

**IDENTITY AND ADAPTATION: A CASE STUDY OF  
MON NATIONAL LIVING IN HINTHARGONE,  
BAGO TOWNSHIP**

**PHD DISSERTATION**

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**MAY, 2013**

IDENTITY AND ADAPTATION : A CASE STUDY OF  
MON NATIONAL LIVING IN HINTHARGONE,  
BAGO TOWNSHIP

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THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF  
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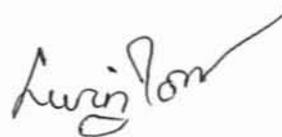
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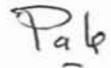
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express special thanks to steering committee members for confirming this thesis title and for their support in terms of guidelines, suggestions, and valuable feedback for the successful accomplishment of this thesis.

And then, I am highly grateful to participants from Hinthargone in Bago Township, without whose participation this thesis would not be a success. I would like to thank Hinthargone-dwelling Mons and non-Mons for welcoming me to their community, and providing me with support throughout my fieldwork.

I am deeply grateful to my Supervisor and Chairperson, Dr Mya Mya Khin, Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon for providing me with much needed support throughout my thesis. Her invaluable insights into my thesis help me to maintain perspective.

I would also like to extend deepest thanks to Dr. Than Tun Sein, Professor (Part-time), Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon for providing me with his invaluable guideline and encouragement during my thesis. He has been a tremendous help and I appreciate the time and consideration he has given me.

Moreover, I am especially grateful to Dr. Saw Saw, Deputy Director, Medical Statistics Division, Department of Medical Research (Lower Myanmar) for her close supervision and valuable guiding, and her advice given to this thesis as Referee. And I am grateful to Dr. Ye Ye Cho who assisted me to improve this thesis as External Examiner.

After that, I also extend my deepest gratitude to all my fellow colleagues and staffs from Department of Anthropology, University of Yangon for both their professional and emotional support and their suggestions regarding this study.

## ABSTRACT

Ethnic identity is not a function of a shared common culture, but of ascription and identification by the actors themselves. The term 'adaptation' may involve the compromised ways which are the relationship of living populations and the social environment. In this study, the concept of adaptation with respect to the relationship between ethnic identity and the social environment was focused. The aim of this study is to elicit some factors influencing upon ethnic identity of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone, Bago Township. To achieve the aim of this study, ethnographic method or qualitative method was used. Informal group interview, Key informant interviews (KII) and In-depth interviews (IDI) of participants were also made to collect relevant data. Twelve informants were interviewed for KII and fourteen informants for IDI. Recordings were made and photographs were taken to make the survey complete. Almost all the Mons living in Hinthargone have flexibility in adaptation to non-Mon nationals while they have been maintaining the ethnic identity through speaking Mon in their daily life. Even the non-Mon can speak the language due to their Mon environment. Moreover, they value their own culture and preserve it by learning Mon literature, marrying among themselves, wearing Mon costume on special events, participating in traditional festivals, propitiating traditional family spirits, and holding funeral rite according to traditional Mon customs. Hinthargone-residing Mons, still co-existing with other nationals, are able to maintain Mon identity to date for reasons such as: Most of them accept their subjective ethnic identity is the main driving force to preserve their culture, their being the majority of population in social environment; socialization of the Mon children by parents and community to develop subjective ethnic identity in them; and being endowed with enough financial circumstances to hold the festivals of Mon culture.)

Key words: ethnic identity, adaptation, social environment, subjective ethnic identity, language, traditional activities, socialization

**IDENTITY AND ADAPTATION: A CASE STUDY OF MON NATIONAL  
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Every member of a human society accepts the social institution to live by as distinctive characteristics of that society. These social institutions are patterned and ordered according to learned norms of conduct and belief which differ in some aspects from their counterparts as manifested by other populations. These distinctions may arise from language, religion, historical experience, geographical placement, and kinship. By practicing these cultural distinctive principles from one generation to the next, they were come into being the 'identity' of that group (Hiebert, 1983).

In all parts of the world, there are no ethnic groups that do not have ethnic identity. It is always retained so long as they identify with other groups. Generally speaking, "identity" refers to the overall character or personality of an individual or a group. It may be usually used to express the notion of a person's sameness, likeness and unique-ness. It can also be referred to the physical, psychological and social aspects of the person. More precisely, it means the sameness of a person at all times in all circumstances. In the international encyclopedia of the social sciences, Brintbaupt (n.d) said that "most social scientists agree that identity is something that develops over time and requires organization and integration, often achieved through the resolution of personal or social conflicts or crises". There are different types of identity such as religious, social, ethnic and so on. Among them, the nature of "ethnic identity" was considered to define in this study.

Before the explanation of "ethnic identity", firstly the term "ethnic" will be defined. According to Edgar and Sedgwick (1999, p. 132), the term "ethnic" is generally used to refer to different racial or national groups which identify them in virtue of their shared practices, norms and systems of belief. In fact, the members of an ethnic group share certain beliefs, values, habits, customs and norms because of the common background. Broadly, it is usually implicitly identified as being in a minority, and as possessing a different range of attitudes or traditions to the ones held and adhered to

by the majority of a society's members. In the modern context, the term "ethnic group" has devolved and come to refer primarily to a minority whose cultural heritage is recognized as different from the majorities in a way that set it apart from the dominant culture. Today, this term is more prevalent in the academic field. Takatani Michio (2007) said that ethnic group is generally translated as "*lumyo*" in Bamar. Though the word "*lumyo*" in Bamar has a general significance of race or lineage, '*tainyintha*' or '*tainyintha-lumyo*' in official contexts means a group that composes the nation state together with other groups. This term is also found in Burma (Myanmar) Citizenship Law, issued in 1982. The third article of the law is as follows: "Nationals (*naingantha*) such as the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rahkine or Shan and ethnic groups (*tainyintha*) as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home before 1185 M. E (Myanmar Era) (1823 A.D) are Burma (Myanmar) citizens". Besides, the Myanmar dictionary (1991, p. 155) also defines as "*tainyintha*" means a person who was born and has lived traditionally in their homeland. In this study, the Mon nationals is intended to describe as one of all the national representatives living together within the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the usage of the term "ethnic" is not aimed to discriminate between minority and majority groups. Therefore, in this study, the terms ethnic, *tainyintha* and national were used interchangeably without the differentiation among these terms.

And then, the concept of "ethnic identity" will be described as the statement of Barth (ed.1969, p. 10). He argues that ethnic identity or determination of group membership is not a function of a shared common culture, but of ascription and identification by the actors themselves. It classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background. Typically, ethnic identity is a means to create boundaries that enables a group to distance themselves from one another. In fact, 'ethnic boundaries are created through ethnic identities or, conversely, boundaries can create identities. Thus, identity and boundaries seem to be different sides of the same coin (Dean, 2007, p. 127)'. From the statement of Dean, ethnic identity and symbolic boundary or criteria of membership correlate to each other can be seen. Ethnic identity may be defined as a social identity, specifically "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of [the individual's] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value

and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). In the study of Phinney (1990), the self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging and attitudes toward one’s group are elements of the ethnic identity in diverse cultural groups.

Rosman and Rubel (1995, p. 303) demonstrated that ethnic identity can be seen as based on primordial sentiments, that is, sentiments which are conceptualized as going back to ancient times and which tie group members to one another emotionally, despite persistent attempts to assimilate them. Therefore, ethnic identity can be designated by “markers of an ethnic group may include a collective name, belief in common descent, a sense of solidarity, and an association with a specific territory which the group may or may not hold” (cited in Kottak, 2009, pp. 131-132). In fact, the ethnic identity of an ethnic group in a society or nation denotes the self-awareness on the part of its own cultural distinctiveness. The similarities in that ethnic group are with members of the same ethnic group, and the differences are between that group and others. In complex societies (composed of great numbers of groups), ethnic groups which possess distinctive characters as their identity always make to adjust some of their cultural features by living together with neighboring groups.

Several ethnic groups who continuously inhabited in all parts of the world have been maintaining their ethnic identity distinctively in the vicinity of other ethnic groups. They have developed various ways to assert their continued identity. Concerning this case, Iijima (ed. Keyes, 1979, pp. 99-118) pointed out the case study of two Sgaw Karen villages, the Upland village of Mae Ha Ki and Lowland- plains village of Phamalo which are located in Mae Saring district, northern Thailand. These Sgaw Karen peoples lived together with non- Karen peoples such as Shan, lua’ or lawa (the people who lived in the upland areas of northern Thailand), Northern Thai (also called the Yuan or Khon Muang). The villagers who lived in two Sgaw Karen villages experienced a picture of different stages of social and cultural change among non-Karen of Mae Saring district. Within the changing sociocultural situation, they make their identity to fit under the conditions of its social environment. From the above described example, when most of ethnic groups settled in such symbiotic situation with their neighbors, their identity can be generally maintained in their social environment but sometimes it may be changed in the adaptation of other groups.

The term 'adaptation' refers to (1) changes in gene frequencies that confer reproductive advantage to a population in a particular environment, and (2) physiological and socio-cultural changes that enhance individual fitness and well-being (Barfield, 1997, p. 1). According to Scupin's statement (2000, p. 141), "adaptation refers to the process in which an organism adjusts successfully to a specific environment". Briefly, the term 'adaptation' may involve the compromised ways which are the relationship of living populations and the social environment. In this study, the concept of adaptation with respect to the relationship between ethnic identity and the social environment was focused.

One of the countries of Southeast Asia, Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a union of ethnic groups consisting principally of Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine, and Shan. Republic of the Union of Myanmar also persuades all the people to keep firmly the union spirit in the heart. The unity and solidarity of the Union of Myanmar is primarily based on the enduring of the "*tainyinth*" living in that State. For this reason, nowadays not only the Mon national but also the other nationals have begun to research, perform and maintain their own culture with permission from the government. According to the following official speech that was reported in "*The New Light of Myanmar*" (19, December, 2002), such activities must coincide with government policy. "Not only the State, but also the national races themselves have permitted all the ethnic groups to freely maintain their traditions and culture, religion and race, contributing to perpetual existence of the national solidarity and the Union". Therefore, all the nationals living in the Union of Myanmar practise their own traditions as their national identity and try to be in harmony with the neighboring people.

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

All the nationals inhabiting together within the Union of Myanmar are descended from the Mongoloid stock that originally lived on the Mongol plateau in central Asia. They began to come into Myanmar in three main groups which were based on language: Mon-Khamar, Tibet-Myanmar and Thai-Chinese. Therefore, they may be blood relations or kin groups. The Mon nationals who comprise as a part of the Mon-

Khamar group entered earliest among these groups, and most of them settled around Bago (Hanthawaddy), Motama and Patheingyi regions (*Tainyindha Yinkheihmu hnin Yoya Dalei Htonsan Mya Mon*, 1968).

Among these places, the Mon kings apparently reigned during pre-colonial period in Bago (Hanthawaddy) which was not only the most famous capital of the Mons but also one of the major centers developing the Mon culture in Lower Myanmar. During this time, Mon civilization developed in classical era as a golden age and which helps to explain the enduring prestige attached to the Mon national's cultural heritage (Guillon, 1999, pp. 155-189). According to the mythical origin of the Hanthawaddy city, it attempts to justify its name, Hamsavati, which later became Hanthawaddy in Burmese. Consequently, on the one hand the Brahminy bird (*hamsa*) is the emblem of Bago Township and on the other hand this bird is a type of the symbol for the Mon nationals. It is the emblem which is featured on the cover of publications in Mon nationals. Moreover, the symbol of *hamsa* encounter with impressive consistency of Bago Township and the Mon nationals so that how *hamsa*, the Mons, and Bago Township correlate to each other should be analyzed in detail.

Another point is the fact that Hinthargone-resident Mons have been living together with other nationals such as Bamar, Kayin and others so that a variety of social context may be encountered with them. While such living, they always speak their native language in daily life and their children are usually taught the Mon literature in summer holiday. Moreover, they wear Mon traditional costume on significant days, and hold Mon traditional celebrations which are mostly religious or social in nature. These overt signs generally can be searched through their life style but covert signs that may define the identity of the Mon nationals cannot easily be found out. Therefore, such disappearing character should be explored in their social structure of that society.

Besides, there are only many investigations concerning Mon national in Myanmar whereas there is few research information in respect of Mon identity in Myanmar from anthropological point of view. Therefore, how the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone attempt to adapt to the social environment at the same time as how they have retained their identity were conducted. As regards these aspects, the Mon

nationals who settled in Hinthagone should be intended to be focused and they are selected to gain new report possibilities for this study. After analyzing the current information regarding the Mon nationals, it was explored further for detailed knowledge of the Mon identity.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The main problems of this study are:

- (1) What is the perception of Hinthargone-resident Mons as regard Mon identity?
- (2) How does Mon identity provide for individuals' epistemological characteristics and interpersonal relation? ; and
- (3) How does Mon identity influence their social environment and how do they adapt to maintain their identity?

### **1.4 Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore the continual existence of Mon identity and its adaptations to the social environment.

The specific objectives of this study are:

- (1) to describe how Hinthargone-resident Mons perceive their identity in their lives;
- (2) to reveal Mon identity that provides for individuals' epistemological characteristics (the theory of knowledge especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion) and interpersonal relation; and
- (3) to find out how their Mon identity influences their social environment and how they adapt to maintain their identity.

## **1.5 Conceptual framework for Mon identity and adaptation**

The Hinthargone-resident Mons' belief and values out of their life history - territory, migration and folklore - were explored. Therefore, overt signs which dictate their dress and diet were analyzed. In other words, those factors constitute Hinthargone-resident Mons' orientation of membership as symbolic boundary.

The Mons' traditional celebrations especially religious festivals and social activities were explored. Those celebrations are constituted with social institutions, within symbolic boundary. In other words, such celebration is the social structure of Hinthargone-resident Mons for the endurance of Mon culture. It was explored through a study of social structure in what traits the Hinthargone-resident Mons adaptation and in what traits they maintain their culture. Therefore explored also were the reasons for that. How social structure is influenced by external circumstances was elicited. As social structure of Mon nationals includes their mutual relations it was examined to know of the extent to which Mon culture is influenced by mutual relations and whether Mon ethnic identity develops or not through participating in those festivals. This conceptual framework is shown in figure (1).

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework

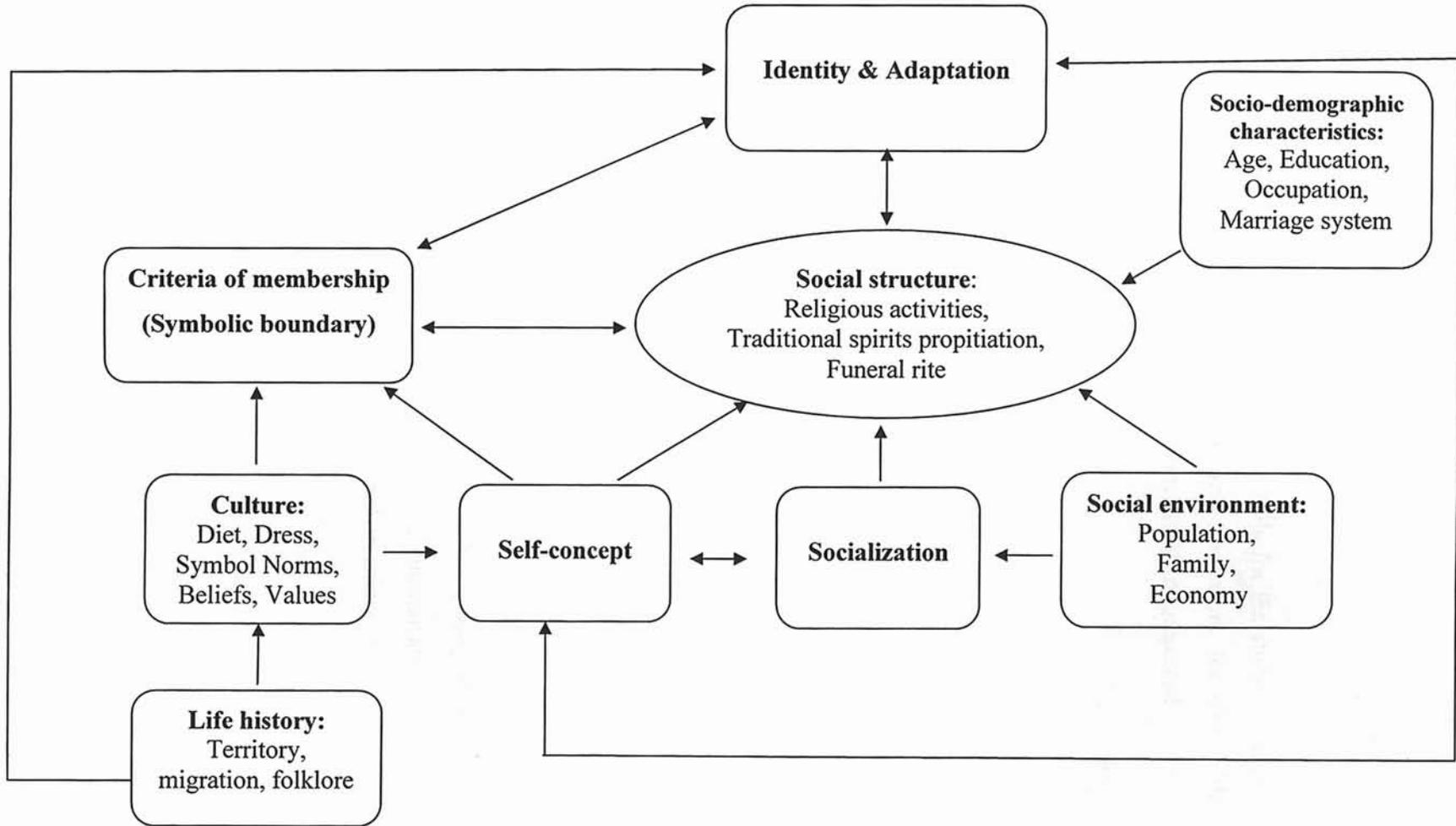


Figure (1) Influencing factors on ethnic identity and adaptation

## **1.6 Composition of Thesis**

This study is composed of ten chapters.

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

In this chapter, background to the study, rationale for the study, research problems, aim and Objectives of the study, conceptual framework for ethnic identity and adaptation of the Mons, and composition of the study are presented.

### **Chapter II: Literature Review**

Chapter II includes theoretical perspectives of ethnic identity and the nature of ethnic identity and adaptation.

### **Chapter III: Research Methodology**

Research methodology used in this study is described in detail. There are study design, study site, study population, study period, data collection method, sample size determination, sampling method, data collection tools, data management, data analysis, variables, and ethical consideration.

### **Chapter IV: Historical Background**

Chapter IV covers how the Mon arrived in Myanmar; their inhabitation of Hinthargone, geography of Hinthargone; its communications; its demographic characteristics; the residents' livelihoods; and marriage system of Hinthargone-resident Mons.

### **Chapter V: Symbolic boundary of Hinthargone-resident Mons**

Symbolic boundary comprising overt signs and covert sign is expressed in detail in Chapter V.

## **Chapter VI: The social structure of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone**

Concerning their social structure formed by the boundaries of that group, the relationship between their beliefs, norms and the social structure and then how they behave in their social environment to adapt their neighbors are presented in this chapter VI. It includes a detailed description of Traditional family spirits (Coconut spirit, Grandfather Spirit), and the spirit propitiation legacy. Out of them the Grandfather spirit legacy accepted by most Hinthargone-resident Mons, resuming spirit again, the things needed for offering to the spirit, preparation for the offering, the spirit propitiation ceremony are analyzed. Moreover, the propitiation of Village spirit, usually found in a locality, is described. Finally rules and taboos to be found in spirit propitiation are included.

## **Chapter VII: Socialization of Mon national living in Hinthargone in Mon tradition and custom**

This chapter describes the connection between socialization and subjective ethnic identity. Moreover, socialization of a Hinthargone-resident Mon, from infancy to age 5, from age over 5 to 10, from age over 10 to age 18, from age over 18 to more, by way of teaching them Mon language and literature and use of Mon dress, and participation of Mon children in activities of Mon tradition and custom are elaborated in this chapter.

## **Chapter VIII: Discussion**

In Chapter VIII, how Mon identity of Hinthargone-resident Mon is connected with Socio-demographic characteristics, symbol, subjective ethnic identity, socialization, Mon language, religious activities, social relationship, their traditional customs, traditional spirits (*Nat*) propitiation, and their social environment are discussed. Then follows an analysis on by what means and with what supports is Mon culture maintained by Hinthargone-resident Mons.

## **Chapter IX: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter analyzes the causes of the persistence and change in Mon identity and its adaptation to a variety of social contexts found in Hinthargone.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is described when the term ‘ethnic identity’ was first used, ethnic identity’s nature, and the views held by scholars on it.

#### **2.1 Background history of ethnic identity**

In the early portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many scholars indicated the isolated groups as the usage of ‘tribe’ (ethnic group that occupy a single territory and exploit its resources with little or no competition from other ethnic groups) and (in British usage) ‘Race’. After World War II (1939-45), these terms began to be substituted by the term ‘ethnic’ because most of the scholars made field work in detail so that they actually realized the interrelations between such groups in rural, urban, and industrial settings in complex world (Cohen, 1978, pp. 379-403). Thus, the oblique reference to the concept of ethnic identity can also be found in the anthropological and sociological literature in reference to the field study of non-western cultures (Trimble and Dickson, n.d).

Ethnic identity is today more salient than in prior decades and it is no longer a useful term. From that time, the delimitation of ethnic identity is especially problematic in all parts of the world so that most of the scholars analyzed this issue. Under such conditions, the concepts of ethnic identity vary according to the underlying theory embraced by researchers’ and scholars’ intent on resolving its conceptual meanings. Earlier anthropologists considered the persistence of ethnic identity for many generations yet most of the students’ today view ethnicity has become more striking factor in social relations since the emergence of the nation- state. In recent years, a number of anthropologists led to focus attention on ethnicity how the modern nation-state has proven to constitute an especially fruitful context for the expression of ethnicity. At one level of interpretation, the nature of identity is sufficient to capture the manner in which ethnic identity is generally conceptualized and used to understand ethnocultural influences on its information and development. At another level, it is almost synonymous with ethnicity (Gans, 2003). Ethnicity means identity

with or membership in a particular cultural group all of whose members share language, beliefs, customs, values and identity (Bohannon, 1992, p.321). "Barth presented ethnicity or ethnic identity as an aspect of social organization, not of culture (Vermeulen & Govers, n.d, p. 2)".

## **2.2 Perspectives on the nature of ethnic identity**

In the anthropological academic field, the conventional, and still popular, conception of an ethnic group was that of people who presumed to affiliate with the same cultural group and who shared the same custom, language and traditions. This conception has been sharply challenged by a number of anthropologists.

Regarding ethnic boundaries, Barth (1969) has been influential in the work of anthropologists who have, until recently, dominated the study of ethnic relations in Asia. In the introduction of this book, he has mainly been concerned with the role of ethnic boundaries (criteria of membership) in identity construction and maintenance has occupied an important share in Anthropology. The determination of group membership would be seemed analytically to be of two orders:

- (i) Overt signal or signs such features as dress, language, house-form, or general life style, and
- (ii) Basic value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged.

These cultural features are emphasized and designated organizationally relevant by the actors themselves. In other words, the boundaries of an ethnic group are constituted through 'self-ascription' as the critical features of that group. For example, some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships, radical differences are played down and denied. Additionally, he proposed that one can not be defined by the first principle of some total inventory of cultural traits alone because "these overt cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed". However, the same group of people with unchanged values and ideas would surely pursue different patterns of life and institutionalized different forms of behavior when faced with the different opportunities offered in different

environments. Typically, “ethnic boundaries define a group and not the cultural stuff that encloses it”. Therefore, he strongly maintained the fact that most of the cultural matters are not constrained by this boundary (Barth 1969, pp. 12-15).

Another point is that ethnic identity is derived from ‘the origin and background’ of individuals, but which are not communicated genetically or in some mysterious way. Rather, they are communicated, and constantly revalidated, in cultural expressions such as myth, religious beliefs, ritual, folk history, folklore, and art or ‘the origin and background’. These cultural expressions, symbolic formulations of ethnic identity, provide individuals with the meanings that make relationships between ethnic groups meaningful (ibid).

And then, in Barth’s (1969) theory, it is discussed that the maintenance of ethnic group’s identity depends on the population size of their locality. He focuses attention on the extent to which ethnic distinctions do depend on the social interaction and the foundations on which embracing social systems are built. The explanation about the criteria of membership can be described in detail in the following:

- (i) The criteria of membership (boundaries) are crucial in the definition of ethnic identity and formed by the members themselves on the basis of emotional sentiments.
- (ii) Both their overt signs involving daily life style and covert signs attached to the codes and values are structured as criteria for ethnic classification. Besides, he proposed a single overt sign is difficult to demarcate the boundaries so that this statement is not appropriate in conventional theory of anthropological field.
- (iii) The boundaries essentially created by myths, folklore and symbols which couples the symbolic meaning may be identified, shared, and passed along to future generation by the cultural expression. The symbols also serve as a public affirmation of one’s ethnic claim-clothing, adornments, flags, food, language, and celebrations.
- (iv) The boundaries such as overt and covert signs are linked with the social structure in which he or she participates so that a structural differentiation between interacting groups may result in the criteria of membership.

Regarding the relationship between ethnic identity and primordial sentiments, Geertz (1973, pp. 255-310) proposed that certain cultural traits attach to the meaning can be searched to obtain the primordial basis for ethnicity. Primordial identities refer to find the evidence in the past of the existence of collective memories, symbols, values and myths, which so often define and differentiate an ethnic group as a distinctive people and determination throughout the history. Concerning the interpretation of cultural traits, Geertz (cited in Moore, 2004, pp. 258-269) argued that "Culture is not behavior; it is a guide for behavior and exists in the minds of those who share it. It is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes the actually existing networks of social relations. Social structure is bound together based on causal-functional integration, the articulation of different segments that interact and maintain the system".

From the above discussion, one's identity can be defined by primordial assumption which joins the attitudes and behavior patterns being as social structure in which he or she participates. Rather, the linkages of primordial assumption may be established through narratives. Such narratives may be conveyed in stories told by parents, elders, and leaders through songs, folklore, ceremonies, commemorating historical events, dramatic performances, artistic creations, and written ethnic histories. Therefore, social structure and symbols and meaning which derived from their primordial identities correlate to each other so that as such relationship of these important factors can not be excluded to define the criteria of membership.

### **2.3 The influence of social structure on social activities and social interaction**

To grasp theoretically the assumption of social structures linking with interpersonal relations, the structural- functionalist, Radcliffe-Brown (1952, pp. 178-87) explained that the practices formed by underlying principles of different societies function to preserve the social structure which represent these societies. And then, he demonstrated that "Social structures include all interpersonal relations, the differentiations of individuals and groups by their social roles, and the relationships between a particular group of humans and a larger network of connections. The

functions of cultural institutions were the role they played in maintaining society. The continuity of structure is maintained by the process of social life, which consists of the activities and interactions of the individual human beings and of the organized groups into which they are united. The social life of the community is here defined as the functioning of the social structure” (cited in Moore, 2004, pp. 147-158).

Regarding the perspectives on social structure of Radcliffe-Brown, ethnic groups can be seen as a form of social organization and these are not just random, chaotic collections of people who interact with one another. Rather, social interaction in any society takes place in regular pattern. These patterns exist through the process of socialization so that people learn the norms, values, and behavior pattern of their society. He argued that anthropologists always refer to the relationship of these patterns as the social structure. In fact, social structure provides the framework for all human societies (ibid).

#### **2.4 The relationship between ethnic identity and social mobility**

Makabe (1979, pp. 136-146) reported that the geographical dispersal of the Japanese population and the subsequent mobility experienced by Japanese Canadians in the postwar decades were considered as critical features in explaining the nature and the extent of the group’s ethnic identity maintenance. And then he explored the components of Japanese-Canadian identity as revealed by the second generation Japanese in Metropolitan Toronto through the work of identity scale construction. In his conclusion, he supported the hypothesis from the data analysis: there is a significant correlation between the strength of ethnic identity and the rate of mobility experienced by individuals. He thought, living by themselves in integration is a basic factor for the Japanese to maintain their culture. He discussed that only through integrated living can the socialization of Japanese children to have subjective Japanese identity be made possible. In the theoretical consideration of ethnic identity, he analyzed (1) socialization (2) language (3) participation in social activities (4) in-group friendship choice (5) subjective ethnic identity (self-definition of ethnicity) by way of finding aspects of ethnic identity. Driedger (cited in Makabe, 1979) also described ethnic identity in terms of six factors: religion, marriage, language, ethnic

organizations, education, and making friends. Those factors are taken into consideration in this study.

## **2.5 The influence of demographic characteristics on ethnic identity**

Pon Nya Mon (2010) examined the influence of demographic variables (age, gender, education, and region) on the level of national identity of the Mons. A survey was conducted among the Mon populations living in Burma, Thailand, United States, Denmark, and Sri Lanka. Two hundreds and seven Mons participated in the survey and responded to a set of questionnaires designed to measure the national pride, national preference, and national superiority, out-group differentiation and ambition for an independent Mon land. He concluded that the participants' level of education is the most significant factor in explaining the level of national identity: participants with lower levels of education tend to show higher levels of national identity compared to those with higher levels of education. Age and gender were not significant in explaining the level of national identity among the participants in overall scale. However, some of variables did show significance in subscales.

## **2.6 Ethnic identity Construction**

Wongpolganan (2011) explored that this study reflects the grassroots lived experience of Mon women at Wangka Village on the Thai-Burma border in Kanchanaburi province. The main focus of this study was the construction of identity by Mon women at the Thai-Burma border. Mon language is still spoken at home, in the neighbourhood, at the market and in the monastery. They wear Mon dress on special occasions. Moreover, Mon grandmothers in Wangka village rise from bed early and take alms-food to the monastery; and worship the Buddha with offerings of flowers on the household altar (Every Mon house has an altar). Where grandparents are absent those duties are performed by mother and children. Wangka-resident Mons, though dwelling abroad, worship the household spirit of Mon tradition. At every Mon's home Coconut spirit and Bamboo tube spirit are propitiated as household spirits. Furthermore, there is one shrine for the guardian spirit of the village which is located in the same spot as the local graveyard and the villagers gather to pay respect and present offerings to the guardian spirit once a year.

In regard of Mon residing on Thai-Burma (Myanmar) border he elicited Mon identity living in Thai-Burma (Myanmar) out of their social activities, their national costume. He also tried to find Mon nationals' characteristics out of language, an important factor to define an ethnic group's identity. The cultural activities are possible to them probably because of subjective Mon identity even though they are residing in the other country. Whether the cultural practices of the Mons on Thai-Myanmar border are reflected or not by Hinthagone-resident Mons in their co-residence with other ethnic groups were analyzed.

