishes the "Go Forward" monthly magazine and other materials in Sgaw Karen is operated by the Karen Convention. The "Go Forward Magazine" is the direct successor of the "Morning Star" started in Tavoy in 1832 and is thus one of the older religious periodicals in Asia.

CHAPTER II. THE CUSTOMS AND SEASONAL FESTIVALS OF THE KAREN PEOPLE

1. Community Hall (BLAU)

The Karen people who lived on the mountains built "Community Hall" (Blau) in some villages up to now. The community Hall was like a Zayat. That kind of building was called "Blau" in sgaw Karen and "Blaung" in Pwo Karen. In ancient "Blaung" could be seen in the Pwo Karen villages but now we could not see it.

In olden days the ancient people kept it as a custom and their children still retained this custom. The olden people did what they should do at "Blau" and what they should do at home. They separated the works where they should do it. So they built "Blau" in their villages to use for special occasion.

They selected a place to build "Blau" where every family in the village could go easily. They built "Blau" by seven posts of three rows. The front part of the "Blau" is an open verandah. There is a kitchen and a place for fire woods. It has a thatch roof sometimes they used "Blau" as a guest house. In the day time the people of the village went out to their farms and work. they left the children and the old people at "Blau". The old people taught the children about God and make them recites poems. When strangers or guests come to village they went to "Blau" first and did not go to the houses. In the evening, the people come back from their work and went directly to "Blau" and asked the children whether any guests had arrived. If they know that the guests arrived they went at once to the guest and prepared for the meal. They sent mats, pillows, blankets to the guests, slept with them and talked with them at night. i.e. to show their hospitality.

Sometimes they used "Blau" to keep the bachelors to sleep in it. According to the saying, "Po-mu ler-dert, Po-kwah-ler-Blau, daughters are to stay in the house whereas sons are to stay in the Blau". That is to say that if the boys grew up they were not allowed to sleep at home and they had to go and sleep at "Blau". As for the girls they were to sleep at their parents' house.

They used "Blau" for celebrating the marriage ceremonies.

¹Linn Myat Kyaw; 198

Before the wedding the girls placed the bronze drum and shuffled the places of the different planks of the Pau Ku (Wah Pat-tala). When the grooms party came they are to rearrange them in their right places. This is the way of testing the ability of the groom's party. If they played bronze drum and Pau Ku the sounds should match and be in tune. It was a good custom of the Karen people. During the wedding feast they broke the pig's head into two parts and put rice-pudding and curry in it. The two "Ta-lo-pas" (match-makers) had to feed each other and the villagers looked on and laughed happily.

The "Blau" is also used for instruction of young men. It also used for the judgement of crime, theft, quarrel etc. The judge was the head of the village called "S' kaw". They had to obey the judgements of the "S'kaw". They also celebrated the funeral in the Blau. They kept the dead body in the middle and the boys and girls held each other hands and circled around. They teased each other and tested each other's wits by making "Htars"(poem). Except during the funerals the women and girls were prohibited to go to "Blau".

So "Blau" was used for many varied occasions celebrated their weddings, funerals, worship and to eat and drink liquor (Kaung-yer). Moreover "Blau" is a Community Hall and a rest house for the guests and the bachelor boys to sleep and get knowledge.

MARRIAGE

2. Tu-wai Pwo-Karen Marriage.

The spinster and bachelor of the Karen had an opportunity to choose their bride and bride groom. They could refuse the proposal of their parents. This idea of marriage was up to date to balance the desire of both parents and children. When there was a seasonal festival or funeral or marriage the girls and boys had a chance to meet each other. They could make poems (Htars) to know each other's interest and to decide whether he or she was suitable for a partner. When the girl or boy attained the age of twenty-five and thirty respectively, they got a chance to choose.

Whenever there is a wedding, worshippers of Tu-wai had to come back to their village and gather at the Tu-wai Nat Kun. They believed that if they were absent, Tu-wai Nat would

¹Ibid., 173

punish them. If they could not be present they had to send message to the Nat-saya and to promise that they would ever come back one day. If a boy decide to marry a girl he had to go to the girl's house at night and told her parents about the intention to get married and to be true to each other for the rest of their lives.

