

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' HEROES & MARTYRS IN ASIA



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Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact

September 2014

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Foreword

Asia is home to 2/3 of the world's 370 million indigenous peoples. They share a common situation with other indigenous peoples in other parts of the world – they are part of the most marginalized and discriminated. Based on Human Development index (HDI), indigenous peoples are overrepresented among the poor, illiterate, malnourished and stunted. This is largely due to historical injustices committed to indigenous peoples especially by states, and the continuing violation of their collective rights to their lands, territories and resources, the right to self-determination including on development concerns, and to their cultural diversity and dignity as distinct peoples.

In response to this condition, indigenous peoples across Asia and beyond have been actively resisting on the impositions of states and others especially in grabbing their lands and resources in the name of development. The militarization of their communities for “national security”, the criminalization of their traditional occupations in the name of “conservation”, the commercialization of their cultures and the utter disregard of their wellbeing has given rise to indigenous peoples movements to defend their rights and promote their aspirations for equality, justice, peace and dignity for all.

These movements are shaped and being led by the many indigenous men and women who are courageous, selfless and determined to fight for the rights of indigenous peoples. Many have sacrificed their lives in being at the forefront of the indigenous peoples struggles. This publication tells the stories of the some of these indigenous men and women.

AIPP is humbled by their sacrifices and recognizes their invaluable contributions in advancing the indigenous peoples movement in Asia. This book is a tribute to them as we continue to be inspired by their leadership and martyrdom for the benefit of indigenous peoples. This book is also dedicated to their families, friends, relatives, communities and organizations.

*Joan Carling,
Secretary General
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)*





BANGLADESH

Manabendra Narayan Larma, a Visionary Rebel



Hundreds of indigenous peoples who have died went through their arduous journey through history and faced the aggression from the more organized, stronger and numerically larger races. The latter came in hordes from near and far lands to plunder valuable resources such as the land, minerals, forests, waters that were held in collective ownership by the complex-free and easy-going indigenous folks. Some succumbed to the onslaught without offering any resistance to the invading marauders, some mounted nominal resistance and put up an unequal fight and perished in the process. Still there were some who were defiant and fought a bloody battle against the disintegration of their race. Some were vanquished by the invaders. This is a painful legacy that the indigenous peoples have come to inherit for thousands of years. Extinction has become a destiny for them.

These ruthless and brutal stories of racial elimination in the annals of history are recalled with the memory of Manabendra Narayan Larma (M N Larma), who in many ways, stood exceptional as a leader of the Jumma people. For the first time in the history of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) a voice of defiance raised by this otherwise calm and composed man against injustice resonated throughout the region. He will go down in CHT history as the first ever political activist who was prepared to go to any length to realize the legitimate rights of the indigenous peoples. The demand was not for new rights but the continuation of what they enjoyed during the Pakistan period.

I first met him in 1964 when he was kept in captivity in the Chittagong Jail. He was arrested for some articles about the woes and sufferings that the indigenous peoples of CHT had to bear with after the damming of Karnafully River. About one hundred thousand people belonging to different ethnic communities lost their ancestral homesteads and best farmlands under the rising waters of the river. This caused colossal damage to the indigenous economy and the social structure which was never quantified due to the lack of political consciousness among the hill people. In those days, the hill people did not enjoy access to political activities and the government considered political dissidence or criticism of any government activity/policy in the CHT as anti-state and therefore a criminal offence. Politics was forbidden for the hill people who were wrongfully accused of being loyal to the state of Pakistan. There were no organizations which might have served as the mouthpiece of the suffering people because an atmosphere of repression was pervasive.

M N Larma was agitated and moved by the untold miseries of the people displaced by the Kaptai Dam and the unfair deal by the government which did not give adequate compensation and proper rehabilitation to the hill people. He decided to speak for the people who had been long silenced. It was an act of courage to do so as indigenous communities could hardly speak against the government's wrongful activities and policies. The government was also unprepared to yield to a stubborn young man from the hill communities who spoke out

his heart. The first ever written protest against the human catastrophe caused by the Kaptai Hydro-Electric Project took the government by surprise. Soon he was detained.

I was a first year student at the Chittagong College when I accompanied Shantuda (Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma), the honorable chairman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council to the Chittagong Court Building where M N Larma was to appear for the resumption of hearing of his case.. Because he was detained on political grounds, nobody, not even his close friends, dared to visit him in jail or in court for fear of being suspected by the police of having any link with his political thought. My presence in the court pleasantly surprised him and since then our friendship lasted until his last days.

M N Larma showed courage to dismantle the age-old practice of acquiescing to any government action be it good or bad, in the CHT. He pioneered in speaking out against injustice and taking an intrepid stand in defense of his Jumma people during the Pakistan period. From Shantuda, he learned about the latest developments in the CHT, activities among the indigenous students' circle and their level of consciousness, their readiness to work for the tyrannized and maltreated Jummas. When he asked about the progress of his case, he was told that the government police failed to prove that he, M N Larma was involved in anti-state activities and authorities were merely delaying the hearing of his case.