## **2.7 The influence of subjective ethnic identity on ethnic identity**

Ajrouch (2000) examined how social relationships among Lebanese immigrants living in east Dearborn contribute to the process of adaptation and identity formation. In east Dearborn of the United States, Lebanese immigrants co-exist with Arab Americans, Americans. He demonstrated the social ties that exist within an ethnic group were highlighted through the perceptions of adolescent children of Lebanese immigrants and examined to discern the process of acculturation and the negotiation of ethnic identity. Positive and negative perceptions of living in an ethnic community were discussed. Gossip, which is the negative perceptions that the adolescents describe, and cultural congruency and familial relations, the positive perceptions the adolescents describe, result from the interactions of group members. Both positive and negative aspects constitute a tension that represented two aspects of the adolescents' identity-the adolescents feel connected to both Arab and American identities. He concluded the interactions that arise within this ethnic community become an important avenue of immigrant adaptation because they create an affinity with larger American society while simultaneously forging a strong Arab identity.

## **2.8 The influence of traditional spirit (*Nat*) propitiation and marriage on ethnic identity**

Shigern Iijima (1979) in his study of adaptation of Sgaw Kayins in hill village (Mae Ha Ki) and a low village (Phamalo) in Mae Sariang district discussed which aspects of

ethnic identity changed and which aspects are maintained. He explained marriage and traditional celebrations to find Kayin ethnic identity.

The basic unit of hill Kayin society is the kin groups known as *dopuweh*. Membership in these groups is reinforced by periodic performance of the *oxe* rites, dedicate to the *bgha* or ancestral spirit. In lowland as well as upland villages, the belief in *bgha* and the practice of the *oxe* rite continue to be important for most Kayin and to be significant for the definition of Kayinness. It is believed to be the most closely related to the eldest living female in the group. Although most *dopuweh* consists of the co-residents of single households, this is not always the case. So long as the woman of the senior generation remains alive, her descendants, no matter what households they live in and even if they have moved away from the village, remain members of the same *dopuweh*. At marriage, a man remains in the *dopuweh* in which he was born. However, once his own wife becomes the head of a *dopuweh* on the death of her mother, he ceases to belong to the *dopuweh* in which he was born and becomes a member of the *dopuweh* his wife now heads. However, there is a difference between lowland and upland Kayin in that the plains Kayin generally follow compromise version of the *oxe* rites and their hill cousins continue to follow more strict versions. He discussed that the relationship between traditional spirits and ethnic identity with a description and analysis of the belief in the *bgha* (ancestral spirit) and the associated *oxe* rite.

In the lowlands, the Kayin have had to associate with their neighbours, irrespective of their ethnic background, to organize paddy field irrigation. Many lowland Kayin have also come to participate in important Buddhist lent and the ceremony of ordination into the Buddhist clergy. Yet despite the trend towards becoming peasant and the participation in some aspect of Thai culture, even the lowland Kayin cannot be said to be assimilating to lowland Thai culture. The *talutaphadu* ritual itself seems to play an important role in preserving the Kayin from losing their identity.

In Mae Sariang where the Kayin are a majority, as they are in the hills, they can afford to maintain 'purity of blood' by not intermarrying with other people. In contrast, in the lowlands the plains Kayin are a distinct minority. The plain Kayin maintain themselves as a cultural rather than a pure-blood group and accept intermarriage with

neighbouring non-Kayin peoples. Although the lowland Kayin villages have opened up to influence from non-Kayin sources and have adopted some non-Kayin practices, even the lowland Kayin have remained distinctively Kayin.

Bramadat (2012) explored that how ethnic and religious aspects of the Church are interrelated in supporting ethnic identity and consciousness. He said that the primary significance of the Korean ethnic church is its capacity to strengthen and reinforce ethnic identity by supporting their culture and enforcing value orientations. In his study, the Church was used as “instrumental in consolidating group unity and powerfully catalyzing a sense of exclusive group identity and consciousness in its members by helping to create strict boundaries against the outside world”. He argued that the Church is the primary site of cultural reproduction of second generation immigrants, and that it supports development of cohesive group defensiveness and exclusivity in two major ways. First, it provides general institutional transmission of Korean culture, and secondly, core traditional Korean values are legitimized through identifying with conservative Christian morality and worldviews. Second generation Korean American immigrants believe that intra-group marriages contribute to the persistence of Korean American ethnic identity formations. Therefore, in addition to going to temple, they maintain their culture by marrying Korean to Korean.

Discussions of above-mentioned scholars were considered in finding the ethnic identity of Hinthagone-resident Mons. The criteria of membership were assigned by language in some ethnic groups where as it is designated by religion in other groups because these distinctive criteria may vary from level to level and certainly vary from culture to culture.

Firstly symbolic boundary was explored via the life history of Hinthagone-resident Mons, and social structure composed of those boundaries was explored. What factors in social structure are responsible for maintaining or changing Mon culture were searched for. Then it was studied whether mutual relations among the Mons are relevant, and with what characteristics the Hinthagone-resident Mons are keeping up Mon culture.

## **2.9 The relationship between ethnic identity and adaptation**

Aguayo and Flores (n. d) examined the ethnic identity and adaptation process of Latina/o (Latin American inhabitant of the United States) newcomers in three rural communities in Missouri. They assessed the relation of identity and adaptation to their settlement and integration patterns in the host community. Those scholars considered ethnic identity and adaptation process along six themes, namely: networking in community (the tools participants use to integrate into the community), community life (activities newcomers' engage with their community), perceptions and experiences, language, ethnic identity, and challenges. Latina/os receive assistance from family members, friendships, church services' personnel, and word of mouth at local Mexican businesses, but their ethnic identity is in order for lack of legal documentation. According to the scholars, Latina/os adapt to the environment abroad through participating in social activities and speaking English, while they keep ethnic identity through using native language at home and holding their ethnic celebrations, it is described. In such maintenance of ethnic identity their perception, social network (family and friends) are significant; social network may have had supported their cultural transition and encouraged them to practise their ethnic activities, which may have played a role in reducing their acculturation stress.

Those scholars do not describe where those Latina/os lived or why they relocated to Missouri in the Midwest. But they explain the important role played by the use of native language and traditional celebrations in maintaining ethnic identity. Their study shows no use of demographic characteristics to find out ethnic identity. In this study the six themes explored by those scholars are resorted to either directly or indirectly.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used to explore the continual existence of Mon identity and its adaptations to the social environment, namely, a description of research design, selection of study area, study period, identification of study population. Moreover, data collection method and procedures describe how to find out data source, how to choose the informants, how to collect the data, how to analyze the data, what tools to be used in data collection, and then how to test the reliability and validity of the data. Moreover, limitations of the study and ethical consideration of informants participated in this study was also described.

#### 3.1 Study design

Descriptive study design was conducted in this study.

#### 3.2 Study site

The selected area for this study is Hinthargone ward situated in Bago Township. Bago Township including Hinthargone ward is closer to Yangon City which is the biggest city in Myanmar than other regions living in the Mon nationals. However, how are Hinthargone-dwelling Mons able to keep their culture and traditions intact to date? Most of Mon nationals settled in the *Mahazeidi*, *Kyaikpaw*, *Innwin*, *Hinthagone* wards whereas Hinthargone is their earliest establishment place and a large number of Mon nationals can be seen as the integration in a single place. Besides, this ward is my native place and most of the elders who are Mons and non-Mons living in this place are close relationship with my family. Therefore, all necessary help can be obtained from them. For frequent visits to this township, there is very easy means for transportation so that the study area can be visited anytime to obtain enough data.

The study was conducted in Hinthargone ward within the Bago Township which is formed by (31) wards. In Hinthargone ward, there are (1567) households and a total population of (9445) (Office of the Administrator of Hinthargone ward, 2008). For the

above reasons, Hinthargone ward was selected as study area. See Annex-1 for the map of Bago Town and Annex-2 for location map of Hinthargone ward.

### **3.3 Study population**

To achieve the objectives of this study, the study population was selected. They are Hinthargone-dwelling Mon nationals and non-Mons.

#### **Inclusion criteria**

- Any Mon and non-Mon nationals aged over 60 with residence of 10 years and above there
- Interested and responsive monks in regard of this study, Mon and non-Mon nationals
- Leaders and heads in civil administration
- Mon youths aged over 18 participating in social activities
- Mon children aged above 5
- Mon nationals participating in community affairs were chosen for interview.

#### **Exclusion criteria**

- any Mon and non-Mon nationals aged under 60
- Mon children aged under 5
- Those who feel like being unresponsive during this study
- Mon and non-Mon nationals who are unresponsive due to advanced age and poor health

### **3.4 Study period**

The study took place during the period lasting from 2009- 2012. The detailed time frame chart for this study was presented in Annex-3.

### **3. 5 Data collection methods**

#### *Qualitative data collection*

Before the study area was visited, data sources relevant to this thesis were discovered and considered out of the Internet, library and other places. These literatures were read and reviewed in a neutral manner and the researcher's opinion was added and such factors were integrated to compare and contrast this study.

Data were collected in a variety of ways including conversations, observation with informal group interview, Key Informant Interviews (KII) and In-depth interviews (IDI). Data were collected until enough information was obtained by using KII and IDI. If new information was not obtained, the interview was stopped.

#### *Informal Group Interview*

For Qualitative data collection, one informal group interview with key informants of the study ward (local leaders and elders) was performed.

#### *Key informant interviews (KII)*

The history of Hinthargone was asked through KIIs of Mons, non-Mon nationals and monks all of whom are aged above 60 with residence of 10 years and above there for reasons that they might know about Hinthargone history at that age as they might have been told about it by their forefathers. Moreover, Mon history and traditional family spirit history was interviewed. KIIs guidelines are shown in Annex- 4. Twelve informants were interviewed for KII.

#### *In Depth Interview (IDI)*

For IDI, the Hinthargone history was asked of any Mons and non-Mons aged above 60 with residence of 10 years and above there. Moreover, interviews were made of Hinthargone-dwelling Mons, Mon children aged above 5 on Mon traditional festivals, social activities, and socialization of Mon children, Mon diet, Mons' traditional costumes, their traditional spirit propitiation, and the criteria of

membership in youth organization. IDIs guidelines are shown in Annex-5. Fourteen informants were interviewed for IDI.

### 3.6 Sampling methods

Purposive sampling method was used in this study (see in figure 2).

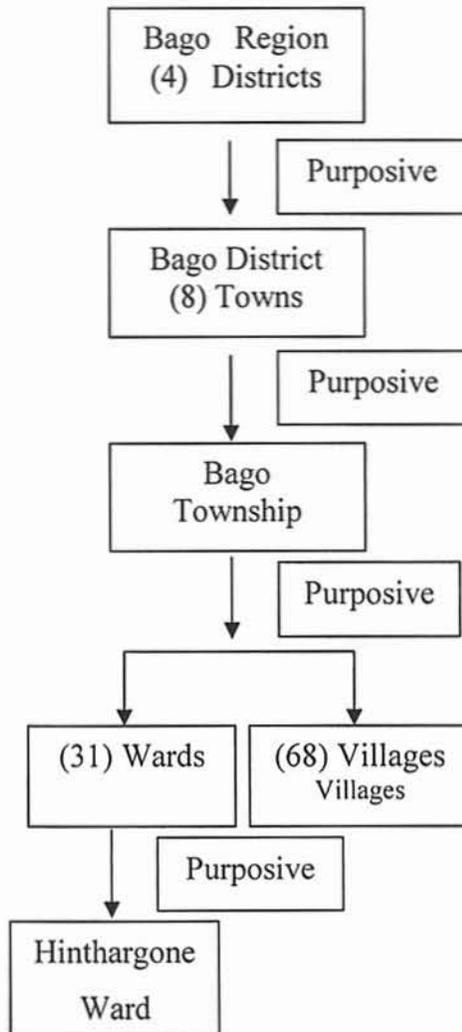


Figure (2) Sampling Procedure

### 3.7 Data collection tools

Interview guides described in Annexes 4 and 5 were applied.

### **3.8 Data management**

#### ***Qualitative data management***

All KII and IDI sessions with Informants were audio recorded using a cassette recorder, with the consent of participants. And then, the obtained data were analyzed to get ethnic identity. From this, how their social structure including social institutions affect in the social environment were described because the social institutions are the standards they apply when they judge their behavior. And then, the formation of their social structure, the interrelation to inter- personal and community are possible to be obtained. Besides, these activities are a part for the unity of the social life so that the activities affect the social life, and the social system as a whole.

Once daily data were collected, the field notes were transferred to the data files according to the subject. And then, local terms were clarified as wordings and noted down what needs further investigation. Finally, data were ordered in relation to the research questions, and categorized answers that have similar characteristics or patterns. And then, the summarized data were displayed in charts and figures such as matrices and diagrams or tables to help visualize possible relationships between certain variables. In analyzing data, the association between variables was identified.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

Qualitative thematic data were analyzed manually according to themes and sub-themes. Once daily data were collected, the field notes were transferred to the data files. Thematic analysis means the processes that sorted themes from reading and re-reading, the transcripts, noting any similarities and differences between and within participant's accounts. Responses were further categorized within each main theme after reading the transcripts again in the light of the first thematic analysis to produce the final findings.

The reliability and validity of the findings were tested by the combination of different collection methods as triangulation.

### 3.10 Ethical Consideration

In doing field work, conflicting values and a wide range of possible choices can be encountered so that the possible issue must be avoided in the research area. If the field area is chosen to collect the data, the anthropological ethics and values were conducted in the following procedures:

- (1) Before going to the research area, the approval of this thesis by the Ethical Committee of Board of Seminar will be obtained;
- (2) The persons who have authority and who can help this thesis were informed about the causes for coming to this region, and then the procedures and potential impacts of this thesis will be also explained;
- (3) To conduct interviews, tape records what informants say and use the camera, the permission were asked of the authorities;
- (4) Informants were given gifts or money for participating;
- (5) The informants' choices were firstly considered, and then available reports from informants were recorded;
- (6) The informants' rights, interests, and sensitivities were safeguarded and the privacy of informants was protected and the informants are not exploited.

### 3.11 Limitation of the study

Hinthargone-resident Mons are bilingual (Mon and Myanmar language) so they revealed enough facts in interviews. However, they use Mon language in daily life. For example, visitors to the monastery would speak Mon among themselves, and would do so on alms-round for holding Sabbath food offering. Therefore, a researcher with knowledge of Mon language might gather more facts.

Model Mon (*Mon Sanpya*) runs Mon literature classes during two summer months. But my stay at study site was not long enough to take advantage to observe the Mon language class.

## CHAPTER IV

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is described how the Mons first settled in Myanmar and in which area, stories on their values and beliefs, the interrelation of the ethnic name Mon and Talaing. Their shifting to Hinthargone, its geography and communications and demography also are involved. The aim of this chapter is to explore what Mon are those migrants; and how ancient stories are connected with their ethnic identity, and how their population, education and marriage are related with their ethnic identity are presented.

#### **4.1 Background History of Mon**

The ethnic identity of the Mon national was identified by the following three characteristics: common ancestry, territory, and historical memory as historical background of Mon nationals.

##### **4.1.1 Common ancestry**

The national races residing in Union of Myanmar were descended from Mongoloid stock of the Central Asian plateau to the west of China where the rivers Yantze and Hwang Ho have their headwaters. They came into Myanmar in three major groups- Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burman, and Tai-Chinese. Among the tree, Mon-Khmer was the first to do so. Thus, the Mon being Mongolian, has their language belonging to the same group of Mon-Khmer (Myanmar Socialist Lanzin Party (MSLP) (ed.), 1964, pp. 34-36).

As to the original home of the Mon-Khmer professor Luce claimed it to be the Yantze-Kiang river valley before they were displaced by the Chinese coming from up north. That land, very suitable for growing rice paddy, became vulnerable to robbers. Thus, the Mon-Khmer, looking elsewhere, migrated to other paddy-growing regions like Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar (Naing Pan Hla, 1992).

Regarding this case, a visiting professor Naing Pan Hla (1992, pp.14-15) said that the original home of the Mon-Khmer was Yantze-Kiang river valley in China and they were the first Mongolians to grow rice paddy. But they were eventually pushed out by Chinese-speaking people coming en masse from up north. Looking for greener pastures, the Mon-Khmer came to and spread across Southeast Asia to grow paddy for their food not later than 2000 BC (ibid). As to the Mon-Khmer's original home of Yantze-Kiang river valley he claimed as evidence that out of the word Yantze-Kiang, 'Kiang' is Mon for creek and 'ho' is Chinese for river (ibid).

Moreover, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century of Christian era the Mon-Khmer established Funan empire, a region nearby the hill of that name now in South Cambodia. After its disintegration in the 6<sup>th</sup> century due to religious disputes different states appeared. In Cambodia to the east of Funan the Khmer founded a separate state, and in Dvaravati to the west of Funan the Mon founded a separate state (ibid).

“The Mon and Khmer are ethnically, linguistically and culturally related people. Mon-Khmer, who migrated from central Asia, was the first migrant group who came to present-day Myanmar and Thailand. They settled in the Menam valley of Thailand, extending between the Salween River in the west and the Mekong River in the east. They also came along the Ayeyarwaddy River settling in the lower Ayeyarwaddy valley of Myanmar, spreading east towards the Menam valley (Min Po Nyein, 1996)”.

According to a history of Kangyi Stupa, Mudon, Mon-Khmer-speaking peoples migrated south along Thanlwin River and Mekaung River. Out of those coming down the Thanlwin some settled on Shan plateau as Palaung, Wa, Rian, and Danot ethnic groups, and some moved on westwards from Myanmar-Yunnan border migrating to Assam and the east coast of Indian peninsula. Some of those migrating south along Mekong River established the Mon state of Dvaravati in its valley and some moved on westwards and spread in Tanintharyi coast and deltas of Thanlwin, Sittang and Ayeyarwady rivers. Again another group moved on southwards along the Mekong to dwell in its delta and western hills as Khmers (Marmaka, 2007).

Out of the Mon-Khmer group moving down Mekaung and Thanlwin valleys some went to present-day Cambodia and Thailand while some migrated westwards to enter Myanmar as the first Mon-Khmer members to do so (Myanmar Socialist Lanzin Party MSLP, ed., 1964, p. 36).

#### 4.1.2 Territory

The Mons coming into Myanmar mostly settled down in Tanintharyi, Bago and Patheingyi, the combined regions of which came to be known as Land of the Mons or Ramanna Desa. But its residents were called Mottama Mon, Bago Mon or Patheingyi Mon depending on the region they occupied (Ni Lar Tin, 1994).

In Pegu (Bago) Kalayani inscriptions engraved in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D by Mon king Dhammazedi, the term “Ramannadesa” region was collectively formed by (3) regions of Mandaladesa (မန္တလေးဒေသ) including 96 towns: (32) towns around Patheingyi; (32) towns around Hanthawaddy; and (32) towns around Mottama (Myanmar Socialist Lanzin Party MSLP, ed., 1968, p. 17).

Scholar Naing Pan Hla explained, claiming evidences, that Ramannadesa was the name for the whole Southeast Asia, specifically the Mon kingdom in Lower Myanmar in the west and another Mon kingdom Dvaravati, also known as Old Siam, in the east (1992, p. 54).

Concerning this issue, the scholar Htin Aung (1967, p.25) also said that “the Mons in the lower valley of Menam founded the kingdom of *Dvaravati*, and then a new kingdom in Haripunjaya (Lamphun) and finally the kingdom of Thaton including Ayeyarwaddy delta. These three kingdoms were organized by a common language, racial origin, and a common religion so that these three Mon lands were originally known as “*Ramanna Desa*” or “Land of the Mons”.

### 4.1.3 Common historical memory

While teaching the Mon youngsters Mon language and Mon literature, Mon parents are likely to tell them folklores and legends which can vividly depict their glory of ancient times.

#### **Hanthawaddy (Bago)**

According to the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone, they take pride in dwelling at Hanthawaddy (Bago) which was home to a great Mon Kingdom. They still harbour at heart memorable episodes in history in regard of the glorious Mon Kingdom Hanthawaddy (Bago).

Regarding this, some Mons in Hinthargone said Lord Buddha after his eighth rains retreat journeyed to Suvannabhumi (Thaton) at the request of arhat Ven. Gavampati when the site of Hanthawaddy (Bago)-to-be was still under the sea. However, when the Buddha saw a Brahminy duck and a male duck resting on a sandbank, barely wide enough for the perch of a waterfowl, he prophesied that that place in distant future would grow up into a great kingdom where his teachings would flourish. A great many years after the Buddha attained *Nirvana* that place became land in accord with the Buddha's prophecy. However, it became disputed territory between people of India and Mon national *Samala* and *Vimala*, both born of king of Thaton and female Naga-serpent. Eventually the Mons emerged victorious and created a great self-ruled kingdom. Hence, 1<sup>st</sup> waning day of Tabodwe (February-March), when Hanthawaddy city was founded, has been declared to be Mon National Day. Moreover, the Brahminy duck (*Hintha*) has been the symbol of Mon nationals because the Buddha made his prophecy on seeing those birds. Therefore, the Mons residing in Bago region are proud of themselves for these reasons: Hanthawaddy (Bago) was one-time city of the Mons; 1<sup>st</sup> waning day of Tabodwe, is Mon National Day; and the Hintha bird that rested on the original spot which later on grew into a land mass known as Bago region is assigned to be the Mon's symbol. In this way, the appearance of Hanthawaddy (Bago) remains an unforgettable event in Myanmar history.

## **Bhadradevi (ဘဒြဒေဝီ)**

Circa CE 1000 Tissa (တိဿ) the Hanthawaddy (Bago) king held wrong view and embraced Brahmanism. But his subject *Dhanajeyya* (ဓနဇေယ) the rich man had a daughter called *Talahtaw* (တလထေင်) (a) *Subhada* (သုဘဒ္ဒါ), who was devoutly Buddhist. The king had ordered that any worshipper of Buddha images would be put to death by an elephant trampling him or her and the remains would be burnt up. One day the princess wading into a pond to bathe found a Buddha image and took it home for her veneration. Hearing that, the king implemented his order. But the pious, meditating on the Three Gems and reciting Buddha's attributes, could not be killed. The king prayerfully swore that, if the Buddha image be really powerful, the Buddha would make his appearance coming over through the sky. Just then the sky became overcast and lightning were incessant. Lord Buddha, with six rays radiating from his body, came over miraculously through the sky. Since then the king, turning Buddhist for life, made *Subhadda* as his queen and became a *sasana* supporter who built pagodas and religious building.

## **The Prince Assakumar (အသကုမ္မာ) or Prince Attha (အဝိသားမင်းသား)**

A majority of Hinthargone-resident Mons related Prince *Attha's* life history said that King *Samala* (သမလ) of Hanthawaddy (Bago), after making his younger brother *Vimala* (ဝိမလ) Crown Prince, sent him to Taxila (တက္ကသိုလ်) for learning arts. Then King *Samala*, after making *Suvannakappi* (သုဝဏ္ဏကပ္ပိ) or Miss Pumpkin or girl conceived in a pumpkin flower, forgot his brother. On his return home from Taxila *Vimala* in anger killed his brother, anointed himself king and made Miss Pumpkin his queen; she was already pregnant with Prince *Attha-to-be*. The king ordered the child be killed. A worried *Suvannakappi* hid her child in the forest, near a trail used by a herd of water buffaloes. When a great herd of water buffaloes came rushing a female water buffalo (with *jamburit* (ဇမ္ဗူရစ်) gold on her forehead) stopped still standing astride the child to save its life. Then the cow acted as nursing mother to the child and brought him up. Growing up among water buffaloes Prince *Attha* was expert at lance

throwing and archery while riding a water buffalo and known for and wide. He was called Prince *Attha* for having been born at *Kun Attha* village, among water buffaloes.

At that time, a force of Hindus from India under the leadership of Indians (*Lanba kala* / ကုလားလန်ဘား) Hanthawaddy (Bago) in seven ships to seize it. That Indian and king *Vimala* set a date to hold a duel between the two sides. King *Vimala* was hard put to find an able fighter among his subjects to confront the Indian side. Then he summoned Prince *Attha*, aged 16 only, after being informed about his bravery by a hunter. The prince asked for a leave of seven days to return to his foster mother of a female water buffalo and seek its permission. The water buffalo then taught him how to successfully fight the Indian warrior.

Back at Hanthawaddy Prince *Attha* and *Lanba Kala*, both on horseback, got ready to fight in a paddy field to the east of O-bo situated near Bago. The Indian was wearing a coat of mail which could not be pierced by a lance easily. Therefore, Prince *Attha* tried a stratagem, getting the Indian to perform a dance with a lance by turns before the king. While the Indian was performing so, Prince *Attha* saw that his neck was vulnerable. Then their fight began, lasting three-fourths of a day. No one had emerged victorious yet. It was windy, and waves off the coast sounded loud. The spectators held their breath. Finally Prince *Attha* gave a roar to frighten the Indian, who turned his head aslant, revealing a gap in the coat of mail. He was lanced thereat and Prince *Attha* emerged victorious. The victorious prince was made king with the name of *Atthakumma*. A stupa named *Kyaikkasin* was built on the battleground. That name in Mon means 'Buddha who looks as kant'. The stupa stands to date between Bago and Thanatpin. The locality was formerly called "*Upae Kho*" (ဥပသီခို) (for the Prince's stratagem in his fight with the Indian). Over time *Upae Kho* has become Bago.

#### 4.2 The interrelation of the ethnic name "Mon" and "Talaing"

In the past, Mon and Indian immigration took place simultaneously in Pegu and Paunglaung valleys but on the whole the probability is that the Mons first settled and

they have clearly formed the bulk of the population since very early times (Page, 1963, p. 11).

To confirm this statement, there can be seen in so valuable evidences as the three Mon nursery songs in which it clearly points out the fact that early Indian settlers migrated from Kalinga or Telengana in India had come to live in Lower Myanmar because of the Asoka-attack at Kalinga, modern Madras coast, and then they had come to live side by side with the Mon nationals who migrated from the valleys of Yanze Kyan. Thus, this fact is certainly one of the causes of the Indianization of the Mon people (Naing Pan Hla, 1992, p. 57). In other words, the Mons appear to have been as the plains in Bago and all the old Talaing villages are either on river banks or along the edge of ridges adjoining cultivable land so that they seem to have absorbed or blended with each other (ibid).

During the period, the problem was raised by the extraordinary dialectical differences between Mon and Talaing due to their regions and the scholar, Page (1963, p. 10) concluded that “it perhaps indicates the coalescence in one nationality of several bodies of immigrants who came to Burma either at different times or different places”.

In the brief modern chronicle (*Yazawin*) (cited in Marmaka, 2007, p. 145), there is the difference between Mon and Talaing because the people who came from the Telegana in India settled in Myanmar and they were called “Talaing” on the basis of their region. And he stated the main subject attached with the term “Talaing” that those Talaing intermarried with the Mons so that their next generation was also known as “Talaing”. This terms means the people were not born from the originally Mon generation so that the Mon don't like the name Talaing. According to Naing Pan Hla (1992, p.5), “Talaing” means the people who come from Indian place named “Kalinga” or “Telengana” in Madras coast.

Regarding this issue, Naing Pan Hla (1998) also demonstrated that the term Tanliun (တန်လိုန်) was found at Preimma (ပုရိမ္မာ) inscription composed in the 15th century, Ava period so that the Myanmar might have referred to Tanliun basing on a Myanmar

record. Some Europeans called the Mons as “Peguan” owing to the city, Pegu (Bago). After the last Mon capital city of Hanthawaddy (Pegu) was taken by Bamar in 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Mon nationals were called by the Myanmars as “Talaing”. In fact, the etymology of the Bamar nick-name Talaing was derived from Indian place name Kalinga or Telengana in Madras coast. When this region was invaded by the Great Emperor Asoka (*Arthoka*) in the 3rd century B. C., his troops killed a hundred thousand people and captured as prisoners of war one hundred and fifty thousand people. Therefore, a lot of Indians might have fled to Mon country known as “*Ramannadesa*” in Lower Myanmar by crossing the Bay of Bangal bringing with them their culture for the Mons. And then they were mixed with the Mons so that their next generation came to be known also as Talaing. Thus, whenever the Mon nationals were called by the nick-name Talaing, they were so angry because they regard the vulgar term “Talaing” as a down-trodden insult with the meaning of a bastard.

In 1911, there were 48809 persons who claimed themselves as Talaing where as in the later the Talaing became practically unknown in the district because most of them fled to Thailand after the fall of Hanthawaddy and some Mons had changed as Bamar nationals for the call of the name Talaing (Page, 1963, p. 52)

After 1948, the government began protesting not to use the word Talaing in referring to Mon people, and then this term was limited even for the entry in the official spelling book.

### **4.3 History of Hinthargone**

Bayinnaung, builder of Second Myanmar Empire, set up his Court at Hanthawaddy in A.D 1551. On his passing away in 1581, an ossuary stupa was built on a spot, close to present-day Hinthagone Street 2, on that pasture land. In A.D 1857, the presiding abbot U Myaik of *Shwenantha* village in Insein Township, Yangon Region came to reside in the monastery at the site of the ossuary stupa so the two were known as *Shwenantha* Monastery and *Shwenantha* pagoda (Thet Tin, 1945).

According to 1882-83 E. Era's original survey, Hinthagone ward existed as pasture land named Hinthagone new ward grounds (*Kwetthit Kwin / ကွတ်သစ်ကွင်း*) (Source: Land Record Department, Bago Township, 2011). On human habitation at Hinthagone more than a century ago a 65-year-old Bamar national said:

*“As far as I know, the governor's House of a town (Myo-oak House) by the side of Bago-Thanatpin road at the top end of Hinthagone is more than a hundred years old. It was the residence of the governor of a town during British colonial period”.*

The Bamar minority with at least 75-year residence in Hinthagone admitted their ignorance as to when the first settlers came to that pasture land. Since some time before 1928, Bamar nationals settled in Hinthagone Street 2 near *Shwenantha* Monastery standing on that pasture land. The area then was sparsely populated. On this a 75-year-old Bamar national, born and bred still living in Hinthargone, said:

*“In my youth, mother related to me that some time before 1928 her family suffered a ‘paddy-farming loss’ (failed harvest due to natural disasters) in O-bo village, Bago and they moved to Hpalauk village near Pyinbongyi village, Bago Township for another trial. They suffered another paddy-farming loss again, so settled in Hinthagone Street 2 instead of returning to native village. Father himself felled trees, cleared up under bush and created a plot of land to live on. He hadn't had to pay any money. My elder brother was born here in 1928. At that time, the Streets numbered up to Hinthagone Street 2 only. The whole area was forested except for our plot of land”.*

According to most of the Mons and Bamar who settled in Hinthargone over 50 year ago, in 1930, a very strong earthquake shook Bago causing heavy damage. The victims of the earthquake were sheltered at Hinthagone which is situated in the Bago-Thanatpin road. Since that time, non-Mons had begun to settle by the side of Bago-Thanatpin road. For various reasons, some Bamars and Mons moved to Hinthagone Street 2. At that time, the Mon nationals and Bamars lived mixed together in Hinthargone Street 2. Up to that time the eastern part of Hinthargone had no settlers. It was still a deep forest with big trees. According to the majority of the Mon

nationals who have lived more than fifty years in Hinthargone, during the British times, the main places like *Thawka U-yin* and that around the *Shwe-bon-sint* monastery (east of Hinthargone) were thickly covered with creepers and big trees. Thus the tiger, wild cat and other animals roamed in the forest.