A few days before the wedding day their friends in the village had to work and make preparations for their wedding. They worked together teasing and joking each other happily. On the wedding day at 3 A.M. the bride and bridegroom woke up and prepared for the wedding. The bridegroom had to take two coconuts and the bride kwan-eit including beetle-leaves, beetle nuts, tobacco, lime, candles, popcorns, sticky rice and Tha-bye-ywet. At dawn they went to Tu-wai Nat Kun accompanied by their friends. The bride and bridegroom had to wear the Karen's dresses. Their friends teasing and joking happily on the way. When they arrived near the Nat-Kun, the boys from the other village would tease and make fun of them as they wished, but they had to excuse them.

When they went into the Nat-Kun, the Nat-saya would perform the ceremony. Nat-saya would select a fine coconut and cut opened it and poured it into a plate and pray for them. Then he would accepted all the things that were brought and prepared for the wedding. Both the bride and bridegroom had to raise up the plate and Nat-saya would pray for their future. Then he would lit up three candles and offered the sacrifices to the Tu-wai nats and the couple had to make vows to each other. They also had to give donation to the Nat-saya and the elders who prayed and blessed them. Then the bride and bridegroom went round three times and threw pop corns at the Nat Kun's bells. They believed that if they could hit the bells they would get children who possessed "Sweet voice".

After that they went to Tu-wai Nyaung bin (Bayan tree) and tied it with a rope seven rounds and paid respect, for this tree was an old tree which their grand parents had given respect to and so they continued to preserve the customs. On their way home they were accompanied by their friends who were joking and teasing. Those who liked liquor could drink and eat kun!

From the village gate to their house they were blocked many times by joking, teasing friends demanding for "Ghai-bo". They had to give money to satisfy them. They ate together with

their friends at home, the bride and bridegroom had to feed each other thrice and their friends would clap their hands and then joined in the feast. At night before they went to bed they had to pay respect to both side parents. If the parents were dead they had to take a cup of liquor and the traditional flower and raised it up to the east and west to show their respect.

3. Ceremonial at Funeral Festival

As the Karen people were living in many regions the funeral customs are also different. We could see that some burried their dead, some kept there on a shelf, some entombed or cremated the dead body.

Paku-Karen cremated the dead body after keeping it for three to seven days. Before the cremation the old men and women wailed and soothed the family; the young boys and girls were playing Pau-ku's, bronze drum, singing and dancing and making poems (Htars) to each other the whole night.

In Pa-pon township the people pulled out the trees which the dead person had planted and kept it beside the dead to take them with him. While the dead body was at home they had to climb trees and collect honey. This was done for the dead person so as to enable him to climb trees and collect honey in his next life or existence.

In ancient days they burried the properties of the dead person together with him, or piled them near his grave; i.e. the dead person could use them in his next existence. They believed that the soul of the dead person would go to "Plu-Pu" (Hades). It was believed Plu-Pu was the opposite of the present world and so in directing the dead they would use the opposite directions. For example, if they would like to point to the East, they point to the West, If they would like to point to the sky, they point to the ground.

They tied the dead persons thumb and big toes. They put some change of money into the coffin for his ferry fee. Before they took the body from his house they had to offer food to the traditional Nat and ask for his permission to do so. They poured water from an earthly water pot from the top to the bottom of the staircase. As soon as the corpse passed the staircase the earthern pot was broken into pieces by throwing it on to the ground with great force. The Pwo Karen burried the dead for

three months or one year and then dug it up and cremated it again. After seven days they collect the bones, ashes and coal and packed it up in a piece of white cloth. They put the bundle into a bamboo basket and took it into the village for the bone-picking ceremony.

The Bwe-Karen built a hut in the middle of the village for the funeral ceremony. They made fire and the old men in the village sat talking and drinking kaung-yei. If there was a dead person it was to be taken to that hut. They drank kaung-yei and sang. At dawn they buried the dead person. They put the dead's properties which belonged to him and buried it.

The Gai-Kho Karen kept the dead person seven days and buried it. They invited the whole village and fed them. The Pre Karens offered Pwe (feast) fed those who came to the funeral. They buried the dead person with his properties. The Gai-Kho has made a coffin with a log before he died. They broke a piece of bronze-drum and buried it with the dead.

Some people who lived on the mountain had another custom in relation to the dead. When husband died the wife could continue to live in that house, but when the wife died they destroyed the house and built a new house in another place. Some Karens in Pa-pon township pulled down the walls of the house. Three young people would keep vigil singing, dancing and making poems the whole night. After cremation the dead, the young people continued to keep vigil-singing, dancing and making poems for about seven days. This kind of custom is called "Aw-pwe".