He was concerned over the state of affairs that the indigenous communities in the CHT were made to put up with where the Jummas neither had political authority nor economic power. He believed that people without economic and political power could hardly survive in the face of stiff economic and social aggression from the powerful neighboring communities unless special constitutional provisions were made to protect the weaker. He said the Jummas were more threatened with gradual elimination in an independent Bangladesh than they were in Pakistan where they enjoyed constitutional protection both in the constitutions of 1956 and 1962. In our talk at the MNA hostel in Dhaka in 1972 during the Constitutional Assembly session he said: "I come to learn from a reliable source that the draft constitution to be placed for approval in the Constituent Assembly does not contain any provision safeguarding the interests of the indigenous peoples of CHT. All people belonging to different caste, creed, ethnicity living in the geographical boundary of Bangladesh will henceforth be known as Bangali. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has wiped out the identity of indigenous peoples with the stroke of a pen. My last hope has been shattered. Something has to be done and we have to be prepared for the worse. I do not know where this body of mine will lie dead." He sounded prophetic and it was proven true in later years.

The draft constitution was tabled before the Constituent Assembly where except for M N Larma, all other members of the Constituent Assembly belonging to Awami League were all praises for the Bangabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of the nation. He was to present to the nation a fully democratic and secular constitution but was not interested in the

apprehensions of the indigenous peoples, a greater proportion of which lived in the CHT. The Bangabandhu, was so great and overshadowing that no members of the Constituent Assembly dared speak against his wishes, except for M N Larma who took the floor of the Assembly and declared that he did not endorse a constitution which did not contain provisions safeguarding the interests of not only the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh but also the interests of the downtrodden and underprivileged farmers and workers, the fishermen, and other disadvantaged and marginalized people all over the country. It was his wish that a country's constitution be aimed at building an egalitarian society where all people, regardless of creed or culture must be provided with an adequate space to breathe in their own environment. That he was bold not only in words but also in action was evident from his refusal to put his signature to endorse the constitution.

That time, it was beyond Bangabandhu's imagination that someone in Bangladesh, would dare go against his wish when his words were considered divine,. He warned the Assembly not to play with fire and of the severe consequences in the event of not complying with his admonition, in an oblique reference to M N Larma's role. Defying Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and holding high the indigenous causes are a testimony of the extent of M N Larma's commitment and dedication to the plight of his Jumma people. The extent of his involvement in the Jumma's movement for survival aimed at achieving vital protective measures for them in the form of constitutional safeguards.

M N Larma was a lone crusader against the unjust government policies which were not for the interest of the indigenous communities during the sixties. The local

elite did not cooperate with him, instead, they eagerly showed their loyalty to the government. In those days the common people and the local elite used to believe that anti-government stand was equated with anti-state activity. Due to a low level of awareness among the masses, they did not see that it was their democratic right to articulate their opinion on the government policies that concern their life and living. Fortunately, M N Larma, got the full backing of the student community studying at different colleges and universities of the country. They were to become his vanguard in his campaign for indigenous rights which they lost to the Bangladesh constitution. His popularity grew among the greater section of students and people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. His being a role model to many of them was a great achievement for him.

No other leader in the CHT is so much respected and honored as M N Larma. No name was as frequently uttered as his name. M N Larma was not above blemish either but whatever infirmities he had was outshined by the contributions he made to the development of political thinking in the CHT. His stubborn resistance to the unjust machination of those in power compelled the government to find a lasting solution to the ethnic problems in the hills. The present situation in the hills is far from what he sought and fought for. His visions will come true only if his style of leadership is carried out.

Used to a very simple lifestyle, he was soft spoken and introvert in nature. When he was MP, poor folk from the villages went to him with the hope of getting their problems solved. They gave him vegetables as complimentary gift or tribute, as they were unable to afford costly items. He refused to keep them unless the people accepted the reasonable price he offered them. He could have had the cozy comforts of urban living as avenues were open to him. Instead, he went underground and opted for a fugitive life in the service of Jumma cause.

The painful saga of the indigenous peoples all around the world continues today. The number of indigenous peoples in the world is now alarmingly decreasing in number, elimination process being active as ever. Indigenous peoples in the CHT who have lived for centuries by the hills and forests around them and shaped their own culture, are struggling hard to survive today. Their breathing space has narrowed considerably. Their hero M N Larma who tried to lead them out of this critical situation and in whom they reposed their hope for survival, is no more. The question that needs an answer is: Are the CHT indigenous peoples just going to join the historical caravans heading for their inevitable 'tryst with destiny'?