About 1935 refugees from a faraway place came to this place because the natural disasters like floods and the seashores falling down in erosion had destroyed their livelihoods. They came to live in the thick forests. A 75-year-old Mon national informed about the state of Hinthargone. He is a farmer. He said that:

*“My parents and relatives from both sides including grandparents, brothers and sisters, moved to Hinthargone from Zingyaik because our livelihood there failed. At that time, this place was a dark, deep forest. To the west of Shwe-bon-sint monastery was a five hundred feet square mango orchard owned by a rich man. My parents and relatives settled down in that mango orchard, each family building a little hut. It was 1935, the time of British rule. At that time I was just months old baby.”*

From that time houses began to appear in the eastern part of Hinthargone. As soon as the Mon began building their houses in the east of Hinthargone the minority Mon in its west moved to join the integrated community of Mon in the east of Hinthargone. On this an 86-year-old Bamar grandfather with a residence of 77 years in Hinthargone Street 2 said:

*“I arrived here in 1935. Then the abbot of Shwenantha Monastery was my older brother, and I came being informed that there were some houses with residents around here. At that time, some Mons lived beside our houses. As Bamar population was on the increase the Mon relocated to the east of Hinthargone, Model Mon. After the great earthquake of Bago many refugees were given plots of land around here to live on.”*

The majority of the Mon informants claimed that most of the Mon nationals learnt from their friends that a group of Mon nationals were living in harmony and thriving

in Hinthagone. There were good paddy fields and better livelihood for people. They came gradually, not alone but in groups of friends or relatives. When they arrived the new comers usually lived together as a group; for example there were three-four houses of *Zingyaik* group, three-four houses of *Kyaikmayaw*, thus depending on one another for security. According to all the Mons residing in Hinthagone, most of them were the earliest arrivals and they had migrated from *Zingyaik*, Mon State. A few were from the neighborhood of *Bago*, e.g *Kamanat*, *Moatkala*, *Warepatan*, *Aungzeya* villages. A 75-year-old Mon national who has lived in Hinthagone for 60 years pointed out his experience as follows:

*“My family came from Pha-auk village, Kayin State. When my family first arrived in Hinthagone and worked in the paddy fields of the old Mons, they spoke the Mon language only. They did not know Myanmar. After 1948, many of these old Mons migrated to Bago to escape the insurgents. The majority are those who have come from Zingyaik village. Later people from Tharanan, Kawbaing, Kyaikmayaw, Mudon, and Ye (Mon State and Kayin State) came to live in Hinthagone village”.*

In the same way more Mon nationals from Mon State, Kayin State, and Taninthayi Region settled in Hinthagone. Additionally a few non-Mons also came to settle down in this not in groups but as individual families. They came for many reasons, but the main reason was because they were finding it difficult to make a living at their old habitat. The above facts show that the majority of Mons settling in Hinthagone are from Mon state and its environs, and some from Kayin state and Taninthayi Division, and the minority from the vicinity of Bago.

All the Mon nationals agree that not all the Mons came directly to Hinthagone. Some of them first lived in the villages on the banks of the Sittaung River. They are known as *Damathat Athin* village. They were led by the headman of *Damathat* village near Mawlamyine. The land was fertile and the British government gave them land for free. Thus they stayed but later on the river-shores became eroded and broke down. Then they got contact with friends and relatives in Hinthagone. Consequently, they moved again by the families to Hinthagone in Bago Township and settled down there.

The majority of the Mons said that Hinthagone gradually became crowded as many people settled in there. Therefore, the Mon headman who governed *Kamanat* village requested its recognition by the British government. The British government agreed and in 1938 they recognized the village and named it *Keba-su* (ကဝေဝါန) which means refugee group because they were people who came because of hardships. Later, it was named as *Siyinsu* (စီရင်စု) village.

Concerning the date of founding this village, a Mon national, now 84 years old who is the grandson of the Mon headman founding this village was interviewed. He was a Mon national born in *Saing-Te* village, a hamlet of Bago. He grew up in *Kamanat* village, twenty miles east of Bago Township. Currently, he has been living in this quarter since 1939. He said:

*“I cannot give the exact year, but I know that this place existed since the time of my grandfather, who was headman of Kamanat. He was born in Kamanat. When Hinthagone was founded and my grandfather had dual control of both Kamanat and Hinthagone, my family moved to Hinthagone. I was 13 years old then. Now I am 84 years old. So this village is over 70 years old”.*

According to a survey taken by Bago Township Land Survey Records Department it was found out that Hinthagone *Kwetthit* grounds, formerly prescribed as pasture land, consisted of pagoda grounds, sacred land and monastic compounds; Therefore it was reassigned to be human habitation land in 1945-46, instead of former designation of pasture land (Source: Land Record Department of Bago Township).

Before 1948, Hinthagone had only two roads: Model Mon road no 1 and Model Mon road no 2. The British government in consultation with the village elders divided the plots of land with brick pipes. The plots were given to the people by drawing lots. The houses were wide apart. The later plots of land were not marked with brick pipes. They were just extended land where a person cleared up a plot of forests by himself to live on and not given free like the plots on Model Mon roads 1 and 2.

After 1948, the majority of the Mon nationals indicated that in Mon state and its environs as well as regions far from big towns, many rebel groups arose and there was no security in the region. Hinthargone was comparatively safe. More people transferred to Hinthagone. Some people, who settled in here when the village was newly founded, came with their parents and grandparents. Some came with their parents while others accompanied their husbands. At the time, the majority was round about 1951 and the minority was in 1956. Regarding this fact, a Mon dweller of 80 years of age, residing in Hinthagone since about 58 years ago, also related her experience. She is not educated.

*“When my parents moved here from Zingyaik I was 22 years old. My family left Zingyaik because my family’s fields got flooded. My family was told by my mother’s uncle that there were lots of paddy land, and one could harvest as much as one could work. So my family and maternal uncles’ families moved to Hinthagone”.*

The majority of the Mons living in Hinthargone claimed that afterwards, U Chit Thaug, President of Mon Traditional Affairs, Ramanya State (*Yamanya Taing Lone Saiyar Mon Yoyar Aphwe* / ရာမညတိုင်းလုံးဆိုင်ရာ မွန်ရိုးရာအဖွဲ့.) came to visit the eastern part of Hinthargone village. The reason for this is that he heard the information that the Mon nationals lived in Hinthargone. He came to give various kinds of aid to Mons living there. He founded a school for teaching Mon language and literature; a government recognized primary school, dug wells, distributed paddy lands for paddy cultivation and other necessities of the Mon village. After 1948, there were about 100 houses in the roads and up to Mon Model road 9.

In 1952 the leading members of the *Ramanya* State Traditional affairs met the elders of Hinthargone village and agreed to designate the almost all-Mon ward to the east of Hinthargone as the Model Mon village (*Mon Sanpya Yat*) for all other Mon nationals to emulate. From that time till today, on the eastern part of Hinthargone the majority have a ward where Mon nationals live together as a national group. Just as the Mon came to live in integration in a quarter to the east of Hinthargone, so also, other nationals relocated to Hinthargone for various reasons. While the Mon were found

integrated in the east of Hinthargone other nationals including Bamar lived close together in its west. On this a Bamar said:

*“By the time of our arrival here there were no Mon living near our house. They lived in integration at Mon Sanpya, while Bamars mostly lived in the west of Hinthagone. Up to Hinthagone Street 2, the Mon’s houses and Bamar’s houses are mixed, and from Street 3 on there are the Mon’s houses only. Still, there are some Bamar houses few and far between in that ward. Western part of Hinthargone is almost Bamar neighbourhood”.*

Therefore the majority of the Mons living on the eastern side of Hinthargone and a few non-Mons living on the western side and along the Bago-Thanatpin roadside can be found. As the years passed the pattern of living became two separate establishments as only Mons and only non-Mons by themselves.

According to interviews, Mon Model (*Mon Sanpya*) is not a name recognized by the government, but among Mons themselves only. The government-recognized name was Hinthargone Kwetthit grounds. After 1962 it was called Hinthagone Ward 19 and has since 1988 been assigned to be called Hinthargone Ward. Today, it is the native place of the present generation Mons and the houses have become more numerous.

#### **4.4 Geographical setting**

Hinthargone ward lies in Bago Township, Bago Region and geographically stands between North Latitude 17°21" and 17°29", and East Longitude 96°26" and 96°31". The shape of the Bago Township has gradually changed. It has an irregular rectangle shape in the former period and an elongated shape today. It lies between the two banks of the Bago River which always flows across the centre of the town from the north to south. The area of Bago is 20.47 square miles wide, and it contains 31 quarters (Office of township administrator, 2007).

Settlement area of Hinthargone quarter, one of the (32) wards of Bago Township is 1500 acres or 0.21 square miles wide. It is situated in the southeast of Bago Township. The approximate boundaries of which are, to the east, Kamanat village, to the west, Nandawyar quarter, to the south, Taungthusu village, and to the north, Bogone ward. It is formed by 16 administration places (The office of Hinthagone ward administrator, 2007).

#### **4.5 Communication**

Bago Township is situated on the Yangon-Mandalay highway and Yangon-Mandalay Rail-road. It is at a distance about 47 miles by train and 50 miles by motor-way from Yangon. Its distance from western part of Sittaung estuary is only 40 miles, so it is easily accessible to other cities such as Yangon, Mandalay and Mawlamyine.

#### **4.6 Demography**

The demographic data of the study represents from the Office of Hinthagone ward Administrator (2009) was collected.

**Table (1) Socio- demographic Characteristics of Mon and non-Mon nationals' population in Hinthargone (2009)**

Categories	Mon <sup>a</sup>		Non-Mon		Total
	No.	(%)*	No.	(%)*	
<b>Age group</b>					
18 years-old & above	3879	(62.87)	2702	(82.50)	6581
Under 18 years-old	2291	(37.13)	573	(17.50)	2864
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	3097	(50.19)	1491	(45.53)	4588
Female	3073	(49.81)	1784	(54.47)	4857
<b>Education</b>					
Primary/ Middle school level	2877	(46.63)	852	(26.02)	3729
High school level	1991	(32.27)	1075	(32.82)	3066
Graduate	1302	(21.10)	1348	(41.16)	2650
<b>Total (%) (**)</b>	<b>6170</b>	<b>(65.32)</b>	<b>3275</b>	<b>(34.48)</b>	<b>9445</b>

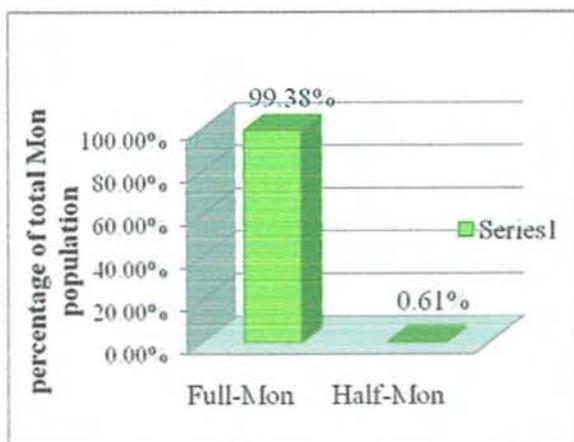
\*Column Percentage

\*\* Row Percentage

a Whoever with Mon lineage is meant

**Source: Office of Hinthargone ward administrator (2009)**

According to the table 1, the majority of the people living in Hinthargone are Mon nationals (65.32%).



**Figure (3) Population percentage of Full-Mon and Half-Mon of Hinthargone**

Moreover, figure 3 shows: among Hinthargone-resident Mons, i.e. those with subjective ethnic identity and Mons of mixed parentage (e.g, Mon-Kayin, Mon-Bamar) the former are more numerous. They are called full-Mon while those of mixed parentage are designated half-Mon. Almost all the children become Mon nationals because Hinthargone is a group of Mon nationals whose parents have subjective ethnic identity.

Most of the Mons said that they usually live together in one place so that they always speak their mother-tongue language. Besides they eagerly celebrate their traditional cultural customs every year to maintain their Mon identity. They also believe that this is the place where Mon cultural customs are practised and preserved. Therefore, they do not want to move to another place. Regarding this case, a male Mon national, 50 years old, mentioned that:

*“Although some Mons stay in Inn-win and Kyaik-paw near Bago, we think of Hinthagone as our native place, where the majority of the Mon nationals live in a cohesive group. It is where most of us are born, so we value our native place. We believe our life is best in the place we are born. That is why we are willing to pay a very high price for a plot of land in Hinthagone”.*

Another one male participant, 45 years of age, also spoke in praise of living among their own kind. He said:

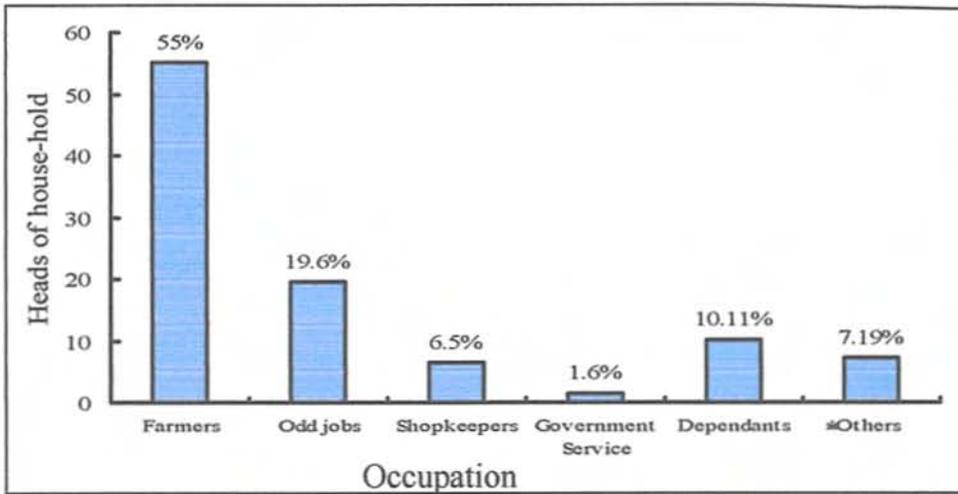
*“If we lived separately, then we cannot speak our own mother tongue language. The Mon traditional customs have not disappeared in this region because the Mons live together in unison. The presiding monk at the monastery (Pun-htaw) (yGefaxmf) is also Mon. That is why we lived in a place where Mons live united and in harmony”.*

Besides a 40-year-old male Mon also expressed his view:

*“Some Mons who migrated from Mawlamyine live in Inn-win near Bago. There are more Bamars there. So, now the Mons there do not speak Mon anymore. That is why we choose to live in Hinthagone, where Mons live in a group and still converse in our mother tongue of Mon”.*

From the above, Hinthargone Mons' desire to live in integration could be considered as mainly contributing to the maintenance of Mon identity. Compare with other living places (*Inn-win, Kyaikpaw, Mahazedi*) of Mon nationals in Bago Township, Hinthargone ward was native place of them, where they always speak Mon language, and they participate in their social activities because of their environment. Therefore, they have been living in Hinthargone and they constitute a majority.

#### 4.6.1 Occupation



**Figure (4) The occupation of the heads of house-hold of Mons in Hinthargone**

\* Others: cheroots, Carpenters, Drivers, Machinists, Pensioners

Source: Office of Hinthargone ward administrator (2009)



**Figure (5) The occupation of the heads of house-hold of non-Mons in Hinthargone**

\* Others: cheroots, Carpenters, Drivers, Machnists, Pensioners

Source: Office of Hinthargone ward administrator (2009)

Figure 4 and 5 shows that among Mons in Hinthargone rice farmers constitute 55% of them. It is because nearly all the Mons who settled to Hinthargone lived by agriculture. Their paddy fields on the seashore broke down into the sea and their lives became difficult. Therefore they moved to Hinthargone where virgin land was plentiful. They continued to work as farmers. Concerning this fact, a 65-year-old Mon national, who came from Kawkareik said:

*“My livelihood in Kawkareik was agriculture. It was destroyed by flood. My uncle told me of the fields in Hinthargone where every plant thrives. So my family came here”.*

But in government service the Mons account for 1.6 % only where compared with other nationals. A few of Mons go to government schools in youth so 21.14% (Table 1) only are graduates against 41.16% for other nationalities (Table 1). Therefore, few Mons are in government service. These factors clearly show the Mons in youth mostly learn Mon language and literature but have very little formal schooling.

#### 4.6.2 Marriage System

According to most of the Mons living in Hinthargone, many Mons living in Hinthargone marry among themselves and preserve their Mon identity because they have subjective ethnic identity. But a few Mons marry non-Mons, which may be because of their fate from the past.

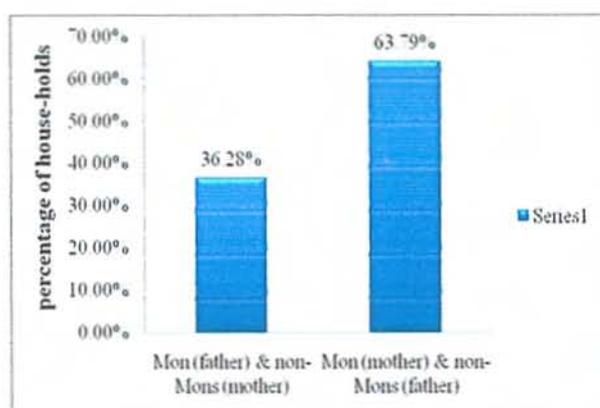
**Table (2): Types of marriage of Mons and Non-Mons living in Hinthargone**

Types of marriage	households	%
Mon & Mon	883	56.22 %
Mon & Non-Mon	58	3.7 %
Non-Mon & Non-Mon	628	40.07 %
Total	1567	

Moreover, Table 2 shows how many Mons staying in Hinthargone marry among themselves (56.22 %) and preserve their Mon identity. The above facts can be concluded that it is important for them to value subjective ethnic identity in preserving the Mon identity.

Moreover, most of the Mon parents stated that they do not interfere in the marriage of their children although they would prefer them to marry their own kind. For the reason, the parents are afraid to choose in case their choice should turn out to be a bad choice. They fear they would be miserable for life. Even if the choice of their child should be a non-Mon, there is no discrimination in their relationship. A Mon national, father of five children illustrated this as follows:

*“One son married a Bama woman and lived in this quarter. We never made trouble between the two. We were all Buddhists. We believe in “fate”, and that everyone comes with his own “fate”. Since it’s their own life, it is best to let them make their own choice; whichever national they choose, our attitude will be the same”.*



**Figure (6) Percentage of house-holds of Mon nationals’ marriage with non-Mons in Hinthargone (2009)**

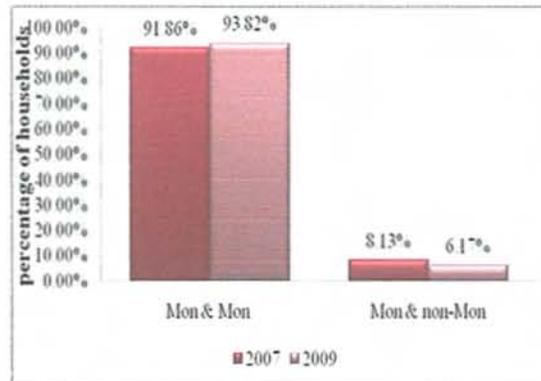
Figure 6 shows that less Hinthargone-resident Mon males marry non-Mons than Mon females (36.28%). Almost all the Mons said that more male Mon nationals marry their own female Mons than the Mon women. Most Mons claimed that Mon males

hold themselves responsible to keep Mon identity because they are the designated inheritors of spirit propitiation.

On this Mon male aged 52 said:

*“The Mon tradition dictates that a couple propitiate the spirit (Nat) on husband’s side. So a Mon woman marrying non-Mon will terminate Mon identity in her line. But it is otherwise for a Mon male because Mon identity is hard to disappear in his line. Moreover, few Mon males marry non-Mons lest Mon identity be lost.”*

These facts show that, among Hinthargone-resident Mon nationals Mon men have stronger subjective Mon identity than Mon women.



**Figure (7) The marriage systems of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone (2007 & 2009)**

According to figure 7, as the years passed, there are no differences among households' numbers. Nevertheless, the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone were marrying among the Mon families more, and marriage with non-Mons became less gradually because of the more numerous the Mons with subjective ethnic identity.

Most of the Mons living in Hinthargone said that most of them after marriage stay with either side parents, whichever is convenient for them. But when a Mon national of Hinthargone marries a non-Mon wife, he brings his wife to Hinthargone.

An 83-year-old married male Mon said:

*“I have two sons and a daughter, who is married to a Bamar and lives at his home. My sons, married to Mon girls, live over there. Most Mons get married Mon to Mon. Even when married to non-Mons, they tend to settle down in Hinthargone with their spouses. Mon boys, rather than Mon girls, are obsessed about Mon identity.”*

**Table (3) Mon ethnicity of the children of Mon and non-Mon nationals in Hinthargone**

Parents		Offspring
Father	Mother	
Mon	Bamar	Mon
Mon	Shan	Mon-Shan
Bamar	Mon	Mon
Mon-Bamar	Mon	Mon
Shan	Mon	Mon-Shan
Kayin	Mon	Mon

Table 3 shows how Mon nationals marry non-Mons, but by living in Hinthargone many children of them consider themselves as Mons. It could be that regardless of the fact that they are Mon ethnicity or not, living in Hinthargone where there is a group of Mons, and the parents perceive themselves as Mon nationals so that their offspring automatically become Mons.

Regarding this case, a male Kayin who is 38 years of age recounted his experience:

*“I married a Mon woman living in Hinthargone and came to live here. From the time I came to live in Hinthargone I noticed that the Mons from children to the grown up never fail to do their religious duties. Since I was a Buddhist myself I participated in all their social activities every year, thus I contributed my share of community duties. My children also celebrated them, so we are all Mons now”.*

## CHAPTER V

### SYMBOLIC BOUNDARY OF HINTHARGONE-RESIDENT MON NATIONALS

This chapter gives overt signs in Hinthargone-resident Mons regarding their daily life styles such as wearing of traditional costumes, and Mon diet. They share such superficial aspects as food and dress in common with other nationals. Also presented is the criteria of membership in detail to become a Mon national; and how these overt and covert signs affect the maintenance of Mon culture also.

#### 5.1 Daily life style

##### 5.1.1 Mode of Dress

According to the interview, a Mon man wears a long-sleeved white shirt on which lies Myanmar male's jacket with red patterns on white background. His nether garment (*longyi*) is white patterns on red background. A Mon woman wears a white blouse and her nether garment (*hta-main*) had red patterns. According to Mon nationals living at Hinthargone the patterned designs in their dress (for men or women) are meant for Mon traditional values to use in their traditional costumes. The colour 'red' represents Mons' relentless bravery; block patterns stand for paddy field, representative of their traditional livelihood of rice farming. Mon male's nether garment has a red band across at the middle, representing the seam of two pieces as the traditional looms of yore could produce a piece of cloth with just so much width.

Hinthargone-Mon usually wear the Mon traditional costume for special occasions (see in figure 8). Hinthargone-Mon males wear the red-coloured traditional costume on any occasion, according to those residents, but Mon girls in *Padetharpin* procession dress themselves in different colours from occasion to occasion. The reason: to have different colours among the occasions organized monastery-wise; and compete for beauty's sake (and win awards given in the past). But on significant days like Union Day, Mon National Day all are in red representing the Mon nationals. Moreover, Mon university-students wear their traditional dress on every Monday, specifically are

dressed in red to be representative of all Mon nationals. On this a 48-year-old Mon leader said:

*“The official colour of Mon traditional costume is red. But with many associations participating in Padetharpin procession celebration on the 1<sup>st</sup> waning of Thadingyut the girls wear what they like in different colours for love of beauty and to differentiate one association from another. The boys are all in red. But all Mons at significant events are in red only, like, Union Day talks.”*



**Figure (8) Hinthargone-resident Mons in traditional costume participate in Mon National Day**

Moreover, nearly all Hinthargone-resident Mons wear Bamar dress only in day to day life, like the Bamar in their surroundings, because they believe only the self-concept on ethnic identity to maintain Mon culture is most important. Regarding this case, a 45-old-year Mon youth said:

*“Mon traditional costume is not worn every day, but only at celebration held in the ward. By doing so, we make ourselves known as Mon national to other people. Therefore, at celebrations like offering food to the Buddha and other donations almost all Mons wear the traditional costume, and have their children do the same for training’s sake.”*

The above facts show that the Hinthargone-resident Mons have their traditional costume organized with symbols representative of the Mons' values and beliefs. Therefore, it could be inferred that their subjective ethnic identity to maintain Mon culture most importantly contributes to their adaptation with other nationals nearby to co-exist peacefully.

## **Diet**

Most of the Mons in Hinthargone always eat Bamar food and drinks in their daily life but not Mon food. Sometimes, they eat Mon traditional food.

## **5.2 Criteria of membership**

All the Mon nationals of Hinthargone responded that the criteria of membership among Mon nationals living in Hinthargone are not because either parents or one parent is Mon. This ethnic consciousness is in their personal thoughts. Likewise, the parents' or the guardians' awareness of their identity is the most significant factor in the criteria of membership because they believe that the Mons with subjective ethnic identity speak themselves Mon language, and also teach their children Mon traditions and customs. They bring up their children to be Mons as they wished and the Mon identity is instilled in their hearts. In this way a self-concept arises in young Mons to persistently maintain their Mon culture and activities. Consequently, the children perceive that they have the duty to preserve their traditional culture as Mon identity. They are self-concept being Mon nationals and there they always choose their life partners among Mon women only.

In Hinthargone, both parents in a family are Mon and still residing in Hinthargone but Mon languages is not spoken in the family. Some families of both Mon parents and not residing in Hninthargone speak Mon in the family because the criteria of membership depend greatly on the self-concept of a member.

A male Mon informant said based on his experience:

*"My parents were Mons but did not consider themselves as Mons. So they did not speak the Mon language. But I grew up with my Mon grandmother who perceives herself Mon national, so I spoke Mon fluently and consider myself a Mon national".*

According to the interview, even the Mons who have self-concept on their identity living in this ward should marry a non-Mon, they participate in the social activities as Mons to preserve their ethnic identity. Yet it is not enough. Their children are also made to join the *Padethapin* procession to be conscious of their ethnic identity. Regarding this case, a Mon woman married to a non-Mon gave her views. She said:

*"I am always conscious of the fact that I am Mon and I always try to instill this idea in my children. So they will prevent the disappearance of Mon language and customs. I have given them their traditions, so they must in turn hand them down to the next generation".*

Regarding the results of participating in social activities, she replied that:

*"The benefits of these social activities, the habits of going to the monasteries are not only socializing but also religious instruction which the monks preach to them, teaches them how to interact in harmony among them".*

Therefore, the criteria of membership are a clear indication of those who are conscious of their ethnic identity. According to interview, most of the Mons are very proud for being Mon nationals and living in Hanthawaddy as the Court of yore. Regarding the case, 23 years old, a Mon youth said:

*"I am very proud of living in Hanthawaddy. It was the throne of Mon Kings in ancient times."*

Some Mon nationals reported that in the present day, some Mons from Hinthargone have left because of the dense population and others because of economic difficulty.

But those Mons still keeping themselves as Mon nationals do not move away to a far distance. They stay in the vicinity of Hinthargone, and bring up their children in their Mon traditional culture of participating in the *Padethapin Pwe* and other Mon social activities. Therefore the Mon nationals still living in unity in Hinthargone are strongly conscious of their ethnic identity and keeping their property for posterity and not selling them at the big sums of money offered. Regarding this case, a 40-year-old married male Mon said:

*“Nowadays at Mon Sanpya ward housing plots bring a good price because of its limited land with a rising population. With a large group of Mons, this quarter is popular with the Mons who would not care about the land price. I have some extra land besides my house which is being offered a good price. But I will not sell it, which is meant to be given to our sons on being married.”*

The above facts show that some may have transferred due to circumstances, but if they still consider themselves as Mon nationals, ethnic identity is still alive and they will preserve their traditions and customs.

Besides, there are differences between men and women in their self-concept as Mon national. Almost all the Mon males' prevailing feeling is that to be a Mon is in their mind. Therefore, men have strongly feel a sense of Mon national and participate fully in their traditional social activities. However, it has nothing to do with Spirit (*Nat*) propitiation. For the reason, it is fanatical and any wrong will not be forgiven. A Mon national, 43 years old and married to a Mon woman, leader of the Mon Youth Association of Hinthagone said:

*“My traditional family spirit is worshipped by hanging a green cocoanut in the house. When my father died I did not continue the custom in his house. I gave my mother the money for doing this ritual although I do not believe in it. I consider myself a Mon and participate in all cultural traditions of the Mon nationals. Being conscious of ethnical identity is not concerned with spirit worship”.*

In contradiction to the above statements, the majority of Mon women living in Hinthargone indicated that their own personal attitude and spirit worship are both important in becoming the criteria of membership in Hinthargone Mon National Association.

From the above, it can be said Mon men have subjective ethnic identity more strongly than women. And then, it is a major factor in socialization as well as an important factor to maintain their ethnic identity as Mons.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MON NATIONAL LIVING IN HINTHARGONE

### 6.1 Religious activities of the Mon nationals of Hinthargone

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a country of many national races and they have their own religious folk festivals that reflect unique traditional customs, beliefs, and values which give rise to the social institution. These festivals altogether can influence their own social structure as well as their ethnic identity. Only when this social structure perpetuates then the society will continue to exist.

This chapter is the religious folk festivals held by Mon nationals at Hinthargone made up of the community members' beliefs, values and norms which altogether constitute their ethnic identity. This study aims to find out whether the activities connected with those festivals complement their beliefs and values or not, and to what extent those activities contribute in maintaining their ethnic identity. It also aims to find out how religious folk festivals influence the interrelations among the Mons at Hinthargone.

#### 6.1.1 Status of the monasteries in Hinthargone

According to the interview, almost all the Mons and non-Mons have built pagodas and monasteries for their religious belief. There are ten monasteries: three Mon monasteries (The presiding abbot of the monastery is a Mon national) and eight Bamar monasteries (The presiding abbot of the monastery is a Bamar national) and eight pagodas at Hinthargone. Hinthargone has a few Mon monasteries only because the Mons have come there later than Bamars; with increasing population religious ground for monastery construction is not available leading to one which was built near *Shwemawdaw* Pagoda in *Bo-phone* ward; and the principle 'one monastery per village' is followed lest more donors in more monasteries would lead to disunity. (For example, migrants from *Zingyaik* altogether built a monastery and appointed a presiding abbot of the same origin as theirs).

In making donations or conducting religious activities, some Mons go to the Mon monastery (the monks discourse delivered in Mon and only one who has learnt the Mon language will understand a Mon-language discourse.) as they have learnt Mon literature in youth and some go to Bamar monastery as they have not learnt it. In this regard, a 48-year-old Mon woman said:

*“Formally I went to Sasanadippa Mon monastery but I did not understand the sermons of the monk. Not having learnt Mon literature, I did not understand the sermons of the monk. But Bodhinyaung monastery’s presiding abbot usually delivers sermons in Myanmar language, which I understand very well. Therefore I now go to Bodhinyaung monastery only.”*

However, an 80-year-old Mon grandfather said:

*“I usually go to Pun Htaw monastery (whose presiding abbot is Mon). There the administering of precepts is done in Mon language. Each monastery has its own patronage.”*

Regarding this case, a 45-year-old Bamar male explained:

*“Mon Sanpya with a majority of Mons has a monastery called Bodinyaung (the presiding abbot is Bamar national). It is only four years old but has already constructed an ordination hall. If the racial factor should count, the Mons would patronize a Mon monastery. But they don’t. That presiding abbot preaches well so his monastery receives a lot of offerings from Mons. The first waning day of Thadingyut is when monasteries receive Padaetharpins (stands bearing gifts). That monastery often receives up to 2-3 Padaetharpins.”*

From the above shows that almost all Hinthargone Mons mainly make efforts to understand the Buddha’s teachings whether they patronize a Mon monastery or a Bamar one. It shows that they have come to live in adaptation with non-Mons.