4. Family Gathering at the First Reaping Time and Thanks Giving at Final Harvesting.

The Sgaw Karen people who lived on the mountains usually reaped their paddy at the month of Ta-zaung-mone. When it was time to reap the paddy, first, they reaped some of the paddy for cooking and fed the villagers. It was a custom to feed other first before they reaped all the paddy in their fields. If they do so they thought that their crops and paddy would multiply!

Feeding the first-crops paddy to other is called, "Au-bu-thaw-kno" in Sgaw Karen and "Aung-bu-thawt-khu" in Pwo Karen. Hsit-mu and Hsit-hsar (Thadin-gyut and Ta-zaung-mone) October and November are the two months for the

reaping. Every year at the first reaping time they came back to their families and celebrating their "Family Gathering". It is a chance for the old grandfather and grandmother to teach their children and give them words of wisdom and knowledge. They taught their children by poems about the legends.

At the month of Ta-zaung mone and Nat-daw (November and December) they finished their harvesting. They piled the bundles of the paddy in the farms. Before they stored the paddy into the barns they had to sacrifice to "Pee-bee-yaw" (Nathamee) to bless the paddy. They believed that all the paddy had spirits, and the spirits need to come back to the piles of the paddy. They gave "Pee-baw-yaw" offering and requested her to bless the paddy to multiply and be durable for eating etc. Then they stored all the paddy into the barns.

After storing the paddy, they again celebrated, "Au-lau-bu-thaw" festival again. On the eve of that day all the children had to go and seek for vegetables in the forest. When all the children had gone the parents had to prepare curry for the family. i.e. to seek for and keep ready fowls ducks or any suitable pig. The mother had to go to the barn and take paddy from the four corners and to refill them with the paddy, which were at the middle of the barn. Then she had to dry the paddy in the sun.

When all the children arrived back from the forest, they pounded the paddy into rice. They all worked together, cooked and prepared for the sacrificial meal. That night they finished all the works and invited their relatives to come and joined them in the next morning.

Early in the morning they woke up and made ready for the celebration of "Au-lau-bu-thaw" or thanks giving at final harvesting time. When all their relatives arrived they eat together and fetched their eldest grand parents in front of them to teach, then all pay respects to the old grand parents who blessed them in return. They taught them about their traditions, their experiences, knowledge, customs and wisdom, for them to get them by heart. The grand parents taught them through poems (Htars).

5. Nat - Sar

In Pwo-Karen word "Nat-Sar" is called "Au-ghe" and in Sgaw Karen it is called "Au-bwatt". This custom is not the sacrificial

to the "Nat", but it is the sacrificial to the spirit of their dead parents. They believed that there are seven spirits of a human being. If he died some spirits were set free and some were wandering to take on another existence. Yearly they sacrifice to the spirits of their parents.

(a) Pwo-Karen (Au-Hhe)

This sacrificial meal was led by the mother of the family. If a girl got married, she had the duty to lead the sacrificial meal on that some day. The children of the Pwo-Karen respected their parents and helped their parents. If their parents died they sacrificed them yearly by offering the eatable things and in doing so they were respected by their children too.

They respected their parents and loved their children and when their sons and daughters got married and departed from them they reunited them yearly. Every year they give respects to the spirits of their dead parents and regathered all their children to participate in the sacrificial meal. By this way reunited their children. When their sons and daughters and grand children arrived they sacrificed to the spirits of their parents. This is to show their sons, daughters and grand children that they respected their parents and to teach them to keep it as a custom. They cooked rice pudding and boiled the pork (without salt) and put it into a big bamboo platter with a cup of water. Then when all members of the family arrived, they sat around the platter and the mother had to call to the spirits of their parents by saying, " Oh ... the spirits of our parents, come back and eat with your sons and daughters this evening, we sacrifice to you this pork, chicken curry and rice pudding please come back ... come back". After awhile they believed that their parents spirits arrived and she offered them water to wash their hands and eat. After awhile she offered the cup of water for them to drink.

