



Title	Traditional Beliefs of the Mon nationals living in Hinthagon
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Abstract

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 socialization. All the Mon nationals living in Hinthagon believe in Buddhism and worship the Buddha as the Enlightened One unique beyond comparison. However, most of them believe in their traditional spirits (*Nats*) propitiated from the time of their ancestors because they believe that it is connected with their health, economy and social activities. For this purpose, the objectives of this paper are to find out why they believe in traditional spirits (*Nats*), how they accept and practise the rites concerned with them, how the results relate to their daily life, and to elicit whether the tradition of spirit propitiation is one of the most important factors in maintaining their ethnic identity or not. To achieve the aim of this study, ethnographic method or qualitative method was used. By conducting this study, the connections between the traditional spirit propitiation and the socio-economic life can be found out. And, who have the chance to inherit the spirit propitiation of Mon nationals can be elicited.

Key words: traditional beliefs, socialization, traditional Spirits, social activities, ethnic identity

Introduction

Hinthagon quarter located in Bago was the primary settlement of Mon nationals among other living places of them in Bago Township. In this area, they lived together with other ethnic groups such as Kayin, Shan and Bamar. When most of the national races settle with their neighbours, their identity can be generally maintained in their social environment but sometimes it may be changed in adaptation with other groups. Ways of maintaining traditional customs of culture differ from one group to another. Most of Mon nationals in Hinthagon are keeping their culture through their belief in and propitiation of traditional spirits (*Nats*). 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 socialization (the social process by which culture is learned and transmitted across the generation) (Spiro, 1978).

For this purpose, the objectives of this paper are to find out why they believe in traditional spirits (*Nats*), how they accept and practice the

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rites concerned with them, how the results relate to their daily life, and to elicit whether the tradition of spirit propitiation is one of the most important factors in maintaining their ethnic identity or not.

Research methodology

To find insights into the general nature of this problem, this study was conducted by descriptive study involving case study. This study was conducted in Hinthagon ward, Bago Township, Bago Region. The study population were selected by the criteria that may obtain to achieve the objectives of this study. Those interviewed were Hinthagon Mon nationals' especially male household heads who worship traditional spirits such as the Grandfather Spirit (*Apho-nat*), Coconut Spirit; Mon women who usually take charge of preparations; the sons who have inherited the tradition of spirit worship; female shamans performing spirit propitiation; and those versed in the chronicles of Mon spirits. Data were collected until enough information by using KIIs and IDIs. The houses holding spirit propitiation were observed and spirit shrines, spirit utensils, preparations for the spirit, and propitiation ceremony were photographed. These data were also collected by using library survey. Data obtained with different methods were put through triangulation to have them exact and correct.

In Data collection methods, KIIs (Key informant interviews) with Mon versed in the chronicles of their spirits were conducted using pre-tested guidelines. KIIs were performed more or less in the nature of informal group interviews. IDIs (Individual depth interviews) were performed with Mon nationals who believe in household spirits like Grandfather Spirit and Coconut Spirit, female shamans in charge of spirit propitiation, Mon women who usually take charge of preparations and sons who have inherited the tradition of spirit propitiation.

Traditional Beliefs of Mon nationals living in Hinthagon

All the respondents said that the majority of Mon nationals living in Hinthagon are Buddhists. But most Mons still believes in their traditional spirits (*Nats*) for their economy and social activities. Concerning this case, a female Mon national said:

“In our house, propitiation of the spirit is held when a family member falls 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.”

Most of the Mon women believe in spirit propitiation more strongly than the men, because women feel a sense of fear stronger 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 tradition, we must believe in spirit propitiation; it is a ‘must’. A friend of mine has got two sons. The eldest 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 aspects of life. In other words, when one forsakes the spirit propitiation after performing spirit propitiation regularly, he may also 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 Hinthagon 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 Hinthagon. They are traditional family spirits and Village Spirit (*Ywadowshin Nat*).