In Bago a Bamar monastery would have from at least 50 up to 400 monks, while a Mon monastery would have from at least 5 up to 20 monks. The Mon monks, because of their small number, can depend on Mon donors. Bamar monks are numerous, but do not have enough Bamars to support them. Thus they partly depend on Mon nationals who are very generous. Similarly the Mons make a lot of offerings to Bamar monks who relate Buddha's teaching in understandable terms to them.

### 6.1.2 Making merit

According to the interview, all the Mon nationals at Hinthargone have been practising Buddhism from the days of their ancestors. Almost all the Mons show deep conviction in performing meritorious deeds. On this a Mon grandmother living in *Taung-htan* roofed house said:

*“My husband is a farm land and we are poor. But we donate what we could while living from hand to mouth for the sake of next existence. With a little income we cook our daily food, a part of which is donated to three monks. On Sabbath day, we cook a good curry. With a special offertory of food, we go to the monastery to receive Precepts from the presiding abbot.”*

Another Mon grandmother, aged 76, added:

*“A Mon tradition in this area is, at dawn every morning, during the lent or outside of it, almost every household offers food to tanswan (alms-round of monks walking in single file). But I offer food to monks who go on alms-round and sit down a few minutes at host house. I also send a set of containers of alms-food to the monastery every month.”*

Most of the non-Mons also described that the priority of Mon nationals of Hinthargone being religious, enjoy donating and meritorious deeds. At Hinthargone a Mon household would offer alms-food to from at least twenty to fifty monks.

On this a 50-year-old Bamar said:

*"In offering of alms-food some households have to cook about a pyi of rice. They offer cooked rice as well as curries. They rise bed before daybreak especially to cook rice for dawn alms-food of the monks. Only after that they cook for the family."*

Concerning this case, an 80-year-old Bamar woman, a store-keeper living in Hinthargone, said:

*"The Mons are more committed to religious activities than Bamars. I notice they donate a lot. When a donation event is to take place at the monastery, they stop their business at home in order to contribute voluntary labour at the event. For example, a pony-cart driver would suspend his services for the day. As for myself, though I do donations sometimes I would not close the shop. But I have respect for their good work based on religious faith."*

Regarding this case, a Bamar grandmother aged 78 added:

*"Since long ago I have been seeing almost all the elderly Mons going to monasteries in groups by my house every Sabbath day during the lent period, holding bouquets of flowers. In the evening, they always go to Shwemawdaw Pagoda to offer flowers."*

The above statements show they are devout generous Buddhists who are eager for merit-making. And this trait is found to be recognized by other nationals.

In Myanmar there are festivals the year round. The nationals living in Myanmar celebrate the seasonal festivals of each month grandly with alms giving and fun fairs. It is celebrated all over Myanmar but the traditional customs and habits vary according to the region. Popular festivals among the Mon nationals are in *Waso* (June-July), *Wa-gaung* (July-August), *Tawthalin* (August-September) during the Buddhist lent and *Thidingyut* (September-October) at the end of Lent. At such festivals, all the

Mons of Hinthagone would take part in teams or groups and they perform donations to the Buddha and *Sangha* at every monastery of Mon patronage.

### 6.1.3 *Waso* (June-July)

According to the majority of the Mon nationals residing in Hinthargone, the month of *Waso* is considered a holy month for the Buddhists. In the lifetime of the Buddha, the monks would come to the Buddha and make a vow, meaning they would dwell in this monastery during the three months of rain. Therefore, the monks reside in one place during Buddhist lent which is from full moon of *Waso* to the full moon of *Thidingyut* lasting for three months. Thus the Buddhists have to take care that the monks do not have difficulties about their daily sustenance and the robes. Such offerings are made so that the monks would spend the Lenten time in quiet meditation or study without having to worry about their needs. Thus they individually as well as collectively donate money, foodstuffs and labour very generously. Likewise, almost all the Mons at Hinthargone offer monks robes and, delicacies to the monks in the monastery of their patronage on the full moon day of *Waso* (see in figure 9 a & b).



**Figure (9 a & b) Offerings being taken to the monastery**

In addition, the younger generation would pay respect to elders with bowls of coconut and bananas, adding gifts depending on the amount they could afford. This activity indicates the appreciation and gratitude for the elders. A married Mon aged 45 said:

*“When I was young, I visited and formally paid obeisance to parents and old relatives in pre-and post-lent period. This habit continues in my married life. While I pay respects to older Mons than me, I am being returned the same by persons younger than myself.”*

An 85-year-old Mon grandfather said:

*“In the past, groups of Mon nationals by themselves took an offertory (of a coconut, three hands of banana), flowers, and a set of robes to the monastery of their patronage. And some wealthy Mons did the same by themselves. Nowadays a family by itself would go there to offer what it could: delicacies, robes, etc. A formal offertory has been dispensed with because the items are perishable. Whenever a Mon goes to a monastery, he or she takes some flowers for offering to the Buddha”.*

### **6.1.3.1 Mon Traditional Sabbath Food Offering (မွန်ရိုးရာဥပုသ်ဆွမ်းကျွေးခြင်း)**

During the lent period, according to the interview, all the Mon youths of Hinthagone since 1956 make the traditional Sabbath Food Offering to the Sabbath keepers who stay overnight at the monastery on Sabbath days. Such community-wise cooking of alms-food has since become as a Mon traditional custom.

According to the account of most of the Mon nationals living in Hinthagone, Traditional Sabbath Food Offering is made by the youth to Sabbath keepers on the morning after keeping Sabbath overnight. It is prepared by the youths themselves. This activity has since been carried out to date at all monasteries where the Mons keep Sabbath. During the Buddhist lent, the number of Sabbath-keepers at monasteries differs from monastery to monastery. At Hinthargone, the *Sasanadippa* Mon monastery, *Pun Htaw* Monastery and *Bodhi Nyaing* Monastery all patronized by the majority Mons have around 80-100 overnight Sabbath-keepers while other monasteries have about 20-30. Sabbath-keepers of other nationals go home in the evening, and do not stay overnight at the monastery.

### **6.1.3.2 Visiting the monastery for Sabbath keeping**

During the lent period, the Buddhists do meritorious deeds and practise contemplation and self-denial. They make a point of fasting and observing precepts on Sabbath day. Even habitual drinkers take a vow of abstinence, for the season at least. It is good in a way for Buddhists to be reminded of the need for self-discipline. Marriage is taboo during the lent. This has nothing whatever to do with any religious concept.

Since all the Mon nationals living in this quarter are Buddhists, most of them go to the monastery to keep Sabbath on the Sabbath days of the lent period. But the minority visits the monastery daily to keep Sabbath during lent period. The majority of the Mons who go to the monastery to keep Sabbath are fifty years of age and above but there are a few under fifty-year-olds as well. On the Sabbath days of this period, when they go to the monastery every morning, they take flowers from their garden and offer them to the Buddha at the monastery (see in figure 10).

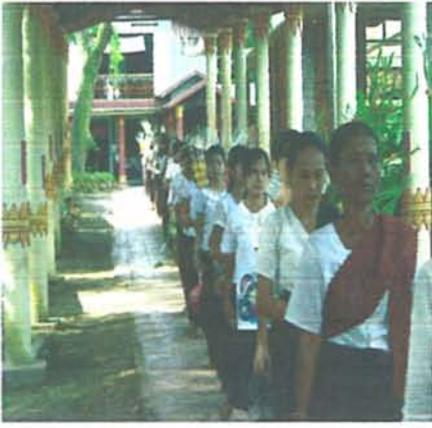


**Figure (10) The Mons go to monastery to observe Buddhist precepts**

In the evening of Sabbath days during the lent period, the majority Mon grandmothers go to *Shwemawdaw* pagoda for offering of flowers. In or out of lent period, a few go in groups to the pagodas to do the same. These practices were not common to youth then, but are so only now (see in figure 11 a & b).

Regarding this, a 61-year-old Mon female, a lay attendant at *Sasanadippa* Mon monastery said:

*“During the lent, we go to offer flowers at the Sasanadippa Mon monastery every day. On Sabbath days, most of the female Mons go to the Shwemawdaw pagoda and say some prayers. Only after that, we return home. About two years ago, the presiding abbot exhorted us to go offer flowers at the Shwemawdaw pagoda, so during the lent period we do that every evening at 4:00 pm. We organize youths and lead them to Shwemawdaw pagoda.”*



**Figure (11 a & b) Those in a queue about to go to Shwemawdaw Pagoda for offering of flowers**

An 80-year-old Mon grandmother said:

*“Since I have settled down in Hinthargone, I have been going to Shwemawdaw pagoda every evening during the lent period to offer flowers; some go to the monastery to do so. Early in the morning, I pick flowers out of the little garden at home, to stitch them into garlands. Or I might pick flowers at other homes also. I usually make two garlands beforehand, one for the visit to the monastery and the other for the visit to the pagoda in the evening.”*

According to the accounts given by the majority of elders of the Hinthargone-resident Mons, those who go to the monastery to keep Sabbath usually stay there overnight. Relatives of Sabbath-keeping elderly Mons: sons, daughters, and grandchildren, would send them to the monastery bringing food, bedding, rice, snacks, fruits and other offertory gifts. A 75-year-old Mon grandfather said:

*“Years ago I used to keep Sabbath at the monastery, but my knees are giving me trouble now and it is hard walking. But every Sabbath day I go to the monastery to keep Sabbath and stay overnight. My grandchildren bring morning meal and bedding for me, which is left at the monastery for the whole lent period. As long as one stays at a monastery his deeds tend to be religious. This is what we can afford, while our donations remain small for our modest means. I keep up these meritorious tasks.”*

However, an 84-year-old Mon man said:

*“Formally my keeping of Sabbath at the monastery lasted overnight; I had companions. It is not so now, therefore I return home in the evening.”*

### 6.1.3.3 Forming of association

In preparing meals for the elders in this way, the unmarried youth of the sector form themselves into groups or teams and give labor contribution. There are nine groups, the majority of whose members are 16-year-olds and the minority, 12-year-old. The groups or teams are formed according to the monastery of choice they would be sending the meals. For example, the team that has taken charge of preparation of food for *Pun Htaw* Monastery will have to send the food to it. Members of the meal preparation team join the teams by choice. Some join the team for religious reasons and some choose to join to be together with their close friends. Some groups are formed entirely with a group of friends for social purposes. An 18-year-old female member of a team, living in *Mon Sanpya 1 Street* said:

*“Teams are based on monasteries and their number is in proportion to donors. My mother is from Khaya village (Hpa-an Township, Kayin State). All the Mons who moved from Khaya patronize Pun Htaw monastery. I have enlisted in Khaya team in Mon Sanpya 8 Street, as my friends belong to it. There is no Khaya team near my house.”*

Another 22-year-old Mon male added:

*“Sometimes team members belong to the same monastery, sometimes to the same circle of friends. I am one of the latter, not based on the monastery of any parents’ patronage. Joining a team means making friends as well as making merit. That is where boy meets girl.”*

The team members stick close together not only through the lent period but on other social occasions including auspicious ones such as wedding receptions and novitiation ceremonies and mournful ones like funerals. Should there be any need for assistance

at social events at the house of a member, such as weddings or funerals, they would all go and lend a hand. A young Mon leader, aged 24, said:

*“After the lent period is over, team members also help out in a team member’s social events auspicious or not, like a funeral, novitiation, ordination, or a wedding. For the Kahtein (Robe Offering) celebration at monasteries each team collects money for an offering of delicacies. No outside voluntary labour is needed now. Each monastery has its own donors and helpers.”*

The majority begin to make their children participate in social activities so that they get a chance to become friends. In these communal activities, boy meets girl and a chance for the choice of a life partner appears more likely. The team members would be familiar with all the activities of the team since the leaders have had exposure to them since they were young. A 78-year-old Mon man said:

*“Since my youth, I had been a leader of Sabbath-day food offering team. Now young people have taken over. As a youth of thirteen, I saw older persons contributing labour and always realized I must take such responsibility one day. Boys and girls of about that age were in membership.”*

Most of the members of the Mon youth said that there are no hard and fast rules or regulations, requiring compulsory membership fees. All the Mon youth in a household, regardless of the number, could join the teams. However, if a family cannot afford to let all children join the teams, they have to give priority to younger ones. Those who cannot join would have to help the younger children with whatever that is needed for the activity instead.

According to the interview, some young members explained that some youths, though willing to join the groups, cannot afford membership fees. In such a situation, a rich, generous family forms a team comprising such youths at its own expense whereat they need not pay membership fees. Then that team goes out soliciting donations, which is then used for holding Sabbath food offering and a tree-shaped stand where various articles such as robes, money and other miscellaneous thing are hung for

(*Padaetharpin*) procession. A shortfall in the fund needed is remedied by the donor. Such a donor said:

*“I have organized a team, including my son. I would like to see youths not standing by without joining a team because they cannot afford membership fees. I see to it that at least a youth from every household is included in a team. In this way, their wish is fulfilled and the Mon tradition is kept alive.”*

There are altogether twenty five to thirty members each in most teams. A few has about 50 members each. It is because the strength of the team is decided on so as to acquire funds to donate a *Padaetharpin*. Team members select two leaders, one male and one female, from among them. Normally the leaders would be those who have good relationships with all team members. Team membership may be paid wholly or in installments or as convenient. For example, if the required amount is 12,000 kyat (2011), they could pay 1000 kyat a week for twelve weeks, or they could pay in installments. A female team member said:

*“Our team has a membership of about thirty; the team’s quotas were 1, 2000 kyat (2011) and 1, 0000 kyat (2010). I contribute in five installments, but it takes longer when I have many payments to be made. We go on alms-round weekly, and remainder-money is held by the two leaders by turns. Some find it inconvenient to pay up membership fees, so we advance them on their behalf. They pay back daily in small amounts, up to the year round for some. But our advancement is worth it because their wish has been fulfilled and a *Padaetharpin* for the monastery becomes possible to the credit of our association.”*

And a female team leader said:

*“Our group is responsible for offering Sabbath food to middle (*Alae / အလယ်*) Mon monastery, and has a membership of 25 boys and 23 girls, making up a total of 48. Contributions required depend on the number of members. A member may contribute only what he can afford. We pay up contributions incumbent on some members who have no ready cash. They in turn pay their*

*fees in installments, sometimes taking the whole year long. But their wish is fulfilled while one more padaetharpin (stand bearing gifts) for the monastery becomes available; we are satisfied we have made advance payment of their dues.”*

Depending on the number of food offering groups, various tasks are assigned among them. A male team member said:

*“There are three similar teams for Alae Mon monastery: two of young people and one of older people. Tasks are taken up by turns: a group may cook rice and another may cook next week and vice versa the following weeks”.*

It can be considered that for both sexes participating together in social activities the process from fondness to making friends as life partnership is possible, and also that an older member tends to have sympathy for a younger in the associations.

#### **6.1.3.4 Going on collection rounds**

Team members meet after 12:00 noon on every Sabbath day and go round the quarter to collect donations. Girls hold the donation bowls and boys carry the rice baskets (see in figure 12). All houses contribute either cash or rice to the teams. The households, even though they have to make contributions every week, would not complain since the donation is not possible for just one family and because it is a joint contribution by all concerned. For families or households where there is no youth to spare due to the demanding household duties, they have to offer extra cash donations.



**Figure (12) Youths on alms-round to solicit resources for preparation of Sabbath food**

It is not compulsory for all team members to go for collection rounds. Should there be anything important he or she must attend to, the absence is understood. However, they must make their appearance of their own free conscience in the following weeks. A 16-year-old team member boy said:

*“In every team, the leader has set the time to go on collection round, usually at 12:00 noon on every Sabbath day. Just after that each group is seen going about their duty, but along the streets (most Mons live in) from Mon Sanpya 1 to Mon Sanpya 9 only, not in Bamar-majority parts. A group is divided into two sub-groups for going on collection round, yet the task is finished only by 3:00 pm or 4:00 pm. Our group often collects 16-19 pyi (unit of grain measurement) of rice, and cash of around 3000 kyat. I work at a goldsmith’s shop and cannot do this religious chore every week. All other members sympathize with my circumstances. We can wear what we like on collection days.”*

#### **6.1.3.5 Preparation of Sabbath food (ဥပုသ်ဆွမ်းချက်ခြင်း)**

All the members of the Mon youth said that the weekly collection from the donors and the general fund are used for the preparation of the meal. Depending on the amount of donated money, they would prepare rice broth, fried noodles, fried vermicelli, deep-fried dough stick (*yew-kyar-kwei*), tea and so on. They need to prepare more when there are a lot of Sabbath keepers on full-moon and new-moon days. The surplus cash is set aside for the *Padaetharpin* Festival held on the day after the Full Moon Day of *Thadingyut*. A youthful member said:

*“At the starts of lent period, peoples tend to be more generous so we receive a lot of offerings. Some rice is sold off to whoever is willing to buy. The proceeds are used to prepare Sabbath meal. Expenses depend on the number of Sabbath keepers. Our monastery caters for about 25 of them, costing us about kyat 15000 a week. Yet we are left with a surplus of kyat 2000-3000.”*

According to the account of most of the Mon youths, they used to gather at a particular house to prepare food for the Sabbath keepers every Sabbath day. Sometimes they choose the house of a team member with the permission of the parents of that household. Sometimes they need to find a suitable place with the help of a friend. The place needs to be spacious enough for the cooking activities. Sometimes, especially at the *Padaetharpin* Festival during *Thidingyut*, there would be so much fun and merry-making that the owners have to sympathetically tolerate the noise.

Team members gather at the chosen place and make preparations on the eve of the Sabbath day. Since they have to get up at 3:00 am the next morning to start cooking, they sleep overnight at the place. Parents trust their children and allow them to do so. The youth also try to be worthy of the trust, and treat other team members as their own brother or sister. The youth normally stay up all night after the preparation work is done. They engage themselves in games and activities or discussions on religious matters to stay awake. All the Mon youth of Hinthargone said that they not only get religious merit from the good deed, but also much pleasure out of it. A team leader said:

*“One pre-Sabbath day night, the volunteers need a house virtually at their disposal, what with their prospective boisterousness, preparation of a padaetharpin, hosting guests, and playing tapes. They need spacious quarters, like a whole floor of the house. If rice broth is to be made, preparations were made on the night before, like, picking out grains of husked paddy out of the rice. To fight sleepiness, they play video tapes and Parcel game. They can afford about one hour of sleep only but are very happy. The leader has to supervise his team members.”*

Another team leader added:

*“We have to give service. If not, the Mon tradition will waste away. Elders before us have taught and pulled us along. Now is our turn for leadership.”*

Sometimes, the teams would prepare food or snacks for themselves at that night. They also invite other teams to eat with them. For instance, if a team prepared snacks at a particular meet, they would go out to other teams around 10:00 pm that evening to invite other teams to join them. This interaction among the different teams promotes good relationships. In this way the kindred spirit is socialized in them since young.

Early the next morning, the cooked meal would be carried to the respective monastery and the food offered to the monks and the Sabbath keepers. When the meal is finished and the washing up activities are done, the presiding abbot of the monastery would give the youth a sermon and preach them to preserve the national culture, arts and literature and to hold the Three Gems (ရတနာသုံးပါး / Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) in reverence at all times. Another team member said:

*“After the members have had their meal and doing dishes has been finished, the presiding abbot administers the precepts. Then he also admonishes how to keep Mon traditions alive, like, to choose a Mon as life partner, to always use Mon language at home, to greet one another in Mon language on the road, and to learn saying of prayers in Mon language.”*

#### **6.1.4 Wa-gaung (July-August)**

In the accounts of most of the Hinthargone-resident Mons, it is found that on the full moon day of *Wa-gaung*, all the Mon families have been celebrating the Offering of the Gold and Silver pots since long ago. The reason is how long the cycle of rebirths is unknown. But one should aspire to living well in the remaining rebirths. Thus gold and silver pots are to be buried so as to pay up old debt while new debt is being incurred.

For this activity, a new earthen pot is wrapped in gold or silver wraps. Then gifts or offerings such as rice, oil, chili, and onion are put in the pot. The gifts vary according to how much the donors can afford. After that, the pots are taken to the respective monasteries and offered to the monks. They believe that by doing so, they would have abundant food in the hereafter.

A Mon grandfather aged 75 said:

*“Offering the Gold Pot means putting one’s usual food items in that pot as much as he could, like, rice, edible oil, chilli, onion, etc on behalf of each family.”*

Earthen pots were used in the olden days. But nowadays they offer various gifts of present day use to the monks. They use aluminum pots instead of earthen pots. It is because aluminum pots are stronger, useful, and modernized than earthen pots. Each donor comes to the monastery carrying a steel tray whereupon lie their offerings. Then the contents of the steel trays are emptied into a big aluminum pot and offered to the presiding abbot (see in figure 13). Afterwards he administered precepts and symbolic pouring of water for donations.



**Figure (13) Preparation made at the monastery for group-wise offerings**

Therefore, it can be concluded that present-day objects and forms of donation at monasteries on significant Buddhist days have become different from the past but their self- concept to respectfully request of the Three Gems (ဘုရား၊ တရား၊ သံဃာ ရတနာသုံးပါး) remains unchanged. In making merit, the elders’ activities tend towards the Supramundane (လောကုတ္တရာ / the way to escape from worldly desires and attachments) while young people try to fulfill their needs.

### **6.1.5 Tawthalin (August-September)**

Most of the Mon families of Hinthargone said that on the full moon day of *Tawthalin*, they celebrate the Food Offering Ceremony at the monasteries, specifically all Mon

monasteries since many years ago. First, a large resplendent boat has to be built with bamboo and covered with gold paper in front of the altar at the monastery (see in figure 14). Then *Pitaka* (ပိဋကတ် / the three repositories of Buddhist Scriptures) books are put in the boat requesting the presence of Buddha for worship.



**Figure (14) The golden boats and contents prepared in honour of the Buddha**

The presiding abbot of the *Sasanadippa* (သာသနာဒိပ္ပ) Mon monastery at Hinthagone explained that the honouring of the Golden Boat with *Pitakas* refers to the arrival of Buddhist missionary monks, Vens. Sona (သောဏ) and Uttara (ဥတ္တာ), before Christian era, at Suvannabhumi the Mon homeland, then the 4<sup>th</sup> century transcription by Suvannabhumi-native Ven. Buddhaghosa (ရှင်ဗုဒ္ဓဇောသ) of Sinhalese (သီဟိုဠ်ကျွန်း) *Pitaka* into Mon language for use at home. On the eve of the ceremony, offerings such as food, candles, flowers, and fruits are placed in the boat and Buddha's presence on the boat is requested (see in figure 15 a & b).



**Figure (15 a & b) Offerings being made to the Buddha**

Early the next morning, at dawn, offerings are made to Buddha. On that night Hinthargone-resident Mons, children, adults and the elderly, came to the monastery and light candles and joss sticks at the Buddha image now placed in the monastic compound (see in figure 16 a & b).



**Figure (16 a & b) Offering of lit candles and joss sticks to Buddha image placed in the boat**

Today, no more boats are built, but they still celebrate the Offering Ceremony. They go round selling gift plates, each for 300 to 500 kyats (2011), where the donors may put in the offerings and take them to the monastery. Some families buy plates from all the people that come and sell at their house but some buy only from the people of their own monastery. A 78-year-old Mon woman said:

*“On 14<sup>th</sup> waxing day of Tawthalin, the Mons dwelling hereabouts put their offerings such as food; lights and flowers into the large resplendent Gold and Silver Boat made of bamboo wickerwork and lit 1,000 oil lamps inside the boat in the same evening. Various items were offered to the Buddha the following morning. At some communities elsewhere honey and Catumadhu (စတုမရ) concoction were donated. Nowadays platefuls of fruit and cake are offered to the Buddha.”*

However, the use of the Boat has been restored at *Sasanadippa* (သာဿနာဒိပ္ပ) Mon monastery since 2011. The presiding abbot explained:

*“Once the Mon youths did not know about the origin of food offering to the Buddha in a boat a Mon custom might well have disappeared. Beginning 2011, I am renewing this Mon custom at this monastery, by having the donors build an artificial boat wherein offerings can be placed.”*

Religious activities of Hinthargone Mons clearly shows present-day objects and forms of donation at monasteries on significant Buddhist days have become different from the past but their self- concept to respectfully request of the Three Gems (ဘုရား၊ တရား၊ သံဃာ ရတနာသုံးပါး) remains unchanged. In making merit, the elders' activities tend towards the Supramundane (လောကုတ္တရာ) while young people try to fulfill their needs.

### **6.1.6 *Thidingyut* (September-October)**

*Thidingyut* is the month when the Buddhist lent ends and the monks are free to leave their lent period residence. The rains and winds have calmed and the weather is pleasant for travel. The monks are free from lent period restriction now and go back to their native places. One of the traditional cultural celebrations in *Thidingyut* month is the festival of lights. It originated in the legend of the Buddha visiting *Tavatimsa* (တာဝတိံသာ) for three months to preach *Abhidhamma* to *Santutthita* celestial being (Gotama Buddha's mother). It is the people of Earth welcoming the Buddha on his return to the human world with the festival of lights and fun fairs. The pagoda festivals, fun fairs, paying homage to the aged and offering of lights are celebrated throughout the whole Myanmar.

The majority of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone said that forgoing the lighting festivals, *Padaythapin* procession (*Padethapin Hle Pwe*) Ceremony is only celebrated in the month of *Thidingyut*. *Padaythapin* means tree-shaped stand where various articles of offering are hung. Every year, starting from 1956, on the day after the full moon day of *Thidingyut*, all the Hinthargone-resident Mons have been celebrating the *Padaetharpin* festival where they collectively donate cash and goods to the monasteries.

#### **6.1.6.1 *Padaetharpin* Ceremony**

According to most of the Mon nationals of Hinthargone sector, the *Padaetharpin* Ceremony which is celebrated on the day after the full moon day of *Thidingyut* is the most popular among the religious folk festivals of the study area. On the day when the

*Padaetharpin* tours the town, even shops and stores close for the day. It is apparent how much the people appreciate the festivity and how well they value that very ceremony of the *Padaetharpin* held on the day after the full moon day of *Thidingyut*. An owner of a store gave an account:

*"Since most of the Mon nationals working in the stores are participating in the activity, the stores have to be closed. Those who do not directly participate have to help those who do. Therefore, even shops which do not have workers who participate close on that day."*

All the Mon youths of Hinthargone said that each youth team has to set up one *Padaetharpin* and send it to the monastery which they always pay respect to. For example, if there are two teams that send meals to *Pon Htaw* (ပွန်တော့) monastery, the monastery will receive two *Padaetharpins*. In addition, people other than the youths such as married couples, grandparents and so on, form teams of their own to construct the *Padaetharpin*. The more people worship at a certain monastery, the more *Padaetharpins* the monastery will receive. Furthermore, the amount of cash on the trees can also vary. According to most of the Mon elders, there are altogether 7 monasteries that the Hinthargone-resident Mons go to, and about 13 *Padaetharpins* (2011) are sent to them.

Funding for the ceremony is from donors and the surplus cash from the *Waso* lent period saved especially for the event. The bank notes are arranged in a tree-like structure and delivered to the monastery. The robe, towels, soap, medicine, toothpaste, brush, etc are also tied to a bamboo frame like a *Padaetharpin*. All the Mon youth of Hinthargone give an account of how each group designs its own *Padaetharpin* in secrecy. They make their own designs and would not let others find it out. In earlier times, the bank notes used to hang from the branches like leaves of a tree but nowadays, they have more sophisticated designs. The *Padaetharpin* is planned for about a month in advance. They have to find brand new bank notes and exchange them with the old ones. They also need time for the design especially if they are sophisticated. Only team members take charge of things concerning the *Padaetharpin*.

A 28-year-old Mon youth said:

*“In preparing the Padaetharpin, a single member’s idea is never used, but the group decides on a design of collective choice, especially of a historical Mon theme, like, a ship carrying Three Pitakas, or the Brahminy duck, the symbol of Mon nationals.”*  
(see in figure 17a & b)



**Figure (17 a & b) Padaetharpin Designs**

On the full moon evening, a special pavilion is constructed in front of the house where they cook the meal and the *Padaetharpin* is placed there for all to observe and feel the virtue of generosity. Preparations are made to treat the guests with ginger salad, pickled tea leaf (*laphet*) salad and green tea (see in figure 18 a & b).



**Figure (18 a & b) Young Mons in traditional costume play host to guests**

On the full moon day at nighttime, Mons and non-Mons, not only from Hinthargone but also from other sectors in Bago such as *Mahar Zeti*, and *Kyaik Paw*, in their best attire would go around the pavilions to look at the *Padaetharpins*. On that evening, visitors to *Padaetharpin pwe* count about 5000. Guests would donate as much as they

could afford. Boys who entertain the guests usually wear the Mon traditional costume and girls wear blouses and traditional lower garments (*htameins*) accordingly. When there are fewer guests after 10:00 pm, these entertainers change into the dresses they fancy and go round to look at other pavilions. A 26-year-old Mon woman gave an account:

*“At night on pre-Sabbath day the group is divided into two—each with girls as well as boys. While one half entertains guests the other half do chores like preparation of Padaetharpin, setting up a pavilion and its decoration, and preparation of food for guests. At 7: 00 pm or 8: 00 pm on the full moon day the venue is very much crowded, while youths are found to be dancing for joy in front of the pavilion. As night deepens and most guests are gone the entertainers change clothes at their discretion to go viewing around other pavilions, where they might make cash contribution they can afford. Then they may go home to sleep or sleep at their pavilion on that particular night.”*

All the Mons of Hinthargone are busy the night through, buying new gifts with the additional money they received that evening, or arranging the cash in a suitable place on the *Padaetharpin*. All the *Padaetharpins* meant for the monasteries are taken to the building, a centre for offering dawn meal to monks during the lent period, in 6<sup>th</sup> Street by 1:00 am on the day following the full moon day of *Thidingyut* (see in figure 19 a & b). Then the *Padaetharpins* are paraded round and then sent to respective monasteries if the weather is rainless and favourable.



**Figure (19 a & b) The *Padaetharpins* found collected in front of the offering centre**

Three religious flags are carried at the front of the parade followed by offertory bowls, maidens in beautiful clothes and at the end of the line are young men carrying the *Padaetharpins*. At the *Padaytharpin* procession (*Padetharpin Hle Pwe*), all the participating Mon youths have to wear Mon traditional clothes (see in figure 20 a & b).