After they had finished feeding, spirits of their parents they started to eat. The head of the family (father and mother) took a piece of curry each, and then the members of the family followed one after another according to their age respectively. This was repeated until all the curry and rice pudding in the big platter had gone. While they sacrificed to their parents spirits they had to be quiet to show their respect, no one can talk, even the children had to stay calm and not to make noise or play. After the sacrificial meal no one was allowed to go

outside that house, they had to stay in that house and sleep there. This sacrificial meal was for the mother's side only, the following evening they had to sacrifice to the spirits of the father's side again. They had to do the same thing which they did the previous night. All the members of the family had to sleep at that house again. In this way the sacrificial meal was for the spirits on the mothers one day, and for the spirits on the fathers side one day. After two days the sacrificial of the Pwo-Karens Nat-Sar (Au-Ghe) had finished. The next day the members of the family could go back to their home or else where, they wished. In this way the Pwo-Karen parents reunited their sons and daughters yearly. When both their parents died, they continued on scarifying the spirits of their parents at their home respectively.

The Pwo-Karen kept their custom for a long time and later due to their economy instead of using pig they used fowl, fish, etc. In ancient time all the participants of the sacrificial meal were golden or silver necklace. But later instead of golden or silver necklace, they tied a piece of char-coal or wood to pieces of cloth and hang them on their necks. At present some of the Pwo-Karen kept on sacrificing with pigs. Other nations or racial groups thought that the karen people sacrificing to the "Nats". In fact they misunderstood the meaning of "Au-Ghe", it was not a sacrifice to any kind of "Nats". But it was to re-united their family members to come back and to give thanks and pay respect to their parents who had passed away. So it was infact a family re-union and thank giving.

(b) Sgaw-Karen (Au-Bwatt)

If there was a sick child in the family, they thought that the "Nat" was giving him trouble. So they had to offer sacrifice to the "Nat". They had to call back all the members of the family who were away from home. They had to sacrifice to the "Nat" with pig or chicken according to the divining of their priests. The priests had to use the bones of the chicken for divination. So the Karen people who believed in this custom had to keep (breed) pigs and the chickens ready for the sacrificing. This sacrificial meal was also lead by the mother of the family. She had to take two fowls (male and female) and twisted the fowls neck and killed it. She had to kill without the blood came out from the fowls. Then kept the fowls on the fire until all the feather were gone and remove all the internals. Again she had to boil the chicken on the fire and put some chillie and salt.

Then she had to put the rice pudding and the soup into the bamboo platter and all the members of the family had to sit around it. Then the father or mother of the family had to offer the sacrifice by saying, "Oh ... Thay ... Kho-Mu-gha we offer you the rice pudding and chicken soup ... please accept these things and take away the sickness of the child". After that the father of the family had to eat first and then followed, by the members of the family according to their age.

The next day the father's side had to make a sacrificial again. They had to cut four parts of bamboo and make square space by these bamboos near the kitchen. They put the leaves of banana into the square space. The father of the family squeezed the neck of the pig while all the members of the family put their hands into the space. When the pig died they thrusts a sharpen stick into the pig arms and through its mouth and kept it on the fire. And when all the hairs of the pig was gone, they cut open the pig's stomach and put into a basket. They all worked at the pigs gall bladder and when they saw that it was good they shouted, "Success ... Success ... Success". When the gall bladder was not good for sacrifice they had to kill another pig and looked at the gall bladder of the pig again!

If it was good to sacrifice they remove all the internals and boiled it with salt and Chille. They gave their neighbours the rest of the pig to cook and eat. Then they put the soup of the pig into the bamboo platter and all the family sat around it. The father or mother had to offer the sacrifice to "Thay -Ko-Mu-gha" as above. They ate and drank all the rice pudding and pork soup.

Then the sick child's father, had to go a little distant spot from his home and built a little hut under a tree; he had to kill a white fowl and put the fowl's nails and internals in the hát. Then he had to recite and drive away the evil-nat meik-sa (Ta-Tarei-Ta-Takha) and said, "have your fill and do not give us trouble, then go away from here". Then he took the rest of the chicken to his home and cooked and ate it with his family, thus believed that the child would be healthy again.

6. The Ancient Karen New Year

Many hundred years ago, the Karen people celebrated their New Year (Ni-klote) generation by generation in some regions. They choose the last day of the twelve months at mid

night after the first "cock-crow". In ancient the cocks always crew exactly at mid-night. They respected and honoured Ni-klote so highly that they left their works and celebrated this festival together, happily and praised God "Ywah" (Thee-baw thee-mu), they celebrated "Ni-klote" three days at the first month of the year. i.e. the 1st day and the 3rd day of "Tha-lei" month!