Traditional family spirits

Most of the Mon national of Hinthagon described that there are different kinds of traditional spirit depending on the family. The majority propitiate the Grandfather Spirit (*Apho-nat*) and the minority propitiate the “Coconut Spirit”. The reason why they believe in the traditional spirit is to guard the house. It is known as the guardian of the house or household spirit (*Ain-dwin-nat*) in Myanmar language. By offering to the spirit, they believe they gain success in their economic and social affairs and being protected from the evil effects of bad deeds and harm. They would also enjoy good

fortune. But they believe that some misfortune would befall them if they do not do so.

Furthermore, the Mon nationals' spirit propitiation varies according to the three regions, Hanthawaddy (Bago) Mon, Mottama Mon, and Pathein Mon. Hanthawaddy (Bago) Mon 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 Mon propitiate the "Cloth Spirit" (Toe, 1989, p. 196).

According to the answers given by the interviewees, most Mons living in Hinthagon combine the "Bamboo tube Spirit" and the "Cloth Spirit" and propitiate these as the Grandfather Spirit (*Ahpho-nat*). 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. Therefore, it can be said that most of the Mons living in Hinthagon came from Mon Region and Kayin Region and the minority who propitiate the "Coconut Spirit" are the migrants from Hanthawaddy (Bago).

Spirit propitiation Legacy

Almost all the Mons living in Hinthagon accept that the traditional spirit propitiation is inherited by the 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.

The Coconut Spirit

According to the interview, only a few Mon nationals residing in Hinthagone 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 spirits 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 (Htwe Han and Ba Nyunt, 1991).

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 19th century. Up to mid-20th 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 *Ain-U-nat-taing*, the house’s second post erected in the fore part of the house (see Figure 1). The Coconut stand is a little bit lower than the altar for the Buddha shrine. A flawless green coconut with its stem intact is chosen to do 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 is tied on the top part of the coconut, called “*boundaw*”. Then it is put into a “*Saing*” (cane or bamboo framework to put in fruits and hung), 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. 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.

In making the offering, the male head of the house needs not do it. It can be done by the housewife herself or assisted by a person who knows the spirit propitiation. Generally the housewife takes this responsibility. In making an offering to the Coconut Spirit, a plate of pickled tea leaves (*Laphet*) is mixed with oil and a bit of salt, a cup of water and a quid of

betel is required. At the shrine, no candle lights, incense sticks must be offered. On offering a Coconut to the spirit it is sprinkled with scented water and a prayer is done. The house wife prays:

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

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 had bad dreams or omens, one must see there is anything wrong with the coconut. If so, it has to be replaced with a new Coconut. 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 happen 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 Ahphaygyi to bear witness. If so, my shop sells well. If not, it is all poor business.”

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. Thus 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. A married couple never sleeps near the spirit-post of the house - the post where the coconut hangs - because the brother and sister spirits are offended by the sight of sexual activity.

The Grandfather Spirit (*Kalok*)

According to the answers given by the interviewees, most of the Mon nationals propitiate the grandfather spirit (*Ahpho-nat*). It is called “*Kalok*” in Mon language. 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 Figure 2 & 3).

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 carefully place the food basket of the grandfather spirit clearly marking the front and back (see Figure 4). 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 and increasing by one tube every time they make the offering. It must not be increased when the tubes reach number twenty. 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 guard them for their economy and social activities.

Besides this, they put a lower garment, a ten yards piece of red and white checked cloth stitched at the top so that it can be worn like a long strip turban, 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 as Spirit-property. 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 of the house-roof. Nowadays, they have replaced the ten-yard piece of cloth with only a two-yard piece because of the expenses.

It is opened to see if there are damage 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 other time. If so, then everything must be replaced and an offering has to be made again.