**Figure (20 a & b) Mon youths in traditional costume participate in parading of *Padaetharpin***

A 55-year-old Mon woman said:

*“On first waning moon of Thidingyut in front of the offering centre, 6<sup>th</sup> Street, with the weather permitting, all *Padaetharpins* are assembled, then paraded straight along Mon Sanpya quarter and sent to respective monasteries. In some years when *Padaetharpin* procession was infeasible due to bad weather they were just sent to the monastery concerned. One’s height is taken into consideration in the *Padaetharpin* procession. One who carries the offertory on her head has got to be highest, and she walks foremost. The *Padaetharpin* is last in the procession. It is handled by boys in turns, and they are followed yet by youths dancing to sound box music.”*

Since there can be variations in the costume of Mon females, the style of dressing of females among the team may differ from group to group and year to year. The color and design of dresses, the hairstyle, and footwear are discussed among team members

and they choose the best ideas that would be appropriate for the team. A 22-year-old Mon female said:

*“In parading the Padaetharpin, though all groups are required to use traditional costume they use different hairstyle, slippers, and make-up consultants. When the htamein (lower garment) colour has been decided upon an order is made with a supplier at Mawlamyine. This step is kept secret among groups. It was more competitive when awards were given to winners in the past. The groups kept the colour of their prospective htameins secret. Nowadays there are three groups taking Padaetharpins to Pun Htaw monastery but all female members use the traditional lower garments of the same colour (see in figure 21 a & b).”*



**Figure (21 a & b) Each team in its own uniform costume**

Formerly, prizes were given to the groups or teams which best portrayed the Mon culture but today, only acknowledgement certificates are awarded, due to the fact that there is too much competition which in turn causes the groups to be envious of one another. A 40-year-old leader of Mon youths gave an account:

*“When awards were first given they were meant for those teams which best portrayed the Mon tradition, whose attire best reflected the traditional costume. The beauty of the Padaetharpins also counted. However, a Padaetharpin will be grand and beautiful when a lot of money is spent on it. The costly Padaetharpin tended to win awards and led to unhealthy competition. So the awards have been stopped.”*

When the *Padaetharpins* reach the respective monasteries, the presiding abbot of the monastery would share the merits of the good deeds beginning from the *Waso* lent

period to date by the pouring of holy water. He would then preach to the congregation to maintain the Mon culture including ways and means such as marriage Mon to Mon, addressing and speaking to each other in the Mon language, and worshiping in Mon language. Thus young Mons are taught to become good and polite.

### **6.1.7 Sweepers' Association**

Most of the Mon youth of Hinthargone said that they have formed the sweepers' association in 2008, which take charge of sweeping and cleaning the *Shwemawdaw* Pagoda square. They also wash the square floor once every fortnight. Registration for membership costs 200 kyat (2011) and members make donations every week as much as they can afford. In regard of founding the association, a 24-year-old Mon youth leader explained:

*“We saw others sweeping the pagoda square. Then after consulting the elders, we got to have fifty members. We washes the square clean also. The association’s rules are: No argument, no quarrel among members. They must also shun improper clothing. Girls must wear htamein as lower garment. Membership fee is 200 kyat. To buy necessities for the association, one may donate what he or she can afford every week.”*

From the above, it is possible that Mon tradition and custom continues to survive and stand fall because of the Mon nationals' subjective ethnic identity. Therefore, the Hinthargone-resident Mons, by participating religious activities, can be said to be maintaining their ethnic identity.

## **6.2 Traditional beliefs of Mon national Living in Hinthargone**

In this chapter, why almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone believe in traditional spirits (*Nats*), how they accept and practise the rites concerned with them, how the results relate to their daily life and the influences of Mon nationals' spirit propitiation on their social environment were explored. Finally whether the tradition

of spirit propitiation is one of the most important factors in maintaining their ethnic identity or not was elicited.

Traditional beliefs are beliefs that arise and develop in the history of the social group, and that are transmitted from one generation to the next through those social processes that are denoted by enculturation (the social process by which culture is learned and transmitted across the generation) (Spiro, 1978). The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a country of many national races and people are given the rights to religious belief. The majority of the nationals are Buddhists; among them are the Mon nationals. The majority of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone are Buddhists. However, most of them believe in their traditional spirits propitiated from the time of their ancestors.

### **6.2.1 Why the spirit propitiation**

According to the interview, the majority of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone are Buddhists. But most of them still believe in their traditional spirits (*Nats*) for their economy and social activities. They believe in the resulting beneficial effects if they keep their promise made at the spirit propitiation. Concerning this case, a female Mon national said:

*“In our house, propitiation of the spirit is held when a family member is taken ill, or has an ominous dream. When business goes bad the spirit is invoked with a prayer. This results in success.”*

Another Mon man said:

*“When illness strikes, I make a spirit offering. But a pledge is not made in advance. It all depends on own economic circumstances. Sometimes my son living away sends me money for holding a spirit offering, and I comply with his wish.”*

A few male Mons believe in spirit propitiation less than the Mon women. But they do not abandon it. They obey the taboos of spirit propitiation very strictly. Most of the Mon women believe in spirit propitiation more strongly than the men, because

women feel a sense of fear more than men. They are afraid and worried and feel they can depend on the spirit to guard them. A 60-year-old Mon woman said:

*“According to our Mon national’s tradition, we must believe in spirit propitiation; it is a ‘must’. A friend of mine has got two sons. The elder son does not propitiate traditional spirit and he lost all in his business and he cannot earn enough to get by. The younger son, however, is doing well in his business because he believes in spirit propitiation”.*

Another Mon woman who is 55 years old said:

*“If the eldest son does not propitiate traditional spirit, he will get into trouble in every aspect of life. In other words, when one forsakes the spirit propitiation after performing spirit propitiation regularly, he may also be face with both physical and mental handicaps. He may become deaf or blind or his cheeks and mouth may get out of shape or his eyes may get crossed or slant. If one does not give due respect to the traditional spirit, it will surely punish his family in one way or another. Some of the offenders may go crazy and even insane totally.”*

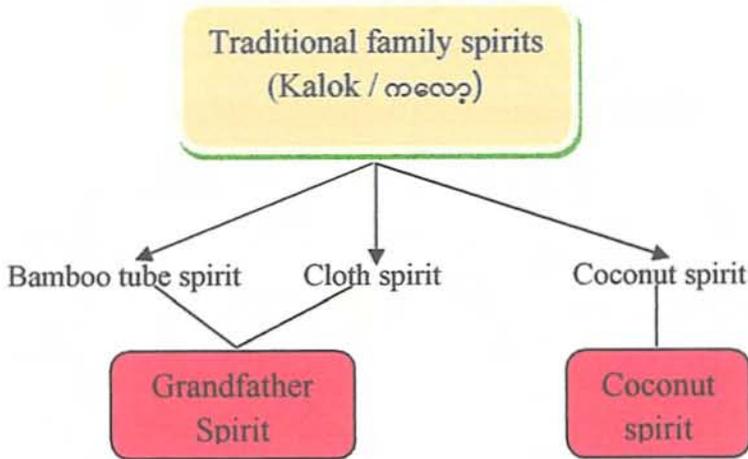
On account of the above mentioned factors, it is evident that Mon nationals in Hinthargone hold spirit offerings for their economic, social and health reasons rather than family tradition. There are two kinds of spirit propitiation among the Mon nationals of Hinthargone. They are traditional family spirits and Village Spirit (*Ywadaawshin Nat*).

### **6.2.2 Traditional family spirits (*Kalok* / ကလော့)**

For the majority Mon nationals residing in Hinthargone the traditional spirit is believed to guard the house and is known as the guardian of the house or *Ain-dwin-nat* in Myanmar language. It is called “*Kalok*” (ကလော့) in Mon language. By offering to the spirit, they believe they gain success in their economic and social

affairs and get protected them from the evil effects of bad deeds and harm. They can also get good fortune. But they believe that some misfortune can befall them if they do not do so.

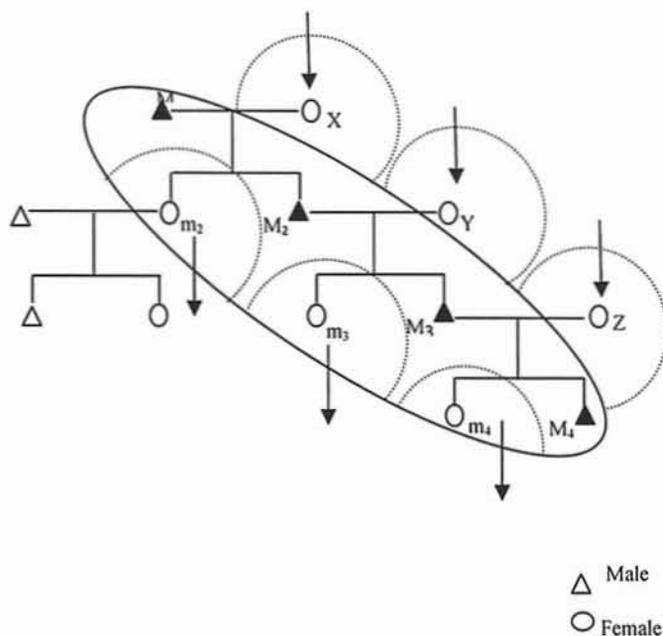
According to the answers given by the interviewees, most of them combine the “Bamboo tube Spirit” (*Wah-kyi-htauk-nat*) and the “Cloth Spirit” (*Inn-gyi-nat*) as the Grandfather Spirit (*Ahpho-nat*) (Figure 1). When they make offerings to the Grandfather Spirit, they make one offering to the “East Nat” because their ancestors came from Mon Region and Kayin Region to the east of Bago. The minority who propitiate the “Coconut Spirit” are the migrants from Hanthawaddy (Bago) (see in figure 22).



**Figure (22) Traditional family spirits of Hinthargone-resident Mons**

### 6.2.2.1 Spirit propitiation Legacy

All the Mons living in Hinthargone accept that the traditional spirit propitiation is inherited by sons especially the eldest son. As the daughters they do not inherit it when they marry. But they propitiate their husband’s traditional spirit when they set up house on their own. They do not need to do so while they still live with their own family. It is known that only the male Mons have the chance to inherit the legacy of spirit propitiation (see in figure 23).



An arrow shows a woman leaving or entering the group. Dashed lines indicate the group's extension or contraction as this movement occurs.

**Figure (23) Spirit propitiation Legacy of Hinthargone-resident Mon nationals**

### 6.2.2.2 The Coconut Spirit

According to the interview, a few Mon nationals residing in Hinthargone only propitiate the Coconut Spirit. It is known in Mon language as “*Minmagaray*” (meaning chief of spirits) which is “*Min-mahagiri*” spirit to Myanmar. This custom dates back to the fourth century during the early days of the Bagan kingdom. There was a blacksmith of great strength who was burnt to death at the stake by the king, who was jealous of his popularity. The blacksmith’s sister jumped into the fire to die with him. Together they became spirit and appeared before the king requesting him to give them a place to live in. The king gave them the right to live under the roof of any household. That is why householders put a green coconut whose juice is used to relieve the pain of burns as a sympathetic offering for the ones who died in fire (Min Yama, 1992).

The Mons began to propitiate Coconut spirit or “*Minmagaray*” in Bagan period. By King *Anawrahta*’s reign (1044-1077), many Mons were already in Bagan. King *Kyansittha* (1084-1113) is known to have brought about the unity of Mons and Bamars. He has convinced that “*Minmahagiri*” spirit helped him while he was

aspiring to kingship so he ordered that every house must keep a green coconut as an offering to spirits. Therefore, since that time the Mons have been worshipping the coconut spirit, also known as “*Minmagaray*” (Htwe Han and Ba Nyunt, 1991).

The tradition of Mon nationals to hang a Coconut dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Up to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Bumar houses in Central Myanmar are known to have a piece of white cloth and spirit pot fixed upwards of the main house post in worship of *Minmahagiri* spirit. No coconut is used but the spirit pot contains some water and flowers. Nowadays, Bamar houses all across the country usually hang a Coconut at home as offering to household spirit (*Eindwin Nat*) (Khin Maung Than, 2001).

All the Mon respondents said that the offering has to be made before the Buddhist lent. The Coconut dedicated to this spirit is hung on the house’s second post erected in the fore part of the house (*Ain-U-nat-taing*) (see in figure 24). The Coconut shelf is a little bit lower than the high shelf for the Buddha. A flawless green coconut with its stem intact is chosen for the offering. The Coconut is offered to spirit who was burnt to death, and Coconut water is considered a salve for victims who have been caught in fire. A red and white cloth 2 feet by 2 inches (*boundaw*) is tied to the top part of the coconut. Then it is put into a cane or bamboo framework (*Saing*) and hung on the house post near the altar. The piece of red cloth is meant to denote that the object wound with it is associated with spirits. Together with the Coconut is a fan, which is meant to cool a victim of burns.



**Figure (24) The Coconut Spirit or *Minmagaray* spirit shrine**

In making an offering to the Coconut Spirit, a plate of *Laphet* (pickled tea leaves) mixed with cooking oil and a bit of salt, a cup of water and a quid of betel are

required. On offering a Coconut to the spirit it is sprinkled with scented water and a prayer is done. Then the house wife prays that:

*“For making this offering, the grandfather (Ahphaygy) may look after the whole family to be free from harm, that our business may flourish and that everything may be well under the grandfather’s protection”.*

In making the offering, the male head of the house needs not do it. It can be done by the house wife herself or assisted by a person who knows the spirit propitiation. Generally the house wife takes this responsibility.

The coconut is replaced with a fresh one regularly at Buddhist lent and the end of it. Besides, when a member of the family falls ill or has bad dreams or omens, one must see whether there is anything wrong with the coconut. If so, a new coconut has to be replaced. Sometimes the coconut may dry up, or a shoot comes out or the stem gets loose. A new coconut is replaced at these times. If not, they believe that some harm will strike in the family. As to the business, a Mon woman said:

*“I sell grocery goods at the bazaar. Going there in the morning, I call upon the grandfather to bear witness. If so, my shop sells well. If not, it is all poor business.”*

#### **6.2.2.2.1 Taboo**

Most of the respondents mentioned that there are specific activities related to the house which are offensive to him since he lives inside the house.

- In the shrine, no candle lights, incense sticks must be offered. In the night, the coconut must be shielded from light by placing a curtain in front of it. The reason why the spirit dislikes the light and fire was that he was burnt to death tied to the magnolia tree.
- The coconut must be removed during childbirth because the house is polluted at this time.

- Similarly, it must be removed when someone dies, and it cannot be replaced for seven days, because the house is inauspicious (*a-mingala*) during that period.
- The spouses never sleep close to the spirit-post of the house - the post where the coconut hangs - because the brother and sister spirits will be offended by the sight of sexual activity.

### 6.2.2.3 The Grandfather Spirit (*Apho-nat*)

Almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone said that most of the Mon nationals residing in Hinthargone propitiate the grandfather spirit. In every household, at the east corner of the front of the house, they have to build a grandfather spirit shrine. It is built on one post or six posts (see in figure 25 & 26).



**Figure (25) The Grandfather Spirit shrine built on one post**



**Figure (26) The Grandfather Spirit shrine with six posts**

The roof of a grandfather spirit's shrine must be parallel to that of one's house although it can face whatever direction. In the shrine, they have to place carefully the food basket (ဝဲးဝဲးဝဲးဝဲး) of the grandfather spirit clearly marking the front and back (see in figure 27). Every time they make an offering to the grandfather spirit, they have to offer in a new food basket, and bamboo tubes. Making these offerings is like refilling the grandfather spirit's food. Thus their business flourishes abundantly. The bamboo tubes they put into the basket must be seven at least, increasing by one tube every time they make the offering. It must not be increased when the tubes reach number twenty.



**Figure (27) The Grandfather Spirit's food basket**

In some households, they also offer a vase of flowers and a cup of water. They light a candle and incense sticks when it gets dark. It is because they believe the grandfather spirit protects their economy and social activities.

Besides this, they put a lower garment (*longyi*), a ten yards piece of red and white checked cloth stitched at the top so that it can be worn as a long strip turban (see in figure 28), a white long-sleeved shirt, a white cloth to wind round the head and a ruby ring in a tin or plastic container with moth-balls to safeguard it from worms. It is called Spirit-property (နတ်ပစ္စည်းထုပ်). This container is carefully sealed so that rats cannot destroy it, and placed near the house-spirit post. Some houses placed it on the cross-beam (ထုပ်တန်း) of the house-roof (see in figure 29). Nowadays, they have replaced the ten-yard piece of cloth with only a two-yard piece because of the expenses.



**Figure (28) A shaman demonstrating tin and how to wear the long strip turban on to the head of grandfather spirit**



**Figure (29) Placing the grandfather spirit's container on the cross-beam of the house-roof**

It is opened to see if there are damages, when someone falls ill in the family, or when they have business problems, or when they are depressed because of some ill luck or bad omens. If they should find something wrong with the clothes on opening the tin, they have to change them with new ones and make the offerings to the spirit. The tin is opened only at the time of the offering. It must not be opened at any time. If so then everything must be replaced and make another offering is made again.

### **6.2.2.3.1 Proceedings for Spirit propitiation**

The offering to the spirit done in every household has spirit-property (နတ်ဝစ္စည်းထုပ်). Spirit-property means a secure package containing grandfather spirit's shirt, lower garment (*Paso*), turban, and a ring. The spirit propitiation goes according to the following stages:

- 1- Preparation for the offering
- 2- The things needed for the offering
- 3-The Spirit Propitiation (*Hakyi-halort* / ဟကျိဟလို့)

#### **1- Preparation for the offering**

The offering trays are prepared in the propitiation of grandfather spirit. The eldest son has to make a promise to give the grandfather spirit the same number of offering trays just as his parents did. The younger sons must think carefully how much they can afford from the beginning. It is a life time responsibility and a promise is made concerning the number of the offering trays. It is not needed to carry on as many offering trays as it had been done in their parent's time; for example, the parents may offer five trays of offering but they can promise only one there if he can afford only one tray.

According to the elaboration of some shamans (*nat-kadaw*), there are usually three trays, one each for the Village Spirit (*Ywadawshin Nat*), the East spirit and the grandfather spirit.

Because all the Mons who propitiate the grandfather spirit have been living in this area so they must offer one tray for the Village Spirit, another tray for the East spirit as their ancestors came from the East of Bago, and yet another tray for the grandfather spirit the propitiation of which is in progress.

Each of the trays must contain a husk peeled coconut with the top cut open, two or three combs of bananas, a betel nut quid, two candles, steamed glutinous rice and fried sweet pancake in a banana leaf-bowl, two bottles of alcohol, a cup of coconut water, a cup of water, a cup of sandalwood water, *nat-pan-nyo*, and *Eugenia* shoots and a betel leaf rolled and tied with thread. The boiled tortoise or chicken or eggs is put in the grandfather spirit and the East spirit offering trays.

The day before the spirit propitiation, the family must buy all the necessary things like coconut, glutinous rice, bananas, alcohol bottles and chicken. On the day of propitiation, the house-wife must keep ready steamed glutinous rice, fried pancakes, boiled whole tortoise or chicken with their stomachs cleaned or eggs (see in figure 30).

In preparing the flower vase for *Eugenia* shoots, firstly thread is wound round the neck of the vase. When someone from the family is ill, the thread is used like the sutta blessed thread (ဝရိတ်ကြိုး). It is tied round the wrists and the neck of the sick person. And then bamboos are cut in five-inch lengths and put into a basin of rice upside-down. Then *nat-pan-nyo* is put into them (see in figure 31).



**Figure (30) Preparation for the offering**



**Figure (31) Putting *Nat-pan-nyo* in bamboo tubes for the offering**

The number of these bamboo tubes is decided by the head of the house. The grandfather spirit food basket is woven with bamboo strips and tied at the top (see in figure 32 a & b). The front and back are marked with lime.



**Figure (32 a & b) Weaving the grandfather spirit's food basket**

Most of the shamans living in Hinthargone said that if a daughter still lives together with her parents even after marriage, the family has to prepare an extra tray of offering to the grandfather spirit for the son-in-law. In some houses, they prepare a tray for the shaman. It consists of a flawless green coconut with a spicate, three combs of bananas, and two thousand kyat (2011) or more as much as the housewife can afford.

## **2- The things needed for the offering**

Almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone said that the things needed for the propitiation of the grandfather spirit are according to the promise made when it was first offered. Generally, it is steamed glutinous rice, *mote-kyar-ze* (boiled rice flour balls in jaggery syrup); or *mote-si-kyaw* (fried sweet pancakes of glutinous rice); and tortoise which has become rare now. So any animal like a tortoise or a cock or two eggs may be substituted in respective offering trays. These must be accompanied by a green flawless coconut, three combs of bananas, betel nut quid, palm candy, husk peeled coconuts with the top of cut open, *nat-pan-nyo* (နတ်ဝန်ညို), pot of *Eugenia* (အောင်သပြေအို), thread and alcohol (see in figure 33 & 34).



Figure (33) The things needed for the offering      Figure (34) Nat - pan - nyo

### 3- The Spirit Propitiation ceremony (*Hakyi-halort* / တကျိဟလဝ်)

Hinthargone-resident Mons called the spirit propitiation *Hakyi-halort* in Mon language. The majority Mon nationals in Hinthargone perform spirit propitiation in front of their house rather than hold a spirit propitiation ceremony which is expensive. A shaman said:

*“A spirit propitiation ceremony costs at least Kyat 10 Lakh so it is usually dispensed with here. They often hold it on a grand scale in Mon state. At Hinthargone a person sometimes would hold a spirit propitiation ceremony if what he has called upon spirit to bear witness results in success. But such ceremonies are rare.”*

The majority of Mon nationals at Hinthargone said that there is no set rule as to how many times in one year spirit propitiation must be done. It must be done according to the pledge when one took on the responsibility. It can be done once in a year or two, three years time. If one’s economy is bad, it can be deferred by offering a plate of pickled tea leaves (*laphet*) with a promise to do the propitiation as soon as he can. But, such a request with the offering of a plate of pickled tea leaves has been done away with. The spirit offering at the promised time is carried out whatever; they are afraid that the grandfather spirit is angry and will harm them one way or another. Some do not make any promises but do the spirit propitiation when they can afford it.

Regarding this case, a Mon man said:

*"The spirit propitiation can take place anytime, but is followed according to one's promise. Our promise is an offering every five years, but the interval could be shorter. The financial circumstances at the fixed time of spirit propitiation also count. Sometimes it is nominal if one cannot afford an elaborate ceremony. It is followed, but guests are not entertained."*

Another Mon woman said:

*"The interval between one spirit offering and another is not limited. An offering costs about forty thousand kyat (2011), and we cannot do it every year."*

According to most of the Mons living in Hinthargone, the grandfather spirit's clothes and accessories need not be replaced with new ones every time spirit propitiation is held. Most Mons have them replaced with new ones according to the pledge. In regard of this a Mon woman said:

*"Last year, I made a pledge to have the grandfather spirit's clothes and accessories replaced with new ones if circumstances permitted. They did, and I supplied new clothes and accessories. If the spirit propitiation cannot be held at the moment the necessary money can be donated at the grandfather spirit's shrine beforehand."*

Most of the Mon nationals of Hinthargone said that the spirit propitiation is done only when the male head of the house is at home. The whole process is carried out by the head of the house and the shaman. On the day of spirit propitiation in the parent's house, the married sons had better visit him at home, but it is not compulsory.

At the spirit propitiation ceremony, each tray is placed in front of the house and is offered to the respective spirits separately. The Village Spirit (*Ywadawshin Nat*) is propitiated first and the grandfather spirit, last. They have to place grandfather spirit's cloth on the offering tray as this propitiation is done to him. The father or

son has to pour a symbolic amount of coconut water and alcohol into a bowl placed near it and lights the candles (see in figure 35). The trays of offertories are propitiated at separate places; the one for the grandfather spirit is made at the house while the other for son-in-law outside the house may be in the street. This is because the son-in-law spirit is different from father-in-law.



**Figure (35) Conducting the grandfather spirit shaman propitiation ceremony**

Then the shaman sprays scented water and prays to the grandfather spirit. She speaks in Mon language to the grandfather spirit that the family members have propitiated food and drink to the grandfather spirit, and that he will bless them with a flourishing economy, that the whole family may enjoy good health and wealth and be free from harm and bad fortune (see in figure 36). A propitiation of the grandfather spirit leads to a foretelling of one's socio-economic prospects and soliciting some help for him too. In regard of this, a shaman says:

*“Just after an offering has been made to the grandfather spirit, the shaman or one of her assistants gets possessed by him, lead to a question-and-answer session on the prospects of the household's socio-economic life. One possessed by grandfather spirit is made to wear his clothes and entertained to the food specially prepared for him. Then any question can be raised and he will give an answer.”*



**Figure (36) Blessing by the shaman propitiation ceremony for the family**

After that, the propitiation continues at the ancestral shrine built outside the house. The food basket is carefully placed at the shrine post in the right direction. The basin of bamboo tubes with flowers too is there. Then scented water is sprayed and a candle lit. Then it is offered to the grandfather spirit, saying they are offering him his food basket and beg the grandfather spirit to look after the family's welfare. As they say their prayers, they put the bamboo tube filled with *nat-pan-nyo* into the woven basket and have them tied at the top. When the candle light goes out, they put the basket on the shrine according to the lime mark in front and back. Then only the spirit propitiation is finished. The visitors who came that day are fed with steamed glutinous rice and fried sweet pancakes.

The grandfather spirit propitiation is done by the shaman in the morning or the afternoon when she is free or convenient for her. Most of the persons who earn their living as shamans are usually elderly women who do not speak the Myanmar language. The minority of shamans are males. Most of the shamans at Hinthargone are born of teacher-pupil relationship, and the minority performs as a hereditary occupation. Besides, the Mon nationals at Hinthargone recognize one as a shaman only after he or she has learnt the art and a Master offertory has been presented. Concerning this case, an 80-year-old female shaman said:

*"The shaman is of two kinds: those born of teacher-pupil relationship and those working as a family line. I belong to the latter. I accompanied my grandmother shaman to homes holding the spirit propitiation. I helped her and learned on job. By age 16, I became a shaman. Satisfied with my performance, my grandmother prepared the required "Master offertory" for my*

sake. The other kind of shaman comes out of the teacher-pupil relationship, making a teacher of a practising shaman and learning from his or her. After learning enough, he or she is blessed with a "Master offertory" prepared for his or her sake by his or her teacher. From that time onwards she can practise shaman work. The Master offertory is compulsory in becoming a shaman."

#### 6.2.2.3.2 The Grandfather Spirit Legacy

Most of the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone described that the tradition of making the offerings to the spirit is carried out along the male line of the family. Therefore when the father of a family died, the possessions of the spirit (နတ်ပစ္စည်းထုပ်) are moved to the eldest son's house and he must carry on the spirit propitiation. It is called the grandfather spirit legacy. Taking on this responsibility of offering to the spirit was done only at the time of the spirit propitiation.

Sometimes, the packet of spirit-property is received by a son other than the eldest. Regarding this, an old Mon woman said:

*"My husband was a middle son. After his father died, the spirit's property was duly transferred with the spirit propitiation to the eldest son, who is responsible for holding this ritual. Strangely the shaman was possessed by the spirit, who declared he would like to remain at the middle son's home, rather than relocate to the eldest son's home. So we have retained the spirit-property, promising to hold the spirit offering once a year. We have kept our promise to date."*

In some households, when the father died before the eldest son is mature, the widowed mother continues to carry on the spirit propitiation and the eldest son officiates. This is because she worries that if her family fails to propitiate the traditional family spirit, some kinds of illness will fall upon them.

In some households, upon the father's death, the eldest son who is obliged to perform the spirit offering marries and lives elsewhere with his own family. But he has to come and make a spirit offering at his own expense at his parents' house because the spouses live and work away from the house.

Again there are some younger sons who have not taken the responsibility. But if they should wish to propitiate the spirit after their marriage in their own houses, they can do so when the propitiation is being done in their parent's or the eldest brother's house or the uncle's house from their father's side. His brothers wishing to share spirit propitiation, each for himself, may buy the items of grandfather spirit as contained in spirit-property and bring them to the spirit-offering. Then just after making spirit propitiation, it becomes effective.

Some join the spirit propitiation when it is done in their parent's or the eldest brother's house or the uncle's house from their father's side, sharing the expenses. Sometimes the relative's house may be in another town, like Paung, Zingyaik. Then the money for expenses of spirit propitiation may be sent ahead of the offering day.

#### **6.2.2.3.3 Discarding the custom of Spirit propitiation**

Spirit propitiation is compulsory in every house with spirit property. For various reasons family members would want to abandon that custom, so when the household head dies the spirit-property is thrown away at the banyan tree in the monastery believing it is where spirits (*Nats*) reside in togetherness. Some put the spirit-property in the coffin of the worshipper on his death, believing they have discarded it. They worry the spirit would harm them in anger if the spirit-property is thrown away elsewhere. A certain married Mon woman said:

*"When I was widowed with two sons, the elder son was aged four yet. In following the spirit propitiation, one needs to take a pledge to make a number of spirit-offering and I must not fail to keep the pledge. So when my husband died, I could no longer afford to offer so many gifts in so many trays. The spirit-property of my*

*husband was sent to the monastery. The elder son grew up and got married. When his uncle (husband's eldest brother) held a spirit-offering, he offered to separately hold the tradition of spirit propitiation for himself."*

But if the widowed mother has no sons, she may go and discard all the spirit-possessions to the monastery or put it in the coffin of the dead person and stop the spirit propitiation.

#### **6.2.2.3.4 Resuming Spirit Propitiation again (နတ်ပြန်ကောက်ခြင်း)**

Almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone described that there are several ways forsaking the spirit propitiation. A few Mons living in Hinthargone do not believe in the propitiation of family traditional spirit. It is fanatical and does not accept any wrong. Therefore, they stopped doing the spirit propitiation. Concerning this case, a Mon national 45 years old who is the eldest son of his family said:

*"We do not believe in spirits, but there will be no offending them.  
Our household worships the Buddha only."*

Thus it shows that the Mons at Hinthargone are found to have different beliefs so that they do not follow the traditional spirit propitiation.

According to most of the Mon women nationals of Hinthargone said that some families could afford the expenses of spirit propitiation when they first made the pledge. But later when they could not afford the expenses, they had to abandon it by going and giving up spirit propitiation at the monastery. A 64-year-old Mon male said:

*"We held the regular spirit offering till my father's death. But it has become too expensive for us and has been forsaken since. So, when he died, the spirit-property was put in his coffin."*

But later, when misfortunes like a great illness or madness happens to an inmate of the house or when their business is poor or illness should occurs in the family,

they consult the fortune teller or the shaman who tells them that such misfortune has come to the family because they have failed to propitiate the traditional family spirit. Therefore they had to resume the spirit propitiation again. Relating this case, an 80-year-old Mon shaman said:

*“In Hinthargone, there is a house where I conduct the proceedings whenever an offering to the grandfather spirit is held. When the male head of the house first got to take up spirit propitiation separately, he had had to incur the expenses needed for it. Later his financial circumstances declined and he tried to end his propitiation by entrusting it with the monastery. Then one of his sons went mad, and he has since duly renewed his spirit propitiation.”*

Moreover, another female Mon who propitiates the grandfather spirit claimed:

*“Some Mons, down and out economically, are exhorted by a possessed shaman at another’s spirit-offering ceremony to renew their traditional spirit propitiation, and they tend to comply forthwith.”*

Resuming or reclaiming back the traditional family spirit propitiation is done when a family member is doing the spirit-offering or when a relative like an uncle from the father’s side is doing it. This is the ceremony of taking back the pledge of grandfather spirit propitiation.

#### **6.2.2.3.5 Taboo**

All the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone practise the following taboos in spirit propitiation.

- The box containing the grandfather spirit’s possessions must not be opened except at the time of the spirit propitiation. If it is opened, they must do spirit propitiation again.