Those who were wealthy killed pigs, fowls, made great feasts and fed all people for the three days. They were very busy because they had to invite each other and treat each other. At this time they dressed in new clothes, visited each other and the elders exchanged presents. The gifts were mostly "White colour" eg. rice and white clothes, because white symbolized purity and freedom from evil things. They respected and honoured the "give and take rice" as a good wishes and blessings. They believed that white is the symbol of purity, free from diseases, difficulties and prosperity, plenty of food healthy and strength in their life. Some persons give present of rice and scatter rice. They greeted and blessed each other by holding each other on the shoulder and bowing their hands.

They took bath, washed their heads and dressed in new clothes. The spinsters combed their hair and decorated it with flowers and jewels. After that everyone offered their sacrifices and worshipped "Ywah". When they were worshipping the priest "Bu-kho" commanded all the people to bow down their hands and give respects to "Ywah" Thee-baw thee-mu. When all the people bowed their heads "Bu-kho" prayed for them in a loud voice. Then "Bu-kho" ordered them to praise Ywah "Thee-baw thee -mu". Then everyone stood up heartily and joyfully, praising "Ywah" by reciting Htars (poems).

After that "Bu-kho" (priest) prayed by saying, "Ywah, Thee-baw thee-mu bless our country". The people said, "Ywah, Thee-baw thee-mu, fulfill our needs we pray". Bu-kho again prayed, "Ywah, Thee-baw thee-mu, bless our leaders", the people again said, "please fulfill our desire", and the third time Bu-kho said, "Ywah Thee-baw thee-mu, bless our people to be freed from diseases and to be prosperous with food", and in unity the people again said, "Ywah Thee-baw thee-mu, hear our pray and fulfill all". After that Bu-kho (priest) blessed the people by saying, "Nay-Tha, Nay-tha, Nya-tha" (inherit it) thrice and let the people worship!

¹Htoo Hla E; - 210

After the worship the male and female recited Htars (poems) to each other. There were the beat of the bronze drums, playing of flute, singing, dancing. This was followed by a big feast of bread, fruit, rice pudding and curry, eating and drinking happily. Then after three days the celebration of Ni-klote (New Year) finished and the crowd departed from each other, greeting each other.

For many hundred years the celebration of Ni klote (New Year) the custom of Karen, slowly and slowly faded away, because of the oppression of other racial groups. But in the year 1932 AD in Tenessarim, the Karen people celebrated Ni-klote once again; and in 1937 (2627/Karen New Year) the British government accepted and confirmed the proposal of the Karen New Year Day as a gazetted holiday in the chamber!

CHAPTER THREE

THE CULTURE AND LITERATURE OF THE KAREN PEOPLE

The Gazetted Karen New Year

We had to express the deeds of the Karen "National Association" (Daw-kalu) When we talk and write about this Gazetted Holiday, K.N.A appeared before the Indian Congress (1883). In 1881, Dr, Than Byan, U Loo Nee, Dr. Myat San, U San Lone and other leaders formed this associating. The first Chair man was Dr. J. Than Bya (M.A.D.D.) and Saw Ba Maung (Bar-at-law) was the last one of K.N.A and tried to get the rights of the Karen people. ¹

For the Karen people to get a gazetted holiday, these leaders appealed for a Karen National Day to the British government. The government did not accept the appeal and Proposed that they appeal for other days. The leaders consulted and agreed to appeal for the Karen New Year Day. At that time, the new year day was celebrated differently by the Karen people. So to get a gazetted day officially, they gave general power to Saw Johnson D. Po Min who was vice-chairman in the senate. Then Johnson called the elders from Towngoo and discussed about it, and continued to give this general power to Thra Moe Loh, to make research based on the Karen Nation Year and to choose the day and month that would be most suitable and to submit these facts to them. ²