The Spirit Propitiation ceremony (*Hakyi haloh*)

Spirit-property means a secure package containing grandfather spirit's shirt, lower garment (*longyi*), turban, and a ring. Every house with spirit-property must hold the spirit, which is called "Spirit propitiation ceremony" *Natkwyay* or *Hakyi haloh* in Mon language. That propitiation is performed according to the following procedure:

- 1- Preparation for the offering:
- 2- The things needed for the offering
- 3- The Spirit Propitiation

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

lifetime responsibility and a promise is made to provide 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 words of some shamans, there must be three trays, one each for the Village spirit (*Ywawshin Nat*), the East spirit and the grandfather spirit because most Mons who propitiate the grandfather spirit have been living in this area so that they must propitiate one tray for the Village spirit (*Ywawshin Nat*), their ancestors have come from the East of Bago, and the current propitiation is especially meant for the grandfather spirit.

Each of the trays must contain a husk peeled coconut with the top of 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 sprigs 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 members must buy all the necessary things like coconut, glutinous rice, bananas, alcohol bottles and chicken. On the day of the propitiation, the housewife must keep ready steamed glutinous rice, fried pancakes, boiled whole tortoise or chicken with their stomachs cleaned or eggs.

In preparing the flower vase for Eugenia sprigs, 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. It is tied round the wrists and the neck of the sick person. And then bamboos are cut in five inches length and put into a basin of rice upside-down. Then *nat-pan-nyo* is put into them.

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. The front and back are marked with lime. Most Mon shamans living in Hinthagon 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 which the housewife can afford.

The things needed for the offering

According to respondents, 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 glutinous rice sweet pancakes); and tortoise which has become rare now. Therefore, for an 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 cut open, *nat-pan-nyo*, pot of *Eugenia*, thread and alcohol.

The Spirit Propitiation ceremony

The majority Mon nationals in Hinthagone 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 Hinthagone 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 Mons said that there is no set rule as to how many times spirit propitiation must be done in a year. It must be done only as the pledge when one took on the responsibility. It can be done once in a year or two or three years. If one's economy is bad, it can be deferred by offering a plate of green 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.”

All the respondents said that 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.”

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 the front of the house and it is offered to the respective spirit separately. The Village Spirit 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. 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 or maybe on the street. This is because the son-in-law’s spirit is different from father-in-law.

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; that he will bless them with a flourishing economy; and that the whole family may enjoy good health and wealth and be free from harm and bad fortune (see Figure 12). 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 leading 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.”

After that, the propitiation continues at the ancestral shrine built outside the house. The food basket has been 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 tied at the top. When the candlelight goes out, they put the basket on the shrine according to the lime marked front and back. Then only the spirit propitiation is finished. The visitors on 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 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 Hinthagon are born of teacher-pupil relationship, and the minority performs as a hereditary occupation. Besides, the Mon nationals at Hinthagon recognize one as a shaman only after he or she has learnt the art and a Master offertory has been presented.

The Grandfather Spirit Legacy

Most of the Mon nationals living in Hinthagon described that the tradition of making offerings to the spirit is carried out along the male line of the family. So when the father of a family died, the possessions of the spirit 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 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 on his own expense at his parents' house because the couple live and work away from the house.

Again there are some younger sons who have not taken the responsibility. But when they should wish to propitiate the spirit after their marriage in their own houses, they can do so when the propitiation is 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 and Zingyaik in Mon State. Then the money for expenses of spirit propitiation may be sent ahead of the offering day.

Discarding the custom of spirit propitiation

Every house with spirit-property must hold the spirit propitiation ceremony without fail. For various reasons, some wish to discard the custom of spirit propitiation. A certain married Mon woman said:

“When I am widowed with two sons, the elder 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 after my husband died, I can 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.”

They do so, on the death of male head of the house, by way of dumping the spirit-property at a banyan tree, or putting it in the dead man's coffin. The spirit-property is discarded at the banyan tree, home to many

spirits, for fear that if it was discarded somewhere else the spirit would be angry and might harm the family members.

But if a 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.