- A spirit shrine is a venerable place; so it must be kept clean and dirt must not be thrown near it. No drain must be allowed to flow towards the shrine.
- Almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone have a tradition of changing the attire of the grandfather spirit and his shrine in the event of funeral ceremonies. It is done before the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the death. But if the shrine is made of concrete, the host must make an apology to the grandfather spirit since the shrine was built. Nat propitiation is required to be done at a funeral because the family members have made a pledge to propitiate the grandfather spirit provided that the sick person recovers. Although the sick person died, the family members must make an offering in fear of being harmed by the traditional spirit.

The following taboos are adhered to by every Mon house, whatever spirit its members worship.

- A coconut must not be brought into a Mon house. If they do so, then the coconut must be cut open and the water offered to the grandfather spirit.
- The things offered to the spirit such as the tortoise, chicken, boiled rice flour ball in syrup, fried sweet pancakes must not be brought into the house. If they are brought into the house, they must be first propitiated to the spirit before eating. The tortoise must be driven out of the house, saying “go away *leik-poat*”. If it gets into the house the tortoise has to be cooked and offered first to the grandfather spirit. Reason: while the Mon Prince *Attha* and Maekhla Devi contested for power the tortoise, Maekhla’s vehicle, ate up the deer tail the prince had brought along, leading to his defeat. Thus the Mons hated the tortoise and never allow it into their house.
- When chicken is cooked at home, the feet, liver and head must be offered to the grandfather spirit first before the family can eat it.

- A pregnant woman must not sleep in front of the household spirit post where the spirit clothes tin is kept. If she did so, the place must be washed down with traditional shampoo.
- Visitors also must not sleep in this room where the spirit post stands.
- The married daughter of the family also must not sleep in this room because after her marriage and living with her husband, she worships her husband's spirit which is not the same as her family spirit. But when the married son comes to the house, he can sleep in the family spirit post room because he propitiates the same spirit as his father.
- Spirit propitiation must not be done on Wednesday, full moon and new moon days, unauspicious days, and during the lent period.
- It must not be done in the house if there is a death or funeral in the street. It can be done only after the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the death.
- The majority of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone follow the practice of spirit propitiation at marriage. It is performed by the side of the bridegroom because it is a symbolic action to introduce the daughter-in-law to grandfather spirit and to put her under his protection.

### 6.2.3 Village Spirit (*Ywadaushin Nat*)

All the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone said that the majority propitiate the Village Spirit in addition to the traditional family spirits. The Village-spirit is referred to alternatively as the *Ywadaushin Nat* (see in figure 37). This spirit shrine is at the entrance of the Mon model village road number 6.



**Figure (37) Village Spirit (*Ywadaushin Nat*) shrine**

The conception of the Village spirit is almost identical with that of the grandfather spirit. If properly propitiated, and not offended, he will guard and protect from danger all people born on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, i.e everybody.

There are two types of spirit festival (*nat-pwe*) in the shrine. Firstly, there is one regularly, and at least annually, performed at certain seasons and within specific months. Once a year, after the paddy has been harvested, in the month of Pyatho (January-February), a big spirit festival is celebrated in honour of to the Village spirit. It is celebrated only at the time the propitiation for the Village spirit. The whole villagers collectively have to contribute to the expenses of the festival. Secondly, there is one privately performed by a family or small work group when they are successful in their business. It is celebrated for one day or two depending on how much they can afford. In the propitiation festival, they also propitiate the Thirty-Seven spirits.

Most of the Mons also do offerings of flowers, candle lights, incense sticks and pray at the Village spirit shrine before they set out on a journey, that the journey will be free from harm and the business may be successful. Thus the Village spirit must be informed and permission asked for any events in the village. In regard of this a married Mon woman said:

*“At home, whatever the current business the grandfather spirit and Village spirit are called upon to bear witness. My husband is a carpenter. Soon enough, a customer appears to hire him. With new income we make propitiation as has been promised.”*

### **6.3 Funeral rite of Hinthargone-resident Mon nationals**

The majority Hinthargone-resident Mon nationals said they hold funeral rite as Buddhists and according to traditional Mon customs constituted of Buddhist beliefs and values. Mon funeral rite has three parts, namely: preparation of corpse, setting up the corpse's shelter, holding funeral rite and burial or entombment.

### 6.3.1 Preparation of corpse

It is again divided into ‘corpse-preparing team’ and ‘proceedings of corpse preparation’.

#### 6.3.1.1 Corpse-preparing team

According to most of the Mons living in Hinthargone, most Hinthargone-resident Mons inform, on the death of a person, the corpse preparing team, called ‘*Zawana Group*’, which takes responsibility till the burial of the corpse is completed. This team has five members including those who are knowledgeable about Mon-tradition corpse preparation but take not fees. But they can be offered money at the discretion of funeral holder. It is altruistic non-profit (*Parahita*) work. On this a 65 year-old Mon skilled in preparation of a corpse said:

*“I have more than ten years of experience in corpse preparation. A team includes up to five persons for convenience. Formerly we were only three, inclusive of our mentor. When some members are away a team can suffer inconvenience. Hence the five-member team is organized. We do not give labour for money, but take the pocket money given by funeral holder.”*

A Mon householder added:

*“When a person dies in Model Mon (Mon Sanpya) we inform Zawana Group just as soon. They hold themselves responsible from start to end. Members are Mon, so no need to worry about Do’s and Don’ts. After the burial some affordable money is given to them.”*

#### 6.3.1.2 Proceedings of corpse preparation

According to the majority of Hinthargone-resident Mons, the corpse-preparing team comes over quickly on receiving news of a dead person and asks the funeral holder to collect two earthen pots (whose water will be used for washing the corpse), some thread and twelve sheets of multicoloured paper for paper streamers and other necessary things to decorate the corpse shelter. To wash the corpse, it is put on the

washing platform, i.e. a crude bamboo platform. A mat may be used instead of the bamboo platform. The placement of a mat or bamboo platform between the corpse and house floor means it is no longer associated with this house. Between the two earthen pots, one contains water and the other traditional herbal shampoo. Firstly the corpse is washed, so as to cleanse it of impurities connected with its old life, brushing it with traditional shampoo from legs to head as opposed to head to legs in case of a living person. Then the corpse is washed with water out of the other pot, just like the former washing with traditional shampoo. Thus the two types of washing discriminate the living from the dead. At some homes the relatives help out in washing the corpse.

Some corpse-preparing members explained that after the corpse is washed the children, helping one another, dry it with towel, brush it with a kind of tree the bark and root of which are used in making a fragrant paste for cosmetic purpose (*thanakha*) paste and scented water and dress it, but in reverse order. The nether garment for it has a stitch line along the middle to convenience the dressing. Then the corpse's thumbs and big toes are tied together respectively with strings made up of thread which is eight times the handbreadth of eldest son and hair of daughters. If the dead person has no sons the thread is not used. In case of a female, the corpse's hair is brushed with coconut oil and knotted. Into the corpse's mouth goes a currency note of kyat five hundred or kyat one thousand (2011), while its face is covered with a handkerchief (see in figure 38 a & b).



**Figure (38 a & b) The preparation of the corpse to put in the specific place**

Most of the Mons living in Hinthargone said that a spirit-basket is placed at the head of the funeral-holding home. When the funeral procession starts for cemetery the spirit-basket is carried by eldest child in case of a dead father and by youngest child in

case of a dead mother. The spirit-basket carrier wears white cloth at the waist and a white turban also. That basket contains: a coconut to wash the face of the corpse just before its burial, a set of dress of dead person, his utensils like pipe, betel box, rosary, glasses, a new earthen pot to be broken up, on removing the corpse from the funeral-holding home, to signify the dead person does not belong to this home no more. Moreover, four cubits of white linen and another two cubits of white linen for turban are placed in the spirit-basket. If the corpse is to be buried, two candles also are put in that basket; they are to be lit when the corpse goes down into the grave (see in figure 39 a & b).



**Figure (39 a & b) The spirit-basket being put beside the corpse**

The majority of Hinthargone-resident Mons said that a small kitchen is set up at the foot of the corpse, until it is put in the coffin, to cook food for the dead separately. This signifies the dead has nothing to do with the living. Nowadays a separate kitchen is not used, but a plate of ready-made meal is put, and renewed, near the corpse until the seventh day of death (see in figure 40).



**Figure (40) Feeding the corpse rice and curry**

Among Hinthargone-resident Mons funeral rite is held in quick order when a person has died so as not to let the floor become warm. Nowadays a dead person's children are often away, so the corpse is kept for a day at the minimum and three days at the maximum to await children's return.

On this a Mon householder said:

*“Mon custom dictates that the corpse not be kept long enough to make the floor warm. Nowadays most children (of the dead person's) are usually working at faraway places, so it is kept for three days mostly.”*

### 6.3.2 Setting up the corpse's shelter

The majority of Hinthargone-resident Mons replied that a corpse's shelter means a decorated place for the dead so that visitors to the funeral-holding home might feel apprehension at the prospect of repeated rebirths, at the same time pondering on eight Paths, four Noble Truths, and six sense objects. It is called “*Jaungnein*” in Mon. There is no need to set up a corpse shelter if funeral rites are to be held immediately.

On this a 78 year-old Mon said:

*“Being devout Buddhists, the Mon set up a corpse's shelter to provoke apprehension at the prospect of continuing rebirths in line with the Buddha's teaching.”*

To construct a corpse's shelter, firstly the flooring is prepared by a master who is to be presented with an offering of three hands of bananas, a coconut and some cash. The construction has four levels in each of which eight four-cubit bamboo strips and six two-foot bamboo strips are matted. The four-cubit is the estimated length of a person; and the eight bamboo strips represent the Eight Path, namely: Right way of viewing things, right way of thinking, right way of saying things, doing what is right or proper, right way of living, exertion in the right direction, right attention, and right abstraction of the mind. The six bamboo strips are representative of object of vision, object of hearing, object of smell, object of taste, object of touch and object of conceptualization. The four tiers represent *dukkhasacca* (ဒုက္ခသစ္စာ), *samudayasacca* (သမုဒယသစ္စာ), *mirodhasacca* (နိရောဓသစ္စာ) and *maggasacca* (မဂ္ဂသစ္စာ). Thus the

corpse's shelter is built to completion tier by tier. On this a corpse-preparing Mon said:

*“Preparing the flooring is called “Placement on the kanarkhon (ကန်ခင်းခံ)”. Firstly four pieces of strings are needed to be placed on the kanarkhon at four places. Each string is to be twisted as such using a fourfold length of thread (each length corresponds to the height of the dead person's eldest child). Those four strings will be used to tie up the corpse on putting it in the coffin. Then, on a mat lying on the four strings is put a blanket, half-way to one side, so that when the corpse is put on it, the extra breadth will be wide enough to wrap up the corpse.”*

According to Hinthagone-resident Mons, six posts, i.e. three posts on each side, of the four-tier flooring is set up. Those six posts represent the six sense objects, the elimination of which would supposedly make one realize *nibbana*. A piece of white cloth, fixed at the top of the posts, serves as the cover. Then the corpse's shelter is turned into *Dhamma* house. Voluntary helpers, having gathered flowers from nearby the house, make long strings of flowers with thread and hung it around the corpse's shelter four times or in four rows. On preparation of a corpse a Mon householder said:

*“To set up a corpse's shelter, old volunteers, especially Mon are helped by way of making paper streamers. They in turn are helped by youths, like, picking flowers.”*

Then a ring is hung with a string tied to the top cover, right above the dead man's nose. It is meant to serve as a wayfarer's guide for the dead man to reach up to the abode of celestials, and later to be possessed by the spirit-basket carrier (see in figure 41a & b).



**Figure (41 a & b) The corpse put in a particular shelter illustrating some Buddha *Dhamma* teaching**

### **6.3.3 Holding funeral rite**

The majority of Hinthargone-resident Mons said that on arrival of all relevant relatives the corpse is put in the coffin to be then lifted onto the motorcar. Just before going into the coffin, the dead person is paid obeisance to by his or her offspring and other relatives. The coffin has to be cleansed beforehand, using one bamboo tube containing traditional shampoo and another bamboo tube containing water. Then the corpse's shelter is broken down, the corpse is wrapped with the mat and tied up with the strings. A special new ladder is made already so that the dead person, now cut off from the house, can leave using his or her own ladder. The number of rungs has to be even, like, two or four (see in figure 42). The special ladder has to stand at the foot of the original staircase. The coffin is taken down the staircase the lower part first. As soon as the coffin reaches the ground a child of the dead person breaks up the two earthenware posts, to signify the dead person belongs to this house no longer.



**Figure (42) Two bamboo tubes and a new ladder for the corpse**

However, some connection needs to remain on behalf of the spirit so that a piece of thread is connected between the coffin and the house. A monk out of the group of monks which conduct Buddhist rites holds that string. After the corpse is put on the car the spirit basket and a meal packet are placed on the coffin. On funeral day the spirit-basket carrier wears the four-cubit white cloth on his or her waist, and another white cloth as a turban. White cloth signifies the person is in distress and unlike others (see in figure 43). After the funeral the white cloth is offered to the monastery. The spirit-basket carrier follows behind the corpse. On this a Mon national said:

*“Formerly in a procession on foot the spirit-basket carrier follows the corpse. Nowadays in a motorcade he or she rides in front in the hearse.”*



**Figure (43) The carrier of the spirit-basket**

### 6.3.4 The burial

The majority of Hinthagone-resident Mons said that the coffin, taken down from the hearse, has to go around the dug grave three times before placement in it. Then the coffin is opened and the corpse’s face is washed with cleanest coconut water gotten by breaking up, in one stroke, the coconut contained in the spirit-basket. There is no rule on who must wash the corpse’s face (see in figure 44). On this a Mon traditional said:

*“The broken coconut shell is thrown backwards by the corpse face-washer. If it falls with inside looking up, he or she would be reborn as a human and quickly at that; and if it falls with downwards, the dead person would be reborn taking a long time. Such is the Mon belief.”*



**Figure (44) Breaking the coconut to wash the corpse's face  
with the coconut liquid**

Then the dead person's cloths spread over the coffin are passed over the coffin three times before bringing them back home. That procedure is called *meekyaw*, signifying the dead person's spirit is being called back home. Afterwards the dead person is pushed a little aslant towards right (in case of a dead male) or towards left (in case of a dead female) before closing up the coffin to bury or entomb. If a burial is planned, the special ladder is taken to the grave and set up there to be used on descending. Moreover a candle is lit on the edge just outside of the grave and another candle is lit in the grave, so as to help the dead person go into light, to a good destination. After the funeral the funerary ladder and bamboos of the corpse's shrine are to be destroyed at the cemetery. A Mon householder said:

*"Back at home the dead person's clothes are put where the corpse lay until seventh day of the death, where after they are given away to a poor person. Paper umbrellas and streamers are included in offering alms-meal to the monks, and after the water-pouring rite those articles are taken to a monastery or pagoda for its sojourn."*

### **6.3.5 Other kinds of death**

According to most of the Hinthargone-resident Mons, funeral rites are held forthwith when a person meets with a violent death due to lighting strike, or accidents like motorcycle collision. A coffin is not used; the corpse wrapped with a mat is put on bamboo matting made of eight bamboo strips and carried to the cemetery by hand,

not on shoulders. At the cemetery the corpse is not buried, but cremated with the use of petrol.

When a woman dies in labour the funeral rites are done forthwith. The corpse, wrapped in a mat, is carried to the cemetery on bamboo matting made of eight bamboo strips. Mother and still-born are buried separately.

### **6.3.6 Taboos**

- When the corpse's shelter is in use on the floor of a silted house, crockery or any other articles are not to pass underneath. If they did, they would not be fit to be used, it is believed.
- The dead person shall not lie underneath the house rafter lest he would be conceivably required to still bear the burden of household.
- If a death takes place on full moon day the funeral rites are carried out forthwith as the next day is deemed improper.
- If two death occur in one day the funeral rites for later death are carried out first. Then the funeral for the first death must follow.
- A funeral procession should not proceed straight to the cemetery from the front of the funeral-holding house because it is auspicious place fit for living persons only.
- If a death has occurred outside the village the corpse must not be taken into it otherwise that deed would harm the village.

### **6.3.7 The relationship between social-welfare service associations and funeral rite**

According to most of the Mons living in Hinthargone, they have founded some associations to support whatever bereaved family among the members of such associations. The aim of such associations is to provide financial support for bereaved families in carrying out funeral rite properly. They are known as social-welfare service associations. The majority of members of these associations are Mon nationals although the minority non-Mons.

Most of the Mons said that these social service associations have been in existence since their older generations such as their grandparents' time. At that time, when a poor family lost one of its members, the people in the respective ward had to give them necessary service to carry out a burial successfully because the family members could not afford to hold the funeral ceremony on their own expense. Thus, most of them realize the key role of community service that managed to facilitate an important and inevitable human activity. Having got the good idea of supporting community service to a poor family to hold funeral rite with no worry about the cost, they first founded the social welfare service association. A leader of such an association said:

*“If a poor family has lost one of its members, most people do not visit the house to comfort and console the bereaved family. Therefore, we have founded the social welfare service association to contribute member fees to the fund. The more crowded the house, the more secure and encouraged the bereaved family becomes.”*

When they first founded the association, member fee for each household was one kyat (1960) only. However, when they found out that the family was too poor to serve the mourners with meals, the members started contributing rice in addition to the assigned member fee. Later, it was commonly accepted to provide a bereaved family with not only the member fee but also some rice. A member of the social service association said:

*“We don't need to worry about the descent burial after our death once the association has come into existence.”*

Nowadays, there are altogether seven associations that have already been founded in Hinthargone. Of these seven associations, four of them are rice associations while the remaining three are Motor Vehicle association, which is aimed to give monetary help to the funeral holder; *Ngo-than-kyar* association, which is aimed to start collecting association fees as soon as a person is known to be dead; and the rest *Kyant-khaing-ye* association, which is aimed to give monetary help to the funeral holder. The member fees assigned by these associations differ from one another. Some associations assigned one viss of rice and five hundred kyat (2011) as contribution fee

to the bereaved family while another assigned one viss of rice and three hundred kyat (2011) and the rest one thousand kyat with no rice (2011).

A typical social welfare service association is made up of from at least 150 households to at most 300 households. Some Mon households tend to join two or three associations as members depending on their financial status. Regarding this fact, a 78 year old lady who has joined more than one association explored her opinion like this:

*“I have joined all the social welfare service associations because I can get much more support for my funeral.”*

According to the rules of the social welfare service association, when a household wants to join the association, the head of that household can inform the chairman and the secretary of the association. When there is a seriously ill one in it will be rejected. Rejecting or accepting as a member can be done according to the decision made by the executive committee member. The initial investment of the association was 4000 kyat (2011).

And then, every head of a household must list the names of all members of his family. These members must be those who live together in a house and who live on the same earning. In a household, anyone who has completed twelve years of age can fill in the member list and can access to the right of receiving the support after death. Regarding the rules of the association, a member said:

*“If married offspring lived together with the parents in the same household, only one family of such married offspring can access to the right of the association because he or she is supposed to responsible to support to the elderly parents. If there is more than one family living together with the host parents that family has to join the association as a new member by following the rules of the association and giving assigned fees.”*

Most of the Mons living in Hinthargone said that if a member fails to give member fee for one event, it is to be expelled from his or her association. If a member is on a long trip to other places, he or she needs to delegate member fee to a parson on his

behalf. Most of the Mons living in Hinthargone said that an important factor to be taken into account is that no illegal gambling is to be done in the funeral house. If there is a gambling group being formed at the funeral ceremony, the association withdraws all the rights including the contribution fees from the bereaved family.



**Figure (45) Giving member fee to the bereaved household through the social welfare service association executive committee**

Almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone said that if a member household loses one of its members, the bereaved family has to immediately inform the chairman, secretary and executive committees of the association about it. In addition, they also need to let the informant to know about the death of the family member. And then, the informant has to go round the ward to make all the people know about the death and he also has to remind them to give contribution fees to the bereaved family on which day before the seventh day donation ceremony for the deceased one. The informant does not need to give contribution fees. Then the executive committees including the chairman of the respective social welfare service association have to accept the contribution fees of the member at the bereaved family's house. They accept the fees according to the list of the members. This social activity is known as *Ah-Thin-Thai-pay-the* in Myanmar (see in figure 46). An association chairman said:

*"We have committees for collection of association fees (a-thin-htaing a-phawe) whose significance is dictated by the number of funeral service associations the home of the dead person has registered in. If the funeral holder has registered in three associations there will be three committees for collection of association fees. Every household has registered in from one to five associations."*



**Figure (46 a & b) The executive committee receiving the member fee**

Such duty can either be performed on the day when the deceased passed away or on the eve of the seventh day donation ceremony for the deceased one. The former type is done for a poor family while the latter for a well-to-do one. If the bereaved family is rich enough to spend the cost, the members of association coming to give them contribution fees are served with meals. A typical meal served to the mourners is rice and steamed fish accompanied by two side dishes namely cassia buds soup and chicken with gourd. In case of those who can't afford the cost, they manage to arrange meals for the committees who perform their duty at their home.

According to Mon nationals living in Hinthargone, the close relatives and neighbours of the bereaved family come to the seventh day donation ceremony celebrated for the deceased. The visitors are usually served with rice noodle in fish gravy (*Mohn-hin-gha*) or pilaf (*Dan-Pauk*) depending on the financial status. Sometimes it is common practice that the contributors to the funeral cost are recognized for their kindness by the bereaved family members who return them with some kinds of gifts such as glasses, cups, plates and napkins.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOCIALIZATION OF MON NATIONALS IN HINTHARGONE IN MON TRADITION AND CUSTOM

Culture is the means by which people adapt to the environment. It is transmitted from generation to generation as children are taught the ways to behave in their society. This process by which children acquire their culture through learning is called enculturation or socialization. Through this process, the child learns the rules of his or her culture. The child learns the values of the society and increasingly becomes motivated to act according to those values (Rosman & Rubel, 1995).

In this chapter, almost all the Mons in Hinthargone have their children taught and trained so that each child would live as a Mon given to abiding by the cultural mores of tradition, would know of the Mons' social values and beliefs, would desire to maintain his or her own culture as a Mon patriot, and would be able to adaptively live with other ethnic groups. In this chapter how the Mons in Hinthargone maintain their ethnic identity, how they have children socialized through Mon traditional activities, and what are the results of that socialization are elicited.

#### **7.1 Connection between socialization and subjective ethnic identity**

The majority of Mon nationals in Hinthargone said Mon parents' training of their children in Mon cultural habits is concerned with their subjective ethnic identity only. In other words, they believe only subjective ethnic identity can make for the maintenance of one's culture. One male Mon informant age 79 responded on the importance for the parents to be conscious of their Mon identity. He said:

*“One's children becoming Mon or not is concerned with his consciousness only. If a person perceives him-self as Mon national, he would teach his children Mon customs. But a Mon who speaks Myanmar language and disregards Mon customs would not teach them to his children.”*

One male Mon informant age 75 responded on the importance of parents' self-concept on ethnic identity:

*"I have one brother who lived together with his family in the centre of Bago. His wife is a Mon national yet their children cannot speak Mon language because the parents themselves do not perceive Mon ethnicity so that they teach their children to speak Bamar language in daily life. The reason for this issue is that the parents perceive themselves as Bamar national and not as Mon nationals. So, Mon ethnicity is on the basis of their attitudes or mind but not the locality".*

On this, a Mon mother with two children said:

*"For my children, to become a Mon national is subjective, and this condition is decisive. To become a Mon, it is no use just wearing the Mon costume. With majority of such people the Mon would go extinct."*

Interviews conducted at Hinthargone reveal that most Mons have their children undergo socialization by four age groups, namely: infancy to age 5; age over 5 to 10; age over 10 to 18; and age over 18.

## **7.2 Socialization from infancy to age 5**

According to the response of most Mons living in Hinthargone, Mon parents teach their children from infancy to age 5 how to speak Mon language and conduct themselves in accordance with Mon tradition and customs.

### **7.2.1 Teaching the spoken Mon**

Almost all the Mons in Hinthargone said they teach their language since infancy how to speak Mon language for two reasons:

- (1) Those who accept themselves as Mon national speak Mon language. On this a 49-year-old Mon woman said:

*“One of my friends, a Mon woman, lives in Kyaukmyaung, Yangon. It is their residence for a variety of reasons, but her family with self-identification of Mon ethnicity speaks Mon at home. Her children speak Myanmar language to their Bamar friends, but when I visit or phone them, they speak Mon.”*

Another Mon male added:

*“A Mon national speaks Mon only if he values his language. If not, he will speak Myanmar language. His valuation of Mon language comes from his subjective Mon identity.”*

(2) Most Mons nationals in Hinthargone replied that while using spoken Mon contributes to the maintenance of Mon culture they also believe that it pays more for a Mon to be bi-lingual (in Mon and Myanmar language). On this a 48-year-old Mon mother, a stall keeper, said:

*“A Mon who speaks both Myanmar and Bamar languages will meet with convenience in every situation. If a child who has been taught spoken Mon approaches a visitor at home, he or she can be called back in Mon so that the visitor would not feel inconvenienced. Again, I sell garments at the market. I know Mon language, so when a Mon customer approaches I greet her in Mon. She often buys my wares perhaps feeling a Mon should favour another Mon above others.”*

Moreover, a Mon who can use spoken Mon usually gets help from another in faraway places. On this a 40-year-old Mon woman said:

*“Last Year, I went to Kawthaung (Taninthayi Region) where my husband was hospitalized. I had no friends there, but there also was another Mon patient. His family heard us speaking Mon language and readily offered help. Unfortunately my husband died and they gave me every help until my husband was properly buried. If we had not known spoken Mon they would not have known us as Mons.”*

Therefore most Mons in Hinthargone teach their children since infancy using Mon language. They lovingly speak to a child in Mon whether the latter knows it or not, so that he or she may become familiar with the Mon language and its sounds and easily master it upon growing up. On this a Mon mother in Hinthargone said:

*“All members in the family lovingly speak to my daughter, since age 3 months, in Mon to familiarize her with spoken Mon. She was always spoken to in Mon so she understood well though she could not respond in Mon language yet. Now at age 2, her listening skill has so developed that she needs a little teaching only to speak Mon language.”*

To become familiar with Mon language, especially most Mon mothers in Hinthargone give their child at age 3 or 5 days its Mon name and started using it. The first son is given its name at age 5 days, other children at age 3 days. A boy's name has 'Min', equivalent to "Maung" in Myanmar language, and 'Naing', equivalent to 'U' in Myanmar language after he had been ordained as monk, at the beginning of his name. A girl's name has 'Mi', equivalent to 'Daw' in Myanmar language, at the beginning. However, Mon names being difficult to pronounce, Mon children enrol at school with Bamar names. Therefore, the Mon nationals in Hinthargone have both Mon and Bamar names. On this 29-year-old Mon mother with a daughter said:

*“My daughter is named 'Peindevichan' (ပိုင်ဒေဝိဆာန်) in Mon language which is used at home. At school friends and teachers will find that name difficult to pronounce so she has been enrolled with the name of Myanmar form, Panndevichan (ပန်ဒေဝီချမ်း). ”*

Mon children since age 1 to 2, when verbal skill usually begins, are taught Mon words and phrases of everyday use. To them, Myanmar language is easy to learn once they enrolled at school but Mon language is difficult to learn for its need to be voiced with the tongue rolled up.

The Mon words taught by parents to children are as follows:

meaning	Myanmar pronunciation	Mon pronunciation
grandfather	Ahpo	Hpanoh (ဖနီ)
grandmother	Ahpwa	Manoh (မနီ)
father	Ahpay	Aphoe (အဖယံ)
mother	Amay	Amah (အမေး)
father's / mother's elder brother	Bagyi	Anah (အနား)
father's / mother's younger brother	Ulay	Amoo (အမူး)
father's / mother's elder sister	Gyidaw	Anyah (အညား)
father's / mother's younger sister	Dawlay	kyee (ကျီး)
younger brother / younger sister	Nyi / Nyima	Daeh (ဒေး)
elder brother	Ako	Akoe (အကိုး)
elder sister	Ama	Amah (အမ)
daughter	Thamee	Kunwu (ကွန်ဝု)
son	Thah	Kunbalai (ကွန်ဗလိုင်)

Moreover, a child is usually taught very common Mon words such as come (kalein / ကလိနံး), give (kaw / ကော); names of human bodily parts such as ear (kathoe / ကသိုး), nose (mone / မုနံး), mouth (paing / ပိုင်း), and eye (mawh / မော့); and other words such as cat (akoda / အကိုဇာ), dog (kalay / ကလေး), pig (kalwait / ကလွေ့), and ox (kalee / ကလီး).

A Mon mother said on teaching of Mon language thus:

*“When we are out walking to and for with baby, we teach it Mon words for pig or cattle upon meeting them. Mon language is a bit difficult to learn, but Myanmar language is easy to learn once a child is enrolled at a Basic Education school on reaching school going age. No special arrangement is needed to teach a child Myanmar language.”*

Hinthargone has no pre-Primary school conducted in Mon language so parents try hard to teach spoken Mon to their children at home. In this activity, mother is mainly

responsible because father is out most of the time earning his livelihood. A 35-year-old Mon woman, married to a Bamar for certain circumstances and in the habit of residing at parents' home and that of parents-in-law by turns said:

*“The whole parents' family speaks Mon. I wish my daughter to have self-concept of Mon ethnicity, so she has been taught in Mon since she was only months old. When she speaks Myanmar, she is asked to repeat what she said in Mon. she is given a treat to do so; it takes effort teaching her like that. A parent with the consciousness of Mon identity teaches the children as such since their infancy. At my parents'-in-law home my child speaks Myanmar. She knows which people are to be spoken to in what language.”*

Hinthargone has a majority of Mons so Mon children who are young enough to play by themselves speak Mon to one another. On this a Bamar woman residing in Hinthargone said:

*“Mon children, even when they have been taught Myanmar language, speak Mon in adulthood”.*

### **7.2.2 Teaching behaviour conduct**

Being Buddhists, the Mon parents teach their children since age 2-3 how to conduct themselves religion-wise. Saying one's prayers like “Okasa---” and Nine Attributes of the Buddha are taught to them in Mon. A Mon mother said:

*“My daughter has been trained since age 2-3 to do like what I do beside me when I say my prayers at night before going to bed. Then she is made to do obeisance to us parents. Now her religious conduct is quite satisfactory.”*

In addition, Mon children are usually told religious stories before going to bed, and taught to raise their hands in touch on seeing pagodas and how to offer food to monks on their alms-round.

Thus a Mon mother said:

*“My child is 3 years old. When a monk comes for alms-food she firstly does obeisance to him and then asks for the small container. After an adult has put some curry in it, she takes and places the small container inside the monk’s alms-bowl. Then she raises its palms in touch in worship. It is initiating us. A child knows no end in learning.”*

Instructions given to a child aged 4-5 are: to regularly visit a monastery where it must first do obeisance to the Buddha, then the abbot before proceeding with other things; not to have a meal without first offering a small portion of it to the Buddha; not to pass a monk’s shadow on the road but stop to let him pass by; and to respectfully speak to those older than itself.

### **7.3 Socialization from age over 5 to 10**

Most Mons nationals in Hinthargone responded that Mon parents train their children age over 5 to 10 in dressing as a Mon national, speaking Mon language, reading and writing Mon literature, and participating in Mon traditional activities.