According to G.H. Luse and G.E. Harvey and U Po Kya's Burmese Hosity, the Karen people was the first nation who entered into Burma in 739 B.C. ³ So Thra Moe Loh proposed to count the Karen New Year when the Karen entered into Burma. The proposal was submitted to the government in 1936 A.D. and so they started counting the Karen year from 739 B.C. So in 1936 the Karen year was 2675. The Towngoo elders firs fixed the date (The first day of Tha-lei) and sent the bill to saw Johnson D. .Po Min. He singed ti, submitted it to the senate sand set out meeting. According to the Lower Senate. It was present and recorded on the 23rd. of Augjst 1937. Then the lower Senate put it up to Upper-Senator where Saya San Baw and the minister Saw Pe Tha were consulted and forwarded it to Dr. Ba Maw's government, and with the gov-

¹. Lifn Myat Kyaw; P.96

². IBID; P.97

³. IBID; P.98

ernments cabinet executive power; it was again submitted to the governor. With his cosient the governmental offices and negotiable instrument Act, the Karen New Year Day was acknowledged and designated as a gazetted holiday. The governments legal first gazetted holiday was on the first of January 1938. (i.e the 1st day of Pya-Tho month 1299). Thaiwa Po Lay Tae formed the Karen calendar. According to this calendar the following Ne Year fell on 21st December 1938 and the five leaders of K.N.A Saw San Si Po, Mah Shwe Ba, Mahn Hla Pe, Saw Sidney Loo Nee and Saw Pe Tha sent their felicitations to the celebration.¹

To day the Karen people confirmed Thra Moe Loh's research of the Karen New Year Day which was the 1st day of Pya-Tho or the 1st Day of "Htai Kauk Phu" and continue to celebrate the Karen New Year Festival.

2. The Karen Flag and National Anthem

In the society of the native Karen People, they used two flags. The one is the "The Karen National Flag", which concerned to all tribes of the Karen people and the other is, "The Karen State Flag", which is used only on the 7th day of November, at the State's days festival.²

In 1881, the Karen National; Association "Daw-Kalu" was founded and led by one of the leaders of the Karen National Association, Dr. T. Than Bya (M.A.D.D.) He was the first Chairman of "Daw-Kalu". In 1930-1940, the chairman and Senator Thra San Baw appealed for the Karen National Flag and the Karen National Anthem and received it.³

Daw-kalu Association invited all the Karen people to send the sample of their drafts flag, as a competition. Soon after they received hundreds of the drafts sample from various regions. They first selected (12) flags madding them and finally re-selected (3). These Three flags were chosen and prizes were given. Mahn Ba Khin got the first flag and in his flag there was a borane-drum, Thra Moe-Loh got the second prize and in his flag the drew the rays of the sun and Dr. Ba Saw Dwe got the third prize and in his flag there was a white elephant . So Mahn Ba Hkin who got the first prize had a chance to draw the Karen National Flag based on this Karen Flags. The flag we used now was confirmed by "Daw-kalu's Association". In this flag there are three colours, red, white and blue, nine-rays. of the sun on a bronze-drum.

The meaning of the flag which was drawn by Mahn Ba Khin was as follows;

- | | | |
|------------------|---|--|
| (1) Red Colour | - | The symbol of bravery. |
| (2) White Colour | - | The symbol of sincerity and purity. |
| (3) Blue Colour | - | The symbol of righteousness and honesty. |
| (4) Rays of Sun | - | Holistic developments |
| (5) Bronze-drum | - | Symbol of cultural, prosperity and literature. |

²Before Burma received independence from the British government, The

¹IBD ID; P. 99

²IBid; P.1073 IBID; P.107

³IBID; P. 107

Karen National Flag was already used. It was hoisted on the left side and parallel to the Union Flag on special occasions. On the Karen New Year Day the Karen people hoisted only the K.N.A in front of their houses.¹

On the 25th of Feb; 1956, the Karen state council held their meeting and MahnZung Sein proposed a Karen State flag to be confirmed. There were twenty-eight members who was painted in three colours. At the night top and the third of flag there was a white star. The colour of the top was blue, the middle- white and the bottom- white. The meaning of the flag was as follows;

- (1) A white star in the blue sky means, the karen state was a state among the union of Burma.
- (2) The blue colour means a pleasant state.
- (3) The white means the Karen people are honest pure and sincere.
- (4) The red means the Karen people are brave, courageous and united.

Dr. U Saw Hla Tun who was the chair-man 7 the Karen state supported Mahn Aung Shein proposed to be acknowledged. One member of the council supported and suggested the flag was to be used only for the Karen Sate, the "Daw-kalu" associating flag (K.N.A) is the only flag for the whole Karen people.