Resuming Spirit Propitiation again

Almost all the Mon nationals living in Hinthagon described that there are several ways forsaking the spirit propitiation. A few Mons living in Hinthagon do not believe in the propitiation of traditional family spirit. It is fanatical and does not accept any wrong. So they stopped doing the spirit propitiation. Concerning this case, a 45-year-old Mon national 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 the Mons at Hinthagon are found to have different beliefs so that they do not follow the traditional spirit propitiation.

Most Mon women said: some families could afford the expenses of spirit propitiation when they first made the pledge. But later when they cannot afford the expenses, they have to abandon it by 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 come to 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 have to resume the spirit propitiation again. Relating this case, an 80-year-old Mon shaman said:

“In Hinthagon, 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.

Discussion

Among the Mon nationals of Hinthagon 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 Hinthagon adopts bilineal kinship system to equally share the inheritance. Therefore, for the Mon nationals in Hinthagon differences are found between inheritance of property and legacy of spirit propitiation.

The Mon nationals in Hinthagon propitiate the combined Cloth spirit and Bamboo tube spirit that is known as Grandfather Spirit, and Coconut spirit. But the Mon nationals of Kawtbein Sanpya village, Kawkareik Township mainly propitiate three traditional spirits, namely, Coconut spirit, Bamboo spirit and Cloth spirit (Tin Myo Win, 2009). The worship of Coconut spirit is common to the Mon nationals in both Hinthagon 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. While this study says most Mons of Hinthagon hold the spirit propitiation ceremony in front of their house, Tin Myo Win’s study says the majority of Mons in Kawtbein hold the offerings and dances under the leadership of the shaman (*Natkanar Pwe*). Inferences to be made from these studies are: the Mons in different regions tend to have different modes of worship; and taboos remain similar to different groups of Mons maybe for their perceived power to harm the worshippers if not obeyed.

Iijima (1979) stated that though Sagaw Kayins of Mae Sariang district has adapted to the social environment through participation in festivals of other ethnic groups they keep Kayin identity by constant propitiation of their ancestral spirit. As the eldest daughter is entitled to

legacy of this spirit worship she usually leads the spirit propitiation. A son after his marriage follows the spirit propitiation conducted by his wife's side. In his study, among the Mons of Hinthagon the eldest son is entitled to the legacy of spirit worship and thus helps maintain the Mon identity.

This study also shows the Mons of Hinthagon propitiate spirits for their belief that spirits could influence their economy, health and social activities rather than for reasons of tradition and custom. Thus the belief in spirit propitiation is found to be the same between the Mons of Kawtbein Sanpya village (Tin Myo Win, 2009) and Sagaw Kayins of Mar Sariang district (Iijima, 1979). From the above, it can be said that most of the national races have been maintaining their culture through holding traditional spirit propitiation chiefly for their benefit.

Conclusion

From the traditional belief of the Mon national living in Hinthagon, it is known that where the Mon nationals of Hinthagon have migrated from. Besides, it is known that only the male Mons have the chance to inherit the legacy of spirit propitiation. It is also known that for the Mons Hinthagon there is no connection between inheritance of property and the legacy of spirit propitiation.

A few male Mons believe in spirit propitiation less than Mon women do. But they do not abandon it. They obey the taboos of spirit propitiation very strictly. Mon women personally believe in spirit propitiation more strongly than men. Furthermore, almost all the Mons living in Hinthagon believe that the traditional spirit propitiation has connected with their socio-economic life. Therefore, it is known that the reason why they continuously do the traditional spirit propitiation for their beneficial effects rather than for their tradition and custom.

Apart from the eldest son who is entitled to receive the grandfather spirit-property, younger sons are free to propitiate the grandfather spirit at their discretion. On the day of spirit propitiation, they may excuse their absence if circumstances do not permit. They believe in the resulting beneficial effects if they keep their promise made at the spirit propitiation. 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. Therefore, the majority of Mon nationals in Hinthagone continue to practise the traditional family spirit propitiation inherited from their

forefathers till today whether for reasons of beneficial effects in life or for reasons of convenience.

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