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ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT**

**THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE TAUNGYO NATIONALS OF
WAPHUTAUNG VILLAGE TRACT, YAMETHIN TOWNSHIP
MANDALAY DIVISION, UNION OF MYANMAR**

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Introduction

Myanmar with a total land area of 676,577 sq km. (261, 228sq miles), is the largest country on the mainland of South-East Asia. Endowed with a variety of geographical features such as mountains, rivers, forests, plateaus, and so forth, it is also a place where over one hundred nationalities peacefully cohabit. So it is not only rich in natural resources and cultural heritage, it is also rich in various facets of ethnic culture and traditions. The main ethnic groups residing in the country are Kachins, Kayahs, Kayins, Chins, Myanmars, Mons, Rakhines and Shans. It's population spread over seven states and seven divisions and is estimated at over 51 millions (Myanmar Ah Lin Newspaper 10.7.2001).

Throughout the history all these nationalities have lived together in peace and unity just like brethren. But due to British occupation and their divide-and -rule policy unity and brotherhood spirit among these nationalities had once become faded, through misunderstanding and less contact. But to build a modern developed nation where all the nationalities can have a peaceful, united life with high standard of living, it is impossible without national unity which is the corner-stone of national development. So I went to Waphutanug Village Tract several times to make a systematic research work on the social life of the Taungyo national. The village tract is in Yamethin Township of Mandalay Division and it is situated on the Shan Plateau, in Southern Shan State. There are several aims for this work and they are as follows;

- (1) A Thesis is prepared for Master of Research Degree;
- (2) This place for my research is that Yamethin is my native place, and it would not be difficult to visit there for collection of datas needed for my paper.
- (3) The Taungyo national speak the archaic form of Myanmar language, I can study their social life without an interpreter.
- (4) The place of the Taungyo national being situated on the mountains, surrounded by heavily forested area with valleys, it is secluded and it has only a little contact with the outside world, and hence, the ethnic group residing there are still observing the traditions and customs of their ancestors to this day;

- (5) If an ethnic group does not make record of their traditions and the traditions and an ethnic group should be recorded. Otherwise their traditions and there things will fade away in the future through cultural assimilation;
- (6) Though ethnic groups residing in all parts of the country, have their own language, daily diet, clothing, culture, features etc., when they are studied closely, they prove to be only a little different from one another which clearly shows that they all have the same ancestors; to make this research work as a proof for that concept;
- (7) National unity and national development for all the people in the Union would be gained by trying to understand others' beliefs and thoughts through there research works which are made with good intentions to know each other.

The first visit to that area with the hope of choosing it as the subject of my research work was made in August, 2000. I must say that it was not that easy to get there as I first thought. I had to take horse-drawn cart and bullock-cart to cover some portion of the journey while the rest had to be made on foot. But it was not a journey on the plain surface of the ground; as the journey proceeded the path along the mountainous area made me more and more tired and exhausted sometimes feeling that I had made a wrong choice as to the area of my research work. But once the surrounding landscape of the village tract got into my eye sight, the tiredness and displeasure vanished into thin air. Everywhere in the whole surrounding area are big trees, luxuriant with leaves, green and lush, valleys steep and long, plantation sites on the hill-sides forming beautiful scenes. I was greatly pleased, looking around and breathing in the fresh air. But when I entered the village, I became more and more pleased by the cordial and cheerful welcome of the natives who came to greet me and invited me to their houses. Their plain and simple smiles on the faces showed that they were not flamboyant and pompous.

When I got to the house of the chairman of the village. Peace and Development Council, he also made a cordial welcome and asked me what could he do for me. I told him that I would like to study the social life of the Taungyo national living there in several aspects such as their economy, religious movements, administration, judiciary, education, health, child life, puberty life,

married life, the history of their ethnic group, their seasonal festivals etc. Then I told him that as there are many things to learn from the villagers, males as well as females, of various age groups, I would like to know if I might be permitted to do so. He whole heartedly gave me the permission, and all the villagers present there also promised me to help as much as they could. So my first trip to confirm the heading of my research was a successful one.

I paid the second visit there on 24th September, 2000 and stayed there until 6th November whereby I could study their traditions and customs, staying closely with them, and I had the chance to take part in some of their seasonal festivals such as the festival denoting the ending of lent, paper lantern festival, "Kahtein" festival (offering of yellow robes to the members of the Buddhist Order), and also the chance to study how they observe sabbath and how they help a woman give birth to a baby in accordance with their traditional belief by using their traditional medicines.

My third visit was in April 2001 and then I could study some more, and had the chance to closely study their "Taphwut" Festival, "Tartet" Festival, Pylon chan-tha Pagoda" Festival, and their traditional way of making offering to the guardian "nats".

The number of informants from whom I could learn data for my research work are (23) of age fifty and over (31) of age group between 25 and 50 and (7) of age under 25, the total being (61) altogether.

So I think I could say my research paper naming "The social life of the Taungyo national of Waphutaung Village tract of Yamethin Township in Mandalay Division" is to some extent systematic with comprehensive view over several aspects of their social life. The paper comprises five chapters with photographs and maps apart from the introduction, conclusion and analysis.