Mong Shanoo Chowdhury

Hajongmata Rashimoni

The contribution of the indigenous peoples to the resistance movements in Bangladesh cannot be denied. We can mention the glorious role of the Santal and Hajong communities for their spontaneous participation in the struggles of the ‘Santal Revolution’ of 1855, the ‘Tanka Movement’ from 1938-1946, including the Liberation war of 1971.

Rashimoni Hajong was a legendary peasant leader of the greater Mymensing District in East Bengal. She was a veteran leader of the Tanka movement against British and landlord (Zamindar) rule in the Indian sub-continent. She was already a leader of great caliber even before her second marriage to Panjaram Hajong of Durgapur. She got deeply involved in the Tanka movement through the encouragement of her husband. She ultimately became ‘Hajongmata’ (mother of Hajong nation) of the indigenous peoples of the locality. She was killed on January 31, 1946 during a battle against East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) members at Baheratuli.

Who is Rashimoni Hajong

Rashimoni Hajong was an important communist leader who organized the resistance movement against the rule of the British and landlords (Zaminder) at the grassroots level of Mymensingh. There are two different stories about her birth place. Some Hajongs say that she was born in 1908 to a lower middleclass Hajong family at Bogajhora village under Durgapur Upazila (subdistrict). Others say that she was born to a Hajong family at Ghailara village under Nalitabari Upazila in greater Mymensingh. It is said that she got married when she was 16 years old, but her husband died after five years of marriage. Then she joined the communist movement. She had no proper academic schooling; but she was self-educated and courageous from her childhood. Besides politics, she had some knowledge of traditional ayurvedic treatment, which she used successfully. She was popular not only as a leader but also as a healer.

Rashimoni Hajong had a second marriage to Panjaram Hajong, who was also an ayurvedic practitioner (Kabiraj) of Bogajhora village under Durgapur Upazila. Rashimoni learned more knowledge of ayurvedic medicine from her second husband as well.

Tanka Movement

The Tanka movement was a militant agrarian struggle on behalf of the Hajong adivasi people in Mymensingh District, East Bengal (initially in India, later East Pakistan) from 1942-1950. The movement was parallel, but distinct from, the Tebhaga movement in other parts of Bengal. Hajong people created the Tanka movement to establish their own rights. The Hajong movement was also inspired by the struggles of Moni Singh.

The Tanka movement was actually organized by Hajong peasants. The Bengali word 'Tanka' means division (Khajna) of the crops into three parts. The movement aimed for the peasant class to get two-thirds share of the total crop yield while the rest (one-third) would go to the owner of the land. The Zamindar rule was that the landowners would get two-thirds of the total harvest. Even if, in any year, the crops were destroyed by natural calamities or other causes, the peasants would still be required to pay the mandated share or money to the landlords. Thousands of Hajong people of greater Mymensingh raised their voices strongly against this exploitation and struggled against the severe rule of the Bengali landlords.

Firstly, Hajong peasants organized locally against the Zamindar rule. The necessary political leadership for the movement came from the Bengal Peasant Association, an organization of peasants and landless agricultural workers of the Communist Party of India (CPI). The movement took serious turns and reached its peak in 1938-1946. It became very popular at Durgapur, Kalmakanda, Haluaghat, Nalitabari and Sribardi upazilas in greater Mymensingh districts.

Bengali communist cadres had arrived in the Hajong areas in the 1930s and helped to organise the Hajong peasants. During the period of 1942 and 1945, Hajong share-croppers organized in the Kisan Sabha struggled against feudal domination of Bengali Hindu landlords. There was a severe crackdown against the movement

in 1946. The Hajong then turned to guerrilla struggles. By the time of independence of Pakistan, the Hajong guerrillas operating along the Indo-Pakistani border were well organised.

Hajong armed communist rebels captured control over a number of villages and set up their own administration there. The Hajong rebels were led by Lalit Sarkar and Padmalochan Sarkar. Rashimoni Hajong also played an important role by walking from door to door to motivate the Hajong peasants.

After being confronted by the Pakistani Army, the rebels built up a base in Baghmara, Garo Hills on the Indian side of the border. For some time they conducted frequent cross-border raids against Pakistani police parties. Additional Pakistani police forces were sent to the area, patrolling the entire border area of the Mymensingh District. The Pakistani state forces conducted a violent campaign of repression against the Hajong people, and most Hajongs left Pakistan for India. Pakistani authorities claimed that "almost all" of the Hajong refugees were communist sympathizers, a claim that was used to justify the expropriation of their households and lands. These lands were lost to Bengali Muslim refugees from India.

Rashimoni's motivational activities

Rashimoni Hajong is now introduced and respected as 'Hajongmata' (Mother of Hajong Nation) for her noble work in her society. She was a woman leader of the 'Tanka Movement' during the second-half of 20th century. She led Hajong peasants groups to protest against the rule of cruel landlords who had been exploiting Hajong peoples for a long time. She conscientized the poor peasants in every Hajong village and involved them in the movement. She also recruited Hajong women guerrillas in many