#### **7.3.1 Mode of Dress**

Most Mon nationals in Hinthargone said Mon parents socialize their children since age over 5-6 by way of dressing them in Mon national costume for *Padaytharpin* (tree-like wooden stand on which offerings are hung) procession and other ceremonies. Especially at the *Padaytharpin* procession the Mon children wear their national dress made at considerable expense of their parents. Requirement for their wearing of national dress is meant to make them participate in Mon festivals through their awareness of Mon cultural traditions and to develop in them the consciousness of Mon identity. The children are only happy going out in a new dress, let alone their maintenance of Mon ethnic identity and Mon culture.

On this a Mon mother remarks:

*“My children have been asked since age about 6 to participate in the Padaytharpin procession. Of course, it costs me some money to make new Mon costumes for them. However, they might come to appreciate the Mon traditional dress as Mons, and be conscious of Mon customs.”*

### **7.3.2 Use of spoken Mon**

The majority of Mon dwellers in Hinthargone said that most Mon children enrolled at age 5 at government-recognized schools speak Myanmar language. But after school has given over they speak Mon the rest of the time because all family members at home speak Mon and the language is in everyday use at *Monsanpya* in the east of Hinthargone. On this a 7-year-old Mon said:

*“I have been taught since infancy to speak Mon at home. Only when I went to school I learned to speak Myanmar. I speak Mon to Mon students at school or Mon friends at home. But I speak Myanmar language to Bamar friends.”*

### **7.3.3 Teaching Mon literature**

Almost all the Mon nationals in Hinthargone send their children to the informal opened in summer to learn Mon literature (see in figure 47 a & b). This activity is carried out because of the fear that the Mons might go into extinction one day. The Mon literature is difficult to learn and such schooling usually begins at age 7-8. On this a 48 year-old Mon man said:

*“Mon literature is too difficult to follow at age 5. Such a child might be going to informal school for fun only. Only after two years of learning could a child sit for examination if he wishes to.”*



**Figure (47 a & b) Photo shows Mon children attending the Mon literature class in summer**

According to the interview, Mon literature classes go on at *Sasanadippa* Mon monastery (situated across the motor road at Bogone ward) and at Basic Education Primary School at Monsanpya (the eastern part of Hinthargone ward). That course is informal and part-time, opened during school holidays in summer. Opened around mid-April, the Mon literature class, running from 8:30 am, then 11:00 pm - 4:00 pm, lasts for about two months, closing on full moon and new moon days. When the course is finished, the students have to sit for examination, and those declared passed with credit are given awards at the Mon National Day ceremony. Some students attending the course remain in eligible for taking the examination for one reason or another.

Mon literature class, being not government-recognized, does not have formal prescribed texts. Mon abbots in a leading role choose suitable lessons to be taught at the class. The Mon primer is taught first, to be followed by historical facts of the Mon such as their overtime kingdom, famous kings, court officials and heroes, birth stories of the Buddha, and outstanding Buddhist person (*Bhadra Devi* / ဘဒြဒေဝီ). The teachers always put emphasis on the need to keep Mon literature alive forever on the part of young students. On this a 9-year-old Mon girl of Third Grade said:

*“Among Myanmar monarchs was one ruling queen only. She is shinsawpu, the Mon Queen. She built pagodas and her reign was very efficient.”*

Students of Mon literature class numbered about 200 at the school and about 100 at monastery in 2012. The numbers are much different because many parents send their children to the class at *Monsanpya* only for fear of their coming to harm in traffic accidents on the motor road. The presiding abbot leads the class at the monastery. The number of teachers at the school is inconsistent; there were six teachers in 2012. Mon teachers from Mon State used to come to the Basic Education Primary School at *Monsanpya* to help. Nowadays, as a growing number of Mon youths know Mon literature in addition to their school education they teach Mon literature to others for free so that their Mon culture may live on. On this the leading Mon teacher, age 45, of the class at *Monsanpya* said:

*“An ethnic group with its own spoken language and literature functioning will never go extinct. An ethnic group without its literature will lose the spoken language over years. Such a group with spoken language only cannot last for long. Therefore the children are being taught Mon literature, and they don’t have to pay anything for that.”*

#### **7.3.4 Participation of the children in activities based on traditional customs**

A majority of Mons in Hinthargone said that Mon children since age 5-6 are being trained to join the association for cooking alms-food for Sabbath day. A 6-year-old Mon girl said:

*“As my elder sister did, I joined the association for offering Alms-food on Sabbath Day. Weekly we go around happily for donations rain or shine. Our return we are treated to snacks.”*

Moreover, most of the Mon parents and elders have their children enjoy, since age 6 or 7, socialization by way of making them participants in *Padaetharpin* procession (see in figure 48 a & b).

In regard of this a Mon mother said:

*“I have three children. I spent money to have them participating in parading of Padaetharpins since their childhood. They were happy going around in new attire. As they have been taught since childhood how to perform their respective duties they will need little admonition as bachelors and maidens on how to keep Mon traditions. Their instinct is just strengthened to know of the need to preserve one’s culture. That is my own experience.”*



**Figure (48 a & b) Photo shows Mon children participating in the *Pataytharpin* procession**

#### **7.4 Socialization from age over 10 to age 18**

Most Mons living in Hinthargone responded that most children have been trained to maintain their Mon literature for long and to participate in Mon traditional festivals for their association. Therefore, they on reaching age over 10 usually develop the personality of preserving the Mon identity. According to Mon parents, most of their children on reaching age over 10 come to have a self-concept of love for their ethnicity and literature, resulting in their desire to learn Mon literature and also their consciousness to preserve Mon culture.

On this a 13-year-old Mon girl of Seventh Grade, an outstanding student at Mon literature class, said:

*“I learned Mon literature since age 6, for reasons like: not to be ignorant of Mon literature as a Mon; to understand Mon films and songs; and to speak Mon as well as read Mon writings of others.”*

On this a 13-year-old Fourth Grader said:

*“If satisfied only with the ability to speak Mon, one would find it difficult to become Mon-literate. I have learnt Mon literature so that the literature as well as ethnicity would not go extinct in the distant future.”*

Their children aged over 10 to 18 are trained in Mon literature, spoken Mon, and the habit of participation in traditionally held activities.

#### **7.4.1 Teaching Mon literature**

Most of the Mon parents train their children to attend the informal school opened in summer, and always tell them that one who is not Mon-literate would lose social acceptance. On this a 12-year-old Mon Fourth Grader said:

*“I should be ashamed to admit ignorance of Mon-literate to a visitor at home, or to mix with other Mons in such a state. That is why I have learned it.”*

According to the response of Mon nationals in Hinthargone, the children are fed sweets and cakes donated by well-wishers everyday so that they might become interested to learn Mon-literate. Moreover, parents by way of motivation use various means such as giving the children pocket money or buying them new clothes so as to motivate in them a willingness to learn Mon literate.

There also are other motivation done by chairman and members of Mon literature and culture Committee and young Mon adults. Therefore *Monsanpya* in the east of Hinthargone have street signs in Mon script. In fact, Mon literature is used in any event related to the Mon, e.g. Mon National Day celebration and *Padaytharpin*

procession (see in figure 49 a, b & c). A 13-year-old female six Grader, born of Mon father and Bamar mother, said about learning of Mon literature thus:

*“I learn Mon literature because of my interest in it, and to fulfill my wish to read Mon script at Mon national Day celebration and, Padaytharpin procession. Moreover, I receive kyat 200 (2012) as pocket money on going to Mon literature class.”*



**Figure (49 a, b & c) Mon writing seen at Mon traditional festivals held at Hinthargone**

However, a minority of Mon children are only interested in playing for fun and do not attend the Mon literature class. On this a 12-year-old student commented:

*“At the Mon literature class in summer girls number more than boys. After lunch recess, boy students usually do not come back for afternoon session. One learns Mon literature based on one’s consciousness.”*

Most Mon nationals in Hinthargone responded that the children learn Mon literature up to age 18 only because afterwards, they have to go into business and a few of them go to university and have little free time to learn Mon literature.

#### **7.4.2 Mode of Dress**

The majority of Mon nationals in Hinthargone responded that the children age over 10 come to have an awareness of their responsibility to keep Mon culture because of various ways of socialization. Therefore they go to social events and festivities dressed in the traditional Mon costume.

A Mon mother with children said:

*“I made my children since age seven wear Mon costumes on going to ceremonies. Now at age 15, they go dressed in Mon costume to any event related to the Mon. They have become familiarized with it. The other day a monk’s discovering event was held. When the time came to invite the monk, all group members went off in Mon traditional dress to bring the monk. That is testimony to their being united.”*

#### **7.4.3 Participation of Mon children in activities of Mon tradition and custom**

According to most Hinthargone-dwelling Mon nationals’ response, children since age 10 are usually trained in activities such as: offering food to monks and Sabbath-keepers at dawn; joining the association concerned to prepare curries on the night before; taking bedrolls, offerings and other things to parents and grandparents already at the monastery and receiving Buddhist precepts administered by the monk. Thus they know how to properly speak to a monk and become familiar with the monastery. On this a 16-year-old boy remarked.

*“Since age 10 I have been used to accompanying parents to the monastery every Sabbath day during Buddhist lent and receiving Buddhist precepts there.”*

They are also asked to hang offerings on tree-like stands for *Padaytharpin* procession to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> waning of Thadingyut (September-October), and to entertain guests with delicacies on the evening before. On this an 18-year-old Mon boy said:

*“At age seven, I joined an association based in some other street, but at age sixteen, mother recognized an alms-food cooking association. We did not get bored going on alms-rounds. At that time we were young and adults led us. Now that we are adults, it is our turn to lead the association.”*

Most of the Mon parents always teach their children in associations to always be considerate towards younger persons.

On this a Mon mother said:

*“I have five children. Each has been trained since childhood to be considerate towards younger siblings. Thus, when they joined alms-food offering associations later on that considerateness continued. For example, sometimes little food is left for them after the Sabbath-keepers have been feasted. Older children let the younger ones eat the remaining food, and they have their lunch back at home.”*

#### **7.4.4 Making friends**

Most Mon youths in Hinthargone responded that as children are admonished by parents to participate in activities of Mon tradition and culture they become friends Mon to Mon mostly.

A minority claim they make friends with non-Mons whom they usually meet at university. On this an 18-year-old Mon girl at university said:

*“I have non-Mons for friends. When invited, I go to their donation ceremonies and birthday, but I have Mon friends too.”*

Many youths in Hinthargone are likely to meet more Mons than other nationals for their participation in Mon traditional activities. Moreover, from working together in teams, most of the Mon youths have a chance to meet and come to know each other well. Therefore, they are more likely to choose a Mon as life partner. On this an 18-year-old female university student said:

*“Even one Mon out of ten is unlikely to marry a non-Mon. At Monsanpya in Hinthargone are Mon associations related to Mon traditional activities. For most Mon boys, if one finds a love interest, he joins the association she belongs to, and tries to be on affectionate terms with her.”*

## 7.5 Socialization from age over 18

### 7.5.1 Mode of Dress

The majority of Mons in Hinthargone responded that because of socialization of their children in various ways, a Mon on reaching age over 18 usually develops a personality that is conscious of the need to maintain their Mon identity. Therefore the Mons in Hinthargone take pride in performing the rites of Mon tradition.

Most Mons age over 18 in Hinthargone wear their traditional dress in social activities: Mon National Day, Union Day, and religious festivals. Wearing of that costume at *Padaytharpin* processions and monastic ceremonies is meant to have others recognized their Mon ethnicity. On this a 24-year-old youth said:

*“At whatever ceremony of the Mon held in Hinthargone, most Mons wear the Mon costume as a habit, without consulting one another. It is like second nature to them on that date of celebration.”*

### 7.5.2 Use of spoken Mon

For their socialization since childhood, the majority of Mon nationals accept themselves as Mon nationals. They are proud to be Mons. On spoken Mon a 19-year-old Mon girl said:

*“A Mon girl wearing a Mon traditional costume but ignorant of spoken Mon will be looked down upon. So all Mons should be able to speak Mon language.”*

When they meet a Myanmar friend, they happily talk in Myanmar. When Mons meet each other, they greet and speak to each other in Mon in front of other non-Mon nationals without shyness and self-consciousness. On this a 20-year-old female university student of Mon national said:

*“I never feel ashamed to speak Mon; that is my own language. At university, I greet a Mon friend in Mon on meeting him or her. If we do not behave this over long term, the Mon language will go extinct, to be followed by Mon culture.”*

When the researcher is interviewing Mon nationals at their home almost all of them were speaking Mon among themselves. A female Mon vender also said:

*“When I go to Monsanpya for business the Mon families are heard speaking Mon among themselves.”*

Moreover, the majority of Mon nationals in Hinthargone persuade their children to speak Mon as well as listen to Mon songs. A 19-year-old Mon girl who sings Mon songs at annual Mon National Day ceremony held at *Monsanpya* said:

*“I sing Mon songs every year at Mon National Day celebration to honour Mon ethnicity. For training myself, my mother buys me music tapes.”*

A Bamar walking through that ward said:

*“Whenever I am walking in the ward I hear Mon homes playing Mon audio tapes on Dhamma.”*

The Mons in Hinthargone responded that they not only speak Mon themselves but also indirectly persuade others to do so. In the east of Hinthargone (*Monsanpya*) densely populated by Mon pedlars on their rounds cry out the names of their wares in Mon. Non-Mons are a minority there. Again, non-Mon pedlars patronized by Mons gradually pick up bits of Mon language. On this a 46-year-old pedlar said:

*“I have been a pedlar around Monsanpya for 15 years. I did not know spoken Mon in the past but I do now after learning bits of Mon language from Mon customers.”*

According to the view of almost all the Mons, most of the non-Mons living at *Monsanpya* have lived for various reasons so long in this region that they have become familiar with the Mon language. They are able to speak Mon because it is everyday language used by almost all the people at *Monsanpya*.

On this a Mon man said:

*“A non-Mon national originally resided in Monsanpya no 4 road. When a Mon residing in the same ward addressed him in Myanmar, he pretends not to hear and replies only when greeted in Mon”.*

According to the interview, most of the Mon nationals married to non-Mons usually speak early on two kinds of language: Mon language and Myanmar language in the house. In fact, when those non-Mon nationals lived together with their spouses in this quarter for a long time, they understood Mon language. Female non-Mon nationals in Hithargone can speak Mon language fluently in daily life. According to some Mon youths, the cause of this subject is that they always buy necessary needs for the family in the shop at Hithargone. Regarding this case, a Mon respondent who opened a store in the house said:

*“A female non-Mon national married to a male Mon national lived in this ward, and then she lived together with her husband in Monsanpya no. (8) Street. One day, when she buys some thing from my store, I was rather surprised by her Mon speaking skill because she can speak fluently Mon language more than native Mon nationals”.*

### **7.5.3 Participation of the Mon adults in activities of Mon tradition and culture**

The majority of Mons in Hinthargone responded that because of socialization of their children in various ways, they take pride in performing the rites of Mon tradition. Most of the Mons in Hinthargone said that the leading Mon adults help young Mon adult age over 18 along by teaching them how to lead the conduct of traditional festivals and social events, to have what attitude in team work, to be considered as a leader, towards younger people, and how to make a sacrifice. The majority of Mon nationals in Hinthargone are enthusiastic about participating in social associations. But they participate up to age around 40 because they have little free time due to household duties. The minority of them give services up to age 45 in their association

because they are free of responsibility for household duties. Once over age 40, they give general supervision but not a leading role. On this a 65-year-old Mon man said:

*“We in adulthood had been leaders in the conduct of social affairs. As a leader of alms-food cooking team I necessarily stayed awake the whole night. Now, we are too old and it is the youth’s turn for those duties. We only supervise the youth in social activities.”*

Almost all Mon women in Hinthargone participate in those social associations up to their marriage only. They stop to do so because of family duties when they get married around age 25-30.

From the above, it is concluded that most of the Mons in Hinthargone have also increasingly become proud of their ethnic identity as a result of socialization. The socializing process perpetuated by parents for their children help maintain the Mon culture at Hinthargone. Therefore socialization, an important process to create their self-concept is the basic requirement to conserve the Mon culture in the long run.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study is to explore what cultural traits have changed and how the remaining cultural traits are being maintained by Hinthargone-resident Mons in their coexistence with other nationals. In Barth (1969) theory, he analyzed that criteria of membership is most crucial in defining ethnic identity. Those criteria are composed based on self-ascription as the critical features of that group. Those criteria can be found in their overt signs like dress and diet and in covert like beliefs and values. Moreover, these criteria can be found in social structure which is constituted of those beliefs. Demographic perspective is taken into consideration by him in regard of ethnic identity. Based on that theory, key findings appropriate to the study objectives are discussed by way of linkage. The findings of other scholars are discussed comparatively to bring out the reasons for similarities and differences.

#### **8.1 Socio-demographic characteristics**

Barth (1969) said that the identity of an ethnic group depend on population size of the people living in that region. In this study, the Mons constitute a majority 65.32% in Hinthargone while the full-Mon population is 99.38%. Moreover, most of the Mon parents perceive themselves as Mon nationals so that they socialize their children in Mon traditions and customs to preserve Mon identity. If they, even while living in integration at Hinthargone, were devoid of subjective ethnic identity, would not have socialized their children through teaching of spoken Mon and Mon literature, dressing themselves in Mon costume and participating in traditional festivals. Then those traditional customs would have disappeared. Another fact is that even though parents at Hinthargone are trying to develop subjective ethnic identity in their children, if the Mon population were a minority their social activities would not last always. They could be assimilated into other cultures. The two factors are mutually inclusive and only one factor out of the two cannot make for the long existence of Mon culture. In case of Mon nationals, it is found that the subjective ethnic identity creating Mon culture and the largest number of Mon nationals in the society are able to support the

conservation of Mon culture. Therefore, the largest population is one of the most important factors for maintaining ethnic identity.

Makabe (1979) demonstrated that ethnic group identity is weakened with social mobility in both occupation and residence. He stated that the Japanese in British Columbia shifted during World War II to Canada in groups for scarcity of jobs. They could not socialize their children because they lived not in group but in wide dispersion in Canada. Therefore, they lost Japanese identity in their second generation.

In contrast, Hinthargone ward included in Bago Township was the settlement area of Mon nationals and non-Mon nationals who migrated from distant regions for different reasons. Since first settling down in Hinthargone, Mon nationals have been living in a group there, with rice cultivation as their major livelihood. Moreover, the majority profess themselves as Mon nationals and they are able to preserve their cultural heritage. From the above, it can be said that Hinthargone-resident Mons devotion to the site with a large integration of Mons and subjective Mon identity are essential factors to maintain Mon culture. In Makabe's study, he did not consider subjective ethnic identity is an essential factor to maintain Mon culture.

Households with male Mon married to non-Mons constitute 36.28%. According to the interview, most of the Mons said that it is culturally constructed that the male Mon has the chance to inherit the legacy of spirit propitiation. Therefore, they may consider themselves responsible to maintain the Mon identity, and choosing Mon women as life partners, may be maintaining Mon culture. In so doing, Mon men with stronger subjective ethnic identity than Mon women have more Mon-to-Mon marriages than Mon women.

Pon Nya Mon (2007) suggested "education" level is one of the most significant factors in explaining the level of Mon identity: participants with lower level of education tend to show higher levels of Mon identity compared to those with higher levels of education.

Similarly, practice of Mon traditional customs at Hinthargone is connected with subjective ethnic identity, not with education and Mon parentage. There graduates are 21.10 % only and 78.9% are non graduates among Mons. Thus subjective ethnic identity could be claimed to contribute to the continual existence of Mon cultural traits even while few Mons at Hinthargone are graduates.

In Niang Pan Hla's study (1994), it was stated that Mon migrants coming into Myanmar first settled in Hanthawaddy, Patheingyi and Bago but latter on shifted elsewhere for various reasons. He said that today Hanthawaddy (Bago) Mons are located at *Zingyaik* and *Kawthein* villages and nearby places according to their dialect. In this study among the immigrants of Mon nationals into Hinthargone, most of the earliest arrivals were from *Zingyaik* village, Mon State. They shifted to the environs of *Zingyaik* after the disintegration of Hanthawaddy (Bago) and then relocated back to Hanthawaddy, probably explaining the majority of migrant Mons from that area. In more support of this, when Hinthargone-resident Mons make offerings to the Grandfather Spirit (*Ahpho-nat*), they make one offering to the "East Nat" because their ancestors came from Mon State and Kayah State to the east of Bago. Therefore, it is possible most of the Mons living in Hinthargone came from Mon Region and Kayah Region.

## **8.2 The relationship between symbol and ethnic identity**

In Barth's theory (1969), ethnic identity is associated with a culturally specific set of value standard. He said that every human society had developed its symbolic boundary as ethnic identity with the national's values and beliefs. Similarly Hinthargone-resident Mons interpret the Mon traditional costume as symbols of their values and beliefs, resulting in Mon ethnic identity. Moreover, their folklore explains how the Brahminy duck has become a symbol of the Mon, and why they respect that symbol. And their life history explains why they believe in Buddhism. Therefore it can be said their ethnic identity is influenced by their beliefs, values and cultural symbols.

### **8.3 The influence of subjective ethnic identity on Mon identity**

According to Barth's (1969) theory, the boundaries of an ethnic group are constituted through 'self-ascription' as the critical features of that group. Similarly, in the study of Phinney (1990) the self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging and attitudes toward one's group are elements of the ethnic identity in diverse cultural groups. Moreover, "Ethnic identity is part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the values and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255).

In this study, Hinthargone-resident Mons accept that subjective ethnic identity only is criteria of membership for keeping the Mon identity. For most Mon nationals in Hinthargone, the subjective Mon identity is being influenced by their self importance, pride of homeland that was Hanthawaddy formerly ruled by Mon kings, love of their place of birth what with Hinthargone boasting a large integration of Mons. A Mon with such a conception, wherever he or she lives, speaks Mon and practises Mon traditional customs, also teaches his or her children to do likewise. When forced to migrate to other places for economic reasons, the Mon usually choose a site that is distant in the least from Hinthargone so that they might be able to participate in Mon traditional festivals at that ward. Another such person, being unable to participate in Mon celebrations for his residence being away from a Mon community, yet teaches Mon language to children and speaks Mon among the family at home. But a minority of Mons in Hinthargone do not have that conception and no matter where they live, Mon language is not spoken by that person or among his or her family. He or she does not teach Mon traditional customs to children. That is why the Mons in Hinthargone accept that subjective ethnic identity only has an influence on Mon identity.

In this study, being strong on subjective ethnic identity, Hinthargone-resident Mons choose a life partner through Mon-to-Mon marriage. At Hinthargone 56.22 percent of total households are made up of Mon couples and those of Mon-to-non-Mon marriages are less. If mother or father is Mon, almost all the children are Mon nationals also because most Mons in Hinthargone would likely have subjective Mon

identity. That factor is supported by the statistics, i.e. out of total population of the Mons in Hinthargone full-Mon accounts for 99.38 % and half-Mon 0.61 %.

Regarding their self-concept, the Mon nationals moved to Hinthargone not family-wise but as members of the same kinship, or village-wise, because they realized that if they lived far apart from their kinsman, their national culture would disappear. The Mon's desire to live in group could be considered as mainly contributing to the maintenance of Mon identity. Their next generation also chose to live in this quarter because it is their native place and they have Mon nationals as neighbours. Their instinctive bent to live together shows their desire to keep Mon culture. Again their spirit to keep Mon culture is evident in that their quarter named Model Mon (*Mon Sanpya*) is meant as a place to be imitated by all Mons. Moreover their wearing of Mon costume at outstanding celebrations is evidently meant to have others recognize their Mon identity. From the above facts reveal that an ethnic group can endure for long only when it has subjective ethnic identity and resides in group at one place. Therefore, one's personal attitude on his or her own ethnicity is an important factor in becoming a member of that ethnic group.

#### **8.4 The relationship between socialization and ethnic identity**

In Hinthargone-resident Mons study, almost all the Mon parents with subjective ethnic identity teach their children in many fold ways to have subjective ethnic identity. They train their children to learn Mon language and literature, to wear Mon dress on significant occasions, and to participate in social activities including traditional festivals. In teaching to develop self-concept in a Mon, whatever necessary is provided by the Mon monks, leaders, parents and donors. For this and other means of socialization, Mon children since age over 10 begin to develop subjective ethnic identity. Therefore, those children in adolescence need no special teaching to participate in religious activities of Mon tradition. As the children have been socialized to become patriotic Mons through subjective ethnic identity they, at age over 18, begin to eagerly participate in social activities such as giving assistance in teaching of Mon language, holding of Mon National Day ceremony, and in traditional religious activities such as going on alms round for offering food on Sabbath days and

*Padaytharpin* procession. That is due to instilling of subjective ethnic identity in them since infancy. Without that sentiment they will not follow Mon customs. For example, a youth would play for fun with friends, rather than participate in an alms-round in sunshine.

This study of Hinthargone-resident Mons is similar to that of Park (2007). In his study, he reported the family's socialization was significant for maintaining ethnic identity. Likewise, the study of Phinney and Cross (cited in French et al, 2006) in which it was stated that individuals may have positive feelings towards one's group membership but these are based solely on accepting what one is socialized by one's family.

However, these scholars do not discuss the important role of subjective ethnic identity in the socialization of children which is brought about by parents. Only parents with subjective ethnic identity would bring about meaningful socialization of their children. Without subjective identity a culture, wherever it exists, can go extinct at a certain time.

In more support of this, Makabe's finding (1979) in which socialization depends on subjective ethnic identity. Therefore, socialization leading to subjective ethnic identity could be considered a major factor to maintain ethnic identity.

### **8.5 The influence of language on ethnic identity**

Another important characteristic for maintaining ethnic identity seemed to be language. The study conducted by Pannarat, Chantachon and Laoakka (2012) in which the language of Viet Kiaw (the name of the ethnic group) has been spoken in Vietnamese New Year, ancient-spirit worship, wedding and funeral for maintaining their identity. In the studies by Yip and Fuligni, Bankston and Zhou, Laroche, Kim, Hui and Tomiuk (cited in Park, 2007), they reported that ethnic identity is significantly associated with ethnic behaviours such as speaking one's native language. Phinney (cited in Park, 2007) said that language fluency has also been conceptualized as one of the most important components of ethnic identity. Native

language fluency is significant not only because of its critical role in bicultural competence but also because it has been found to have a positive effect on developmental outcomes among adolescents from immigrant families (cited in Park, 2007). But they do not consider speaking ethnic language and subjective ethnic identity are interrelated.

Similarly, almost all the Mons in Hinthargone accept themselves as Mon national speak Mon language. In more of support of this, their fluent daily use of Mon has been made possible by their dwelling in group, their having subjective ethnic identity, parents and Mon leaders' encouragement of children to speak Mon, and their having been taught how to speak Mon since infancy. It can be concluded that in a national group, speaking native language depend on subjective ethnic identity and contributes to the maintenance of their distinctive culture.

In Makabe (1979) study, he suggested socialization and language retention were expected to be relatively highly associated with each other. In this study, most of the Mon parents accepted spoken Mon as a factor for the maintenance of Mon culture and they teach their children in infancy how to speak Mon, as well as train them, on their becoming adults, how to enjoy Mon videos and Mon songs, and sing Mon songs on Mon National Day celebration. From the above findings it can be suggested that fluency in a spoken language depends on ethnic identity and it needs constant teaching, and that language is very important for maintaining ethnic identity.

They have accepted that speaking Mon contributes to maintenance of Mon culture, and bilingual fluency is beneficial. Hinthargone-dwelling Mons, with subjective ethnic identity, speak Mon among themselves every day, but being bilingual, they respond in Myanmar language to non-Mons when spoken in that language. Their responding to other nationals in Myanmar language could be considered as their adapting. The Mon nationals at Hinthargone learn Mon language and literature among themselves; on the other hand they are required to learn prescribed Myanmar-language texts so that they are adapting themselves with others.

## 8.6 The relationship between religious activities and ethnic identity

Yang and Ebaugh (2001) said that religion continues to be an important identity for new immigrants in the United States. They argued that majority or minority status of their religious affiliation in the home and host countries is an important, but overlooked, factor in understanding strategies concerning religious and ethnic identities. By comparing two Chinese congregations, a Chinese Buddhist temple and a Chinese Christian church in Houston, Texas, they analyzed what happens when an immigrant group moves from majority status in the home country to minority status in the United States (Chinese Buddhists) and when a minority group (Chinese Christians in China) become part of the Christian majority in the United States.

In this study, the Mon nationals, Buddhists since centuries ago, continued their religious belief on migration to Hinthargone. They are devout generous Buddhists who are eager for merit-making. And this trait is found to be recognized by other nationals. Moreover, most of the Mons and non-Mons in Hinthargone are Buddhists and the Buddhists constitute a majority in there. Moreover, the majority of the population at Hinthargone are Buddhists so Mon monks need not give discourses in Myanmar language so as to have some people convert to Buddhism. They are evidently socializing their children to become devout Buddhists through teaching of religious customs, evidenced by teaching about birth stories of the Buddha and the ideal Buddhist Bhadradevi (ဘဒ္ဒဒေဝီ) and declaring the school closed on full moon and new moon days. For these circumstances the Mons need not be worried that their children would convert to other religions. Hinthargone-resident Mon nationals visit both Mon monastery and Bamar monastery so as to deeply understand the *Dhamma* explained in monk's discourses. Even if some go to one type of monastery their status of Buddhists will not change. Therefore Mon migrants to Hinthargone, embracing Buddhism of their forefathers, have come to live among more Buddhists with the result that almost all the Mons now dwelling in Hinthargone remain Buddhists, maintaining Mon culture and customs.

Bramadat (2012) explored how ethnic and religious aspects of the Church are interrelated in supporting ethnic identity and consciousness. He said that the primary

significance of the Korean ethnic church is its capacity to strengthen and reinforce ethnic identity by supporting their culture and enforcing value orientations.

In present study, by taking part in significant occasions such as religious rituals and other traditional festivals, the children are happy participating in *Padaytharpin* procession because they are well dressed for the occasion to satisfy their innate nature of love of beauty. They get to be friendly with one another through co-operative volunteer work in religious activities and consequently develop a social network. The youths also acquire subjective ethnic identity and promote their friendship and then develop unity among themselves. Thence each of them chooses a Mon only to be their life partner. The Hinthargone resident Mon nationals have come to know the benefit of unity where after they acquire leadership skills and sympathy for their juniors. And they realize how important it is to preserve their customs and culture. Such events are possible at Hinthargone because most of them perceive subjective ethnic identity and Hinthargone constitutes a Mon majority in population. Therefore, the Mon parents greatly value their religious and socializing process as significant characteristics of the Mon culture because those festivals are the best way to cultivate in children a conscious bent to maintain their culture.

According to Barth's theory (1969), the social activities made up of the beliefs and ideals of a human society are based on subjective ethnic identity. Similarly, the Mon national's belief in Buddhism goes back to many centuries ago, so their religious activities contain elements of spiritual belief, ideas and values. Being part of the social structure made up of Mon nationals' values and traditional beliefs is found to be strengthening their ethnic identity.

From the above factors a conclusion can be made thus: in a national group's efforts to maintain their culture the traditional festivals are the best platform to teach traditions and customs to children, whose participation in those festivals leads to their speaking of native language, thence to development of subjective ethnic identity in them, to the choice of a life partner so as to make their ethnicity endure for long.

## 8.7 The influence of social relationship on ethnic identity

The study conducted in east Dearborn by Ajrouch (2000) examined how social relationships among Lebanese immigrants living in east Dearborn contribute to the process of adaptation and identity formation. He said that appreciation of one's cultural traditions constitutes positive perception to maintain ethnic identity while non-appreciation and the process of acculturation is negative perception.

Similarly, as Hinthargone-resident Mon parents trained their children since infancy in traditional culture practices the latter would, since age 5 onwards, participate in religious activities, especially *Padaytharpin* procession held by them. Such associations could be cause for their happiness, facilitating the choice of life partner through friendship, helping with one another, Union spirit, and caring for one another. For these benefits the Hinthargone's Mon youths come to have positive perception of their Mon culture. The positive perception coming from social interaction can be concluded as forming a significant factor for keeping Mon identity. Again, relations with monks, elders and relatives, and juniors as taught by parents since infancy by way of participation in religious activities would make Hinthagone-resident Mons to have an added positive perception. Although they have been living together with other nationals, social interaction is possible among them for being a majority community living in group. From these findings it can be concluded that the positive and negative perceptions of living in ethnic group develop the ethnic identity and adaptation of that group.

In regard of social interaction, Radcliffe-Brown (cited in Moore, 2004) said that every human society contains social structure constituted of social institutions based on its values and beliefs. Because of social activities coming from that structure the mutual relations of its members develop and that society continues, he discussed. That behaviour could be got through socialization. He (1952) said social activities in a human society run on a regular basis, and social interaction between members thereat constitutes the ethnic identity of them. In other words, for a human society to endure, societal activities and mutual relations are necessary. Therefore he said social structure is basic to any human society.

In this study, to Hinthargone-dwelling Mon nationals believing in Buddhism the religious activities based on Mon beliefs and norms constitutes social structure with resultant social relationship. Through participating in those activities, Mon youths grow affectionate with each other, often leading to the choice as life partner and maintaining Mon identity thereby. The above explanation may lead to a conclusion that the Mons' social structure with its resultant social relationship is an influencing factor on Mon culture.

### **8.8 Ethnic identity construction**

The study conducted in Thai-Myanmar border by Wongpolganon (2007) explored that the Mon nationals of that area still speak Mon language at home, in the neighbourhood, at the market and in the monastery. They usually wear the Mon traditional dress for special occasions. Moreover, in spite of living abroad they are engaged in religious activities. During the Buddhist lent, young Mon women offer food to the monks and cater for their parents and senior relatives who stay overnight at the monastery to do meditation and pray together with other merit makers of their age. Traditionally, they pay respect to their senior relatives three times each year. Moreover, propitiations of traditional spirits like Coconut spirit and Bamboo tube spirit at every Mon home, and yearly propitiation of Village Spirit, are carried out.

Similarly, in this study, Hinthargone-resident Mons with subjective ethnic identity speak Mon in daily life. They wear the Mon traditional costumes on significant occasions such as Mon National Day, Union Day, and abide by the practices of the Buddhists as offering the dawn meal to the monks and other religious activities. They offer monks' holy robes and delicacies to the monks in the monastery of their patronage on the full moon day of *Waso*. The younger generation would pay respect to elders with bowls of coconut and bananas, adding gifts depending on the amount they can afford. During the Lenten period, all the Mon youths of Hinthargone make the traditional Sabbath Food Offering to Sabbath keepers who stay overnight at the monastery on Sabbath days. On the full moon day of *Wah Gaung*, they have been celebrating the Offering of the Gold and Silver pots since long ago. They celebrate the Food Offering Ceremony at the monasteries, specifically Mon monasteries on the full

moon day of *Tawthalin* since many years ago. *Padaytharpin* procession (*Padetharpin Hle Pwe*) is celebrated in *Thidingyut*. In traditional Spirit (*Nat*) propitiation most of them combine the Bamboo tube spirit and the Cloth spirit as Grandfather Spirit. A few only propitiate the Coconut Spirit. The majority propitiate the Village Spirit in addition to the traditional family spirits.

From the above facts, Hinthargone-resident Mons are found to be given to making more merit and teaching Mon literature than the Mons on Thai-Myanmar border, perhaps on account of the latter's being foreigners there. At both areas the spoken language, religious activities, and propitiation of traditional spirits are emphasized in keeping ethnic identity. Their bent in making more merit clearly shows their belief in Buddhism.

In Takatani Michio's study (2007) it was stated that Shan national in Shan State, having formed Shan literary and Culture Committee, teach their children spoken Shan and Shan literature during summer holidays. Significant festive days especially Shan New Year are celebrated by them dressed in Shan traditional costume. Being Buddhists, the Shan hold Buddhist festivals through duly formed associations, maintaining at the same time Shan culture.

In this study, Mon monks and leaders are convinced a national race will go extinct without a language. Therefore, Hinthargone-resident Mon parents with subjective ethnic identity teach the children Mon literature. These classes on it are held during summer holidays for children and youth so as to preserve Mon culture. Moreover, they wear Mon traditional costume on special events and celebrate their traditional festivals.

When the three studies are compared the efforts of the Mons on Thai-Myanmar border to keep Mon culture are, excepting the absence of learning of Mon literature for being a minority, the same as those of Mons and Shan described in the two domestic studies. In the two domestic studies, they perceive language and literature is the life blood of an ethnic group which proceeds to keep its identity through speaking

the native language and learning the literature. The overt signs of dress could be an indication of what ethnicity in question is. From the tree studies, religious festivals are constituted of human society's values and beliefs, so holding them could be claimed to be supportive of the maintenance of ethnic identity.

The study of Kunstadter (cited in Keyes, 1979) stated that in Mae Sariang of Thailand the majority of Kayins wear traditional dress and eat Kayin-style food on a daily basis. And they marry among themselves.

In contrast, Hinthargone Mons neither eat Mon traditional food nor wear Mon traditional costumes in their everyday activities. They mostly eat Bamar-style food and rarely eat Mon-style food. Moreover, they wear traditional dress on special occasions only. It may be they neglect the overt signs like diet and dress in preservation of Mon cultural traits, and adapt to the practices of other national groups.

But their intra-marriage is up to 93.8 percent, which similar to that of the Kayin in Mae Sariang. It is possible the youths tend to find their life partners from among volunteers in Mon traditional activities they are trained to participate in. Most possibly, the parents, conscious of prospective results, instil in their children a desire to preserve Mon culture by way of participation in their traditional festivals. Both studies show that each of the two ethnic groups keeps its ethnic identity by intra-marriage.

From the above studies, it can be said that Hinthargone-resident Mons have been maintaining their Mon identity by most of these characteristics. Therefore, for an ethnic group to keep its culture, its language and literature, its diet and dress, religious activities, propitiation of traditional spirits, and marriage system could be considered as significant factors.

### **8.9 The influence of traditional spirits (*Nats*) propitiation on ethnic identity**

In this study, among the Mons of Hinthargone the eldest son is entitled to the legacy of spirit worship. By making offerings to the spirit, they believe they gain success in

their economic and social affairs and are protected from the evil effects of bad deeds and harm.

It is found in the study of Iijima (1979) that the Kayin have been maintaining their identity by constant propitiation of their ancestral spirit. As the eldest daughter is entitled to the legacy of this spirit worship she usually leads the spirit propitiation. If a member of the ancestral-spirit worship commits an act that angers the spirit, all members must perform the rite since all stand in danger of suffering misfortune of sickness in retribution for the offensive act. From these studies, among national groups with different cultures the conception of spirit propitiation often differs from one group to another. It is known that they also believe in the resulting beneficial effects if they keep their promise made at the spirit propitiation. It can be suggested that they continually do the traditional spirit propitiation for beneficial effects than for their tradition and custom.

In this study, except the eldest son who is entitled to receive the grandfather spirit-property, younger sons may propitiate the grandfather spirit at their discretion. On the day of spirit propitiation, they may excuse their absence if circumstances do not permit. Thus the rules on spirit propitiation are found to be not restrictive. Furthermore, there is no strict rule in the coconut spirit propitiation where all participate regardless of whether the head of the family does the offering or not.

In Iijima's (1979) study, it was stated that if a member is absent on spirit propitiation day for various reasons some curried rice with some chicken or pork from the sacrifice are dried in the sun and given to the absent member when he or she next returns to the house. Thus for a ritual to last long, the rules concerning it need to be flexible to the members. If superstition is too strong to tolerate a wrong that ritual would not last long, it could be asserted. In Iijima's (1979) study, completion of college education is not discussed. Nevertheless, study of Hinthargone-dwelling Mons shows the graduates among them are 21.10 % only. Thus they could be continuing spirit propitiation because they lack pragmatic outlook like the graduates.

In this study, among the Mon nationals of Hinthargone the eldest son receives, on his father's death, the spirit-property and continues the practice of spirit propitiation. Other sons may share the practice on their own volition but daughters cannot inherit the family's spirit propitiation. After marriage, a Mon woman propitiates the spirit her husband worships.

According to the study by Nilar Tin (1994), the Mons of Hinthargone adopts bilineal kinship system to equally share the inheritance. Therefore, for the Mon nationals in Hinthargone differences concerning inheritance of property and legacy of spirit propitiation are found among family members.

The Mon nationals' spirit propitiation varies according to the three regions, Hanthawaddy Mon, Mottama Mon, and Pathein Mon. Bago (Hanthawaddy) Mons propitiate the "Coconut Spirit", while in Lower Myanmar, around the region of Mottama, Mawlamyaing, Mudon, Zingyaik, Paung, Ye, Kayin Region, they propitiate the "Bamboo tube Spirit" and the Pathein Mons propitiate the "Cloth Spirit" (Naing Maung Toe, 1989, p. 196).

In this study, the Mon nationals of Hinthargone propitiate the combined Cloth spirit and Bamboo tube spirit that is known as Grandfather Spirit, and Coconut spirit. This finding is different from the Mon nationals of Kawtbein Sanpya village, Kawkareik Township in which they mainly propitiate three traditional spirits, namely, Coconut spirit, Bamboo spirit and Cloth spirit (Tin Myo Win, 2009). Coconut spirit is common to the Mon nationals in both Hinthargone and Kawtbein. Study of Tin Myo Win (2009) does not mention that Coconut spirit worshipped by the Mons of Kawtbein is called "*Minmagaray*" in Mon language. Those studies show that the Mon national have done these spirit propitiation since ancient times yet if they live in different locations, their traditional spirit belief tends to differ a little also. It is so perhaps because they have to adapt to living with other national groups.

In this study, most Mons of Hinthargone perform the spirit propitiation ceremony they have promised in front of their house because a celebratory propitiation with spirit dance under the leadership of a shaman is too costly. But sometimes, when they had

economic success after invoking the spirit they would hold spirit propitiation at home or at village-spirit shrine (*ywadaawshin Natnan*) at the top of the village.

Similarly the Mons in *Kawtbein* would, in consideration of costs, hold sitting propitiation of spirit (*Htai nat-pwe*, spirit propitiation in front of the house under the leadership of a shaman); or, having economic success through a holy resolution made, hold a spirit dance propitiation (*Ka nat-pwe*, or propitiation with spirit mediums' dance and singing accompanied by performance of drum ensemble, under the leadership of a shaman). Thus there are two kinds of spirit propitiation either of which is dependent on current economic circumstances of the holder. This study also shows the Mons of Hinthargone and Kawtbein propitiate spirits for their belief that spirits could influence their economy, health and social activities rather than for reasons of tradition and custom.

From the studies of both Hinthargone and Kawtbein, inferences to be made are: the Mons in different regions tend to have different modes of spirit worship; and taboos remain similar to different groups of Mons maybe for their perceived power to harm the worshippers if not obeyed.

From this study it can be concluded that the belief in spirit propitiation is found to be the same between the Mons of Hinthargone and Kawtbein Sanpya village (Tin Myo Win, 2009), and Sagaw Kayins of Mae Sariang district (Iijima, 1979). Traditional spirit propitiation is important in maintaining the culture of an ethnic group; the practice has influence on their socioeconomic life; and the spiritual belief and rituals are different based on the nationals' beliefs and ideals.

### **8.10 The relationship between ethnic identity and adaptation**

In Aguayo and Flores' study (n. d), Latino newcomers (Latin American inhabitant of the United States) relocating to Missouri (Midwest) have been maintaining their ethnic identity through speaking Spanish and holding ethnic celebrations, which is supported significantly by social network (family and friends). Moreover, they use,

for opportunity of self-interest, adaptation by learning the language, and participating in celebrations, of their new home.

In this study, Hinthargone-dwelling Mon parents familiarize their children with Mon language at home through speaking it by all family members as the children have to use Myanmar language at school. They use the Mon language every day among themselves. The Mon parents train their children to participate in religious activities. Their religious activities are participated by a majority of the Mons of Hinthargone in teams. Those findings make it possible to conclude that while the use of native language and holding of native celebrations are important for an ethnic group to have its culture long-lived, the social network urging them to carry on so helps maintain their ethnic identity.

### **8.11 The influence of funeral rite on ethnic identity**

No information about the funeral rite performed as a symbol of ethnic identity is found in literature reviews. However, the Mon-nationals who live in Hinthargone are found to be able to uphold their ethnic identity in terms of funeral rite although their neighbourhood is occupied by non-Mons.

It is evident that Mon nationals are devout Buddhists by studying their practice of building, a structure over the corpse illustrating the *Dhammha* taught by Lord Buddha. Thus the mourners can feel contrition and regret on impermanence. The aim of performing the funeral rite according to Mon tradition may be that they want their offspring to embrace Buddhism. In addition, a funeral service group which conducts the burial or cremation in accordance with Mon customs is the major supportive factor to encourage the preservation of ethnic identity. The social welfare service associations are founded on the basis of community service arisen from a strong sense of community, which can lead to the unity of a cultural group. In one hand, the contribution fees are reasonable enough to enable each member to participate in this community service. On the other, the recipient is poor or rich can benefit in terms of both financial aids and sympathy and kindness from the mourners.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 9.1 Conclusion

Most of the Mon nationals living in Hinthargone perceive that their subjective ethnic identity is the main driving force to preserve their culture. Accordingly, Mon men are supposed to have stronger concepts relating to subjective ethnic identity than their counterparts because most Mon men are culturally regarded as the heirs of their forefathers to conduct family spirit propitiation.

It may lead to an opportunity for choosing of Mon by Mon as a life partner where by constituting a factor to help keep the Mons' ethnic identity. Besides, it is very significant in becoming Mon national of the children if mother or father is Mon. They share overt signs such as traditional food and dress in common with other nationals because they perceive subjective ethnic identity is very important for maintaining Mon identity. However, they wear the Mon traditional dress for special occasions and always follow the Mon ways of life and traditional practices such as speaking Mon language, getting married to a Mon national, upholding rituals and religious traditions handed down generation by generation.

In their social relationship, they have come to know the spirit of togetherness. It promotes closeness among the youth, enhances religious faith in them, and perpetuates the unity among the Mons. They have come to experience that collaborating with one another leads to the unity of the entire Mon nationals and strengthen their social structure. Moreover, from working together in groups, most of the Mon youth have a chance to meet and come to know each other well. This helps them in choosing life partners – about 56.22% married among Mon. Therefore, for Hinthargone-resident Mons their social activities are a factor contributed to the maintenance of values and beliefs; unity in their social interaction, and endurance of Mon culture.

Most of the Mons with subjective ethnic identity use the Mon language among themselves in everyday activities to vitalize their ethnic identity. Even the non-Mons who come to live among them soon pick up the language to converse fluently with their neighbours. No matter wherever they live, they adapt to living in harmony with some non-Mons by using Myanmar language.

Most of the Mons living in Hinthargone believe that the spirit propitiation is a factor contributing to the maintenance of ethnic identity as well as a connection with the worshipper's socioeconomic life. Therefore, they continue to practise the traditional family spirit propitiation inherited from their forefathers till today.

Almost all the Mon nations of Hinthargone are adopting traditional practices including funeral rite performed in accordance with Mon customs. They can do so because of the supportive groups and associations which provide the bereaved family with both money and service.

Almost all the Mon nationals at Hinthargone have celebrated the religious folk festivals every year because those religious activities constituted of Mon beliefs and norms are not only their ethnic identity but also the socialization process of Mon children by parents so as to have them maintain Mon culture. Therefore they give out their best efforts to preserve their cultural heritage as unfailing practice of maintaining the religious folk festivals.

The Mons' cultural traditions remain to date because of their leaders' socialization so as to have the youths always instilled with self concept that their Mon traditions must be kept alive. Most of the Mon parents in Hinthargone with subjective ethnic identity shape their children in various ways to inculcate the sense of ethnic identity into their children's mind. All the children have been taught Mon language since infancy. They also train their children to participate in the Traditional Sabbath Food Offering, *Padaetharpin* Festival, and to cooperate with each other in team spirit since age 6 or 7. They tend to teach Mon literature at age 7 to 8 in summer. By doing so, Mon children become more interested in their Mon identity and Mon traditions leading to

the strong belief in their mind. The Mon presiding abbots also admonish that Mons' traditional customs be kept alive and see to the needs thereon by way of leadership. The Mon leaders are evidently fulfilling whatever is necessary to have all Mon youths participating in their traditional religious activities. For these circumstances the Hinthargone-dwelling Mons are able to maintain their Mon traditions to date.

All the Mon nationals of Hinthargone are devout Buddhists who are generous enough to do meritorious deeds such as all sorts of offering in their society without discrimination in national races. Because they also want to understand the preaching of Buddhist monks regardless of their race, they take refuge in *sangah* of any race offering them various alms, observing the eight precepts, and learning Buddha *Dhammha* taught by both Mon and Bamar Buddhist monks. Although some non-Mons do not join the Mon nationals in their religious activities as they can neither speak nor understand the Mon language, they come to Mon nationals' social activities and funfair alike being held for religious purpose. Therefore, Hinthargone-resident Mons can be said to have influenced on non-Mons by successfully attracting them to recognize their Mon language and religious festivals while living in harmony with them.

Hinthargone is not only located about 50 miles from Yangon city but also easily accessible to other national groups especially to Myanmar who live nearby. In this context, it is very likely that two different cultures can mix up and become intertwined. It can be assumed that Myanmar culture may even assimilate Mon culture due to high frequency of interrelationship. However, why do Mon nationals of Hinthargone continue to practise traditions and customs as ethnic identity?

The majority of Mon nationals residing in Hinthargone possess subjective ethnic identity. A significant factor to help maintain the Mon culture is socialization, perpetuated by parents and the community, of children whereby a consciousness of such identity is developed in them. Without socialization posterity will not be able to learn Mon traditions and customs. Moreover, the Mons' being the majority of population at Hinthargone environment constitutes a factor contributing to help

maintain the Mon culture. Even though parents at Hinathagone are trying to develop subjective ethnic identity in their children, if the social environment is a minority Mon population that socialization would not last always. They could be assimilated into other cultures. Moreover, the economic circumstances of Mon nationals in Hinthargone are supportive of holding the festivals of Mon culture so that the Mon traditions and customs are preserved to date.

Therefore, Hinthargone-residing Mons, still co-existing with other national groups, are able to maintain Mon culture to date for reasons such as: the majority perceive themselves Mon national, their being the majority of population in social environment; socialization of the Mon children by parents and community to develop subjective ethnic identity in them; and being endowed with enough financial circumstances as social environment to hold the festivals of Mon culture.

## **9.2 Recommendations**

Hinthargone-resident Mons maintain Mon identity through speaking Mon language, learning Mon literature, holding traditional festivals of the Mon, socialization of their children in Mon culture and traditions, and getting married Mon to Mon. Hinthargone-dwelling Mon parents teach, to maintain Mon culture, those traditions and customs to their children since childhood. Their socialization process of children should be encouraged.

In this study, the influencing factor on the Mons' ethnic identity and adaptation only Hinthargone ward, Bago was explored. Therefore, to get more generalization data in further studies some other Mons-dwelling wards in Bago should be investigated to have comparative study.

This study explored to what extent the subjective ethnic identity is significant in maintaining their cultural traits. However in what age that consciousness stronger should be conducted again.

In maintaining ethnic identity, their festivals can be held only if their economic circumstances are favourable. This study does not explore Mon nationals' economy in detail. Therefore, future studies should be conducted the connection on between their economy and ethnic identity.

In spirit propitiation the Hinthargone-dwelling Mons propitiate grandfather spirit, i.e a combination of Cloth spirit and Bamboo tube spirit. Other Mons-majority areas propitiate separate Cloth spirit, Bamboo tube spirit, or Coconut spirit. Why those differences should be a subject in further studies.

Hinthargone-resident Mons perform funeral rite according to their tradition and custom and it is generally explored only. Therefore, in further studies funeral rite of Hinthargone-resident Mon nationals should be conducted in detail.

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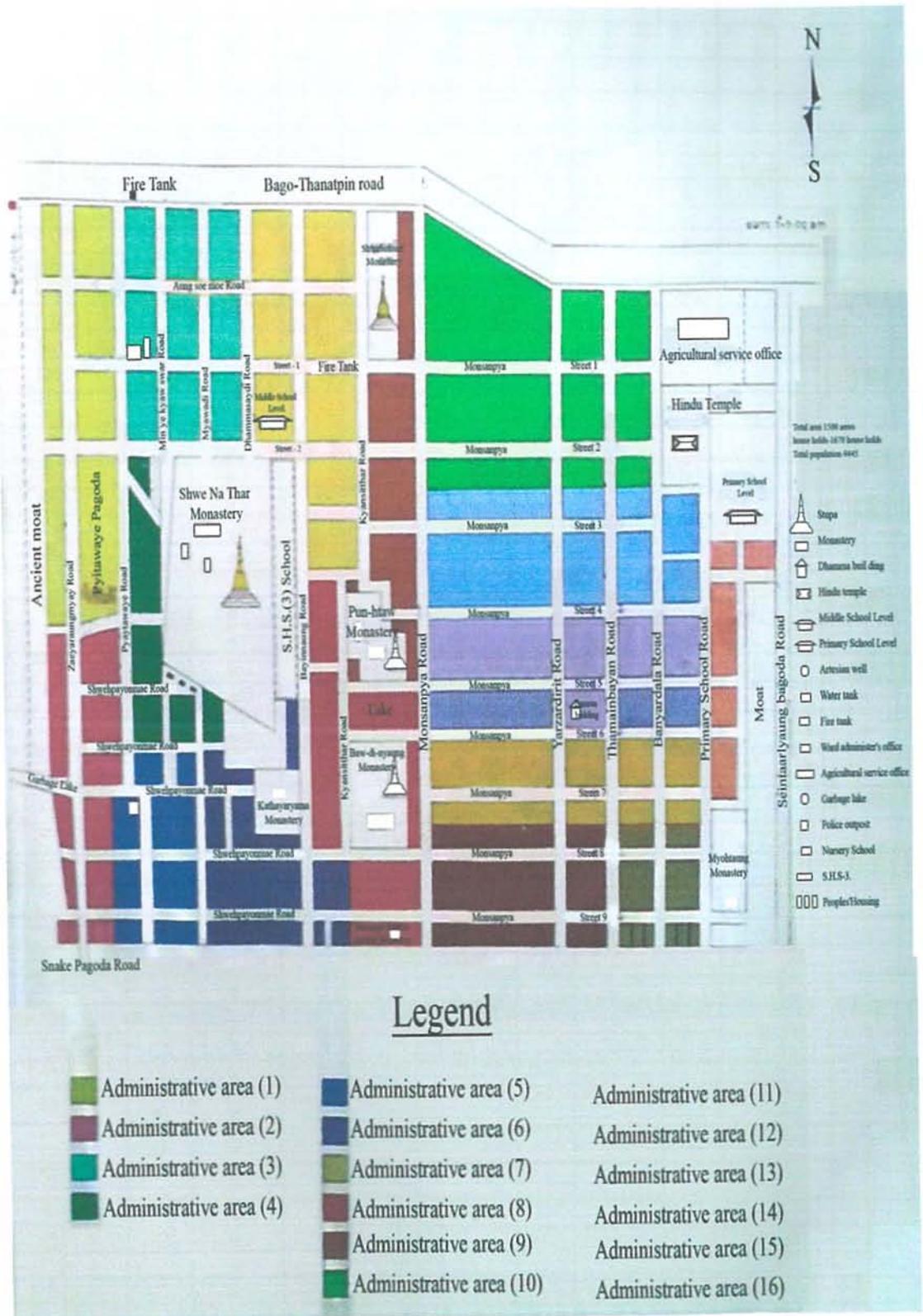
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## ANNEX (II)

### LOCATION MAP OF HINTHARGONE WARD



Source: Office of Hinthargone Ward Administer



## ANNEX (4)

### Key Informant Interviews (KII) guidelines

#### (a) Background history of Mon

- Common ancestry (The widespread population of the Mon national in Myanmar)
- Territory
- Common historical memory (Interesting Mon tales on the Mon)

#### (b) Hinthargone history

- How Hinthargone was first established
- Why the migration to Hinthargone
- The earliest time of migrants' arrival and then Hinthargone status
- The connection between Model Mon (*Mon sanpya*) and Hinthargone

#### (c) Symbolic boundary

- Mode of dress
- Meaning of the Mon's traditional costume
- Official dress colour, red, is different than other colours dependent on the occasion participate, or not. And why?
- Main reason why Mon dress is not in daily use
- on which days are the Mon dress used?

#### (d) Tradition beliefs

- Is traditional spirit propitiated or not, and which spirit, if any? Reason for propitiation it.
- Between the sexes, which believe in spirit propitiation more? And why?
- To whom the legacy of spirit propitiation goes? Why?
- What consequences could ensue on doing without spirit propitiation?
- Is Mon traditional spirit different dependent on region to region?
- Is Mon traditional spirit on an equal status like others?
- Could there be consequences for doing without spirit propitiation?
- How is spirit propitiation discarded?

- Procedure on restoring spirit propitiation
- Qualifications required of a shaman

(e) Religious activities

- Making merit
  - Opinions on making merit of the Mons (their generosity)
  - Which monastery, between Mon abbot's and Bamar abbots, is patronized by Mon nationals?
- Holding religious activities
  - Religious celebrations held during Buddhist lent
  - History, time, objectives, and effects of religious activities
  - Proceedings of religious festivals

## ANNEX (5)

### In Depth Interview (IDI) guidelines

#### (a) Occupation

- Livelihood

#### (b) Marriage system

- Types of marriage
- Do parents set rules for their children to follow in the choice of a life partner? If they do, what those rules are.
- How parents regard a child on its getting married to a spouse of different nationality
- Between the sexes, which is more likely than the other to get married to a spouse of different nationality? And why?

#### (c) Symbolic boundary

- Daily life style

- Mode of dress

- Diet

- Criteria of membership

- perception (pride, shy, proud, glad, shame concerning Mon-ness and Mon

- Language

- preference (music, video, Buddha teaching, media concerning Mon language,

- language, food, traditional dress, monastery, life partner, the integration of the Mons in Hinthargone )

- participation (seasonal festivals, Traditional Sabbath food offering, traditional

- spirit (*Nat*) propitiation

- Is there a difference in following Mon culture between a couple (Mon and non-Mon) and another couple (both Mons) or not?

(d) Tradition beliefs

- Is traditional spirit propitiated or not, and which spirit, if any? Reason for propitiation it.
- Between the sexes, which believe in spirit propitiation more? And why?
- To whom the legacy of spirit propitiation goes? Why?
- What consequences could ensue on doing without spirit propitiation?
- Is Mon traditional spirit different dependent on region to region?
- Is Mon traditional spirit on an equal status like others?
- Why is the spirit propitiated? When? How? Which result?
- Could there be consequences for doing without spirit propitiation?
- How is spirit propitiation discarded?
- Procedure on restoring spirit propitiation
- Do's and Don'ts regarding a spirit
- Are spirits other than traditional spirit propitiated? If they are, which ones?
- Why that spirit is mainly propitiated; Propitiation time; effects of such propitiation

(e) Religious activities

- Status of the monasteries in Hinthargone
  - How many monasteries and stupas are there at Hinthargone? Between two types of monastery - with abbotship of a Mon monk and with that of a Bamar monk, which monastery numbers more? And why?
  - Which monastery do the Moon nationals patronize most? And why?
- Making merit
  - Making merit (For example donations made to pagoda, monastery and Sabbath keepers)
- Holding festivals
  - Which participants, and how, in holding festivals.
  - forming of the association
  - Going on collection rounds
  - Preparation for Sabbath food

- *Padaetharpin* Ceremony

- Overlook and opinion on participation in those festivals

(f) Funeral rite

- Proceeding immediately following an ascertainment that a person has died

- The corpse is prepared in traditional manner

- For how many days is the copse kept before funeral rite? Why?

- Proceeding of funeral rite

- Funeral rite in case of a death other than of natural causes

- Taboo

- Are there free funeral service societies or not? Explain, infancy.

(g) Socialization

- How parents socialize their children in those festivals

- Main reason of that socialization

- Teaching according to age group

- Which cultural tradition is considered most important, and reason for such consideration

UNIVERSITY OF YANGON  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

External examiner's recommendation on the PhD dissertation

Dated Yangon, 5 May, 2013

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Ref: Zin Mar Latt's PhD thesis

**Thesis Title – IDENTITY AND ADAPTATION: A CASE STUDY OF MON  
NATIONAL LIVING IN HINTHARGONE, BAGO TOWNSHIP**

The systematic research focused on Mon nationals, who lived in Hinthargone, Bago Township, identity, and its adaptation to the social environment.

She could identify relevant data and information concerning thesis objectives, and interpret to meet the aim by a reasonable number of detailed examples, and its results are satisfactory. Besides, she could recommend for further research related to economy and ethnic identity. Her answers to defend the questions of the members of the board of examiners were also satisfactory.

Therefore, I recommend that this dissertation is eligible for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.



Dr. Yee Yee Cho

Lecturer

Anthropology Department

Nationalities Youth Resources Development

Degree College, Yangon

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The Government of The Republic of The Union of Myanmar

Ministry of Health



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**Referee's Report for PhD thesis**

Title of Thesis: Identity and adaptation: A case study of Mon Nationals living in Hinthargone, Bago Township  
Name of Candidate: **Ma Zin Mar Latt**  
Course and Year: PhD (Anthropology) (May, 2013)  
Roll No: 4 ဝါရု ဝေ-၂  
Department: Department of Anthropology  
University: University of Yangon

The study described factors influencing upon ethnic identity of Mon nationals living in Hinthargone, Bago Township. The candidate demonstrates a broad awareness of literature on identity and adaptation in literature review. Objectives of the study were spelled out specifically and clearly. The use of qualitative methods was appropriately applied to fulfil the objectives of the study. Results are suitably set out and accompanied by adequate interpretation.

The study found that Hinthargone-residing Mons, still co-existing with other nationals, are able to maintain Mon identity to date. The main reasons were their being the majority of population in social environment; socialization of Mon children by parents and community to develop subjective ethnic identity; and being endowed with enough financial circumstances to hold Mon cultural festivals. Discussion is well written based on findings and linked with objectives and theories. Conclusions are appropriately developed and clearly linked to the nature and content of the research framework and findings.

Overall, the thesis constitutes original contribution to knowledge in the respective field. That would be benefit in bringing this to a broader readership and thus it is encouraged the publications of this thesis.

Dr. Saw Saw  
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Deputy Director  
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