In 1930-1940, the karen New Year Day, the karen National Flag, and the "Daw-kalu Association's chairman, Saya San Baw made arrangements and propose it to the government Among the receiving of these three proposals, the karen National Anthem is one of the most important. This Anthem was written by Saw San Ba and was accepted and confirmed by the "Daw-Kalu" Association.

This Anthem is usually seeing either at the opening and closing of important festivals. It is also sing when the karen National flag is hoisted Usually only the first verse is sung. But during Christian worship services, the three verses are sung.

The mean of this verse is as follows,

- (1) Oh Our National people,
The best people,
I love you very much
You love what is right
You love strangers and guest
You are hospitable.
All you good and noble traits
I love very much.

3. The Karen Dance and Instruments

At present we can see the most popular dances and among them the "Done" dance is outstanding. "Done" dance can be seen at entertainments and festivals. The Bamboo" can be seen only on a New Year Day.

In ancient "Done" dance was used as a religious festival . eg. Shwe Thapminpdone, Hsin-pyu-done, Money-done, Buffalo-done, Crocodile-done etc. But to day we can se Mg-yote-done" ie. to tell and express the condition of the period-when the starting and ending of this dance, The dancers shouted the slogan; La-lait Mg Yote, Mg-yote La-lait (vis²visa) to each other.

¹IBID; P.108

To attract the audience there are rules of behaviour for the dancer. The main point is behaviour; all the dancers have to smile. They have to dance lightly, heartily and orderly. The right hand and right foot go together and so do the left hand and to left foot.

They used drums bronze-drum, claranett, band and Pat-tala Cymbals and bamboo claps. Before dancing they introduce themselves to the audience or greet the audience by saying the first verse of the song and the second verse they started to dance. They are singing and dancing versae by verse and at the last verse is the final salutation to the audience.

The Bamboo dance or Tasi-Klee dance was danced at the funeral house or other festival. We can say " Tasi Klee " dance is like the Talent-show. They killed pigs, fowls and cooked it at the funeral house eating and drinking liquor, Kawng-yei happily and the young people played " Tasi-Klee " to show their skill and talents.

They put down two sets of bamboos running parallel from east to west and another two set running parallel from North to South on the former sets of bamboos. Eight young people sat down at the ends of the bamboos holding the bamboos and keeping time by striking and separating the bamboos, thus causing opening closing in the bamboos. The other four young people would dance to the timing skillfully putting their feet into the opening and drawing their feet when they are closed. They have to dance so that their legs will not be caught between. If any one's foot is caught the rest of the audience laugh and make fun of him. Some raise the bamboos up to their necks opening and closing the bamboos while the dancers put their hands or heads in and out. ie, to show their talents to the audience happily. This kind of dance is called " Tah-HDin-Kaut "

While showing their talents some blew bamboo flutes " Pau-dwa " and thus drawing applause from the audience. They drank liquor, Kaung Yei danced lightly and happily.

In some regions there are dances of " Thaing " which is a dance with spears and swords. In the hilly region dances depict forms of planting-forming and fighting etc. In the delta region there were the opera-concerts for the whole night. This kind of dance is like the Burmese-dance, but they use only the karen language.

There are many instruments such as bronze drum and mounds etc. Moreover there are the karen harps (Ta-na/ Na-dain) and violins (Thaw - tu / Thawt-tu) and wind instruments such as (Ta-khi/ Gaing), paw - dwa / Poug-dwar / Pee-ba and buffalo horns (Kwe)

Some instruments are played together and some are used singly.

4. The Karen Literature

A people that had its own custom, culture and literature was acknowledged as a nation. A nation could not stand without having its own literature. The custom and culture consisted in and existed only because of its literature. Literature is like a mirror, it shows the custom and culture of a nation¹ As a thermometer shows the temperature of a man whether he is well or ill, the literature also shows the status of a nation's custom, culture and religion etc. It is a bridge by which a nation reaches another nation in social welfare and fellowship. So the Karen people should research and learn their literature and express it completely to show that they love their nation. If they study and learn their literature they can express their culture, custom and religion correctly.

Now we can see that they look down their custom, culture and dress, because some think that to wear their clothes and speak their language is not up to date. That kind of thinking is wrong, moreover they guess that to wear and speak other languages are good for them. These kinds of people are those who do not know themselves and are ashamed of being Karen and guessed that to wear clothes and speak their language is a big burden for them. These sorts of thinking and manners ought to be driven away and left behind, and to learn and to make progress of their custom, culture and literature.

If a nation loses its literature it will become weaker and weaker and at last the nation will be lost. So to develop and preserve one's custom, culture and literature is essential and it is also the duty of every member of a nation. When we value our literature, custom and culture we can know how to respect, love and develop it.

The ancient Karen people had a poem and they believed and expected it to come true for them one day. The poem was about a story of "The Golden Book". It said that the "Golden Book" was taken by the youngest white brother, who had given them a "Leather-Book" instead. They said one day, their youngest-white brother would give back their book. According to the poem the ancient Karen people believed and expected this book generation after generation in centuries. They did not doubt about it, but believed firmly.

1. Pa-Doe Committee; Twan-tae, Karen New Year Journal; Twan-tae; 1983. P 19

One of the karen great porphet " Wee-Maw-Lay" foretold that their white-brother would send the " Golden Book " soon. As for him he could not see it. The " Golden Book " which was sent, they could not read it, their brother would write a new alpha-bets and taught them how to read and write. If they received it, they had to take and hold on to it firmly and they would prospered. If they did not take great care, it would be lost again and they would have to suffer under other nations. As he had confirmed the prophecy it was soon fulfilled. When the missionaries arrived and the karen nation got literature.

Thra Wade, the missionary invented the character of the karen literature, and we owed him alot. He gavehis strength, skill, wisdom to form the alpha-bets for the karen people. He left a great amount of fund to establish print and distribute the karen literature.

Mr.and Mrs. Wade left America on the 22nd of June 1823 and arrived Rangoon on the 5th of Decemver. He worked as a missionary among the karen people. On the 25th June 1831, he went and preached at the village Ta-karei, at once the villagers demanded the karen-literature. When he heard about the history of their literature which had been fore told for a long time, he was astonished and started to form the karen alphabets at once. This work was a big task for thra wade, because he had to give his strength, time and wisdom. It was said that karen alphabet " ၵ " (Gha) was so difficult for him that got the word " ၵ " in a dream. His wife woke him up and asked what happened. He told her that he had got " ၵ " at last. This was a great blessing for us not to forget.

The non-christian are still expecting the coming of the " Golden Book" because they believe that this book will come straight to them and that the pages of this book will be made of gold and the words written in silver.

In fact, the meaning of the golden book is a precious book, ie the " Bible " which was written about God's words, poems and wisdom etc. We should express deep gratitude towards the works of Thra Mason (Francis Mason M.A.D.D) and to tell our children generation by generation. Mr. & Mrs. Mason left America on the 26th of May 1830 and arrived Tavoy in the month of December and worked among the karem people. We should not forget his ministry of translating the Bible into the karen language. At first he printed some verses of the Bible for distribution. In 1837, he printed the book of Matthew and in 1843, he finished and published the New Testament.

He tried hard by Giving all his time, strength and wisdom for many years until he completed the translation of the Holy Bible in 1853. So the karen people received with joy.

Their " Golden Book " which they had expected for hundreds of years. The Holy Bible which is the karen " Golden Book" was established in 1853 and in 1953, it attained a centuary. The karen Baptist Convention was held in Tavoy in 1953 on 21-23 November and there was a great Jubilee held in honour and praise of Thra wade and Thra Mason. The effort and sacrifice they had made for us will never die in our memory. So we the karen people owed Thra wade and Thra Mason so much that we should repay our debts by reading the Bible and retaining our literature.

CONCLUSION

As expressed above the ancient karen people were monotheists when they were independent. But when they were ruled by other nations their believe in monotheism was spoiled. Their customs cultures and the priests who led them in worshipping " Ywah " were spoilt and lost and later they became animists and worshipped many gods (Henotheism) until now.

In the early nineteenth centuary the gospels of Christ reached Burma and many karens became christians. In a few years a lot of karen people believed in Christ according to their tradition which were foretold by their prophets. In the next peroid the keren people were educated and their leaders were open-minded and struggled for their National - rights.

To-day we the karen people have been under the rule of many Governments, we have passed through various kind of policies. We have the right to develope and prosper our religious customs and cultures. We have to open our eyes and mind wide raise and strengthen our fellowmen. This is the duly and responsibility of every kearen poeple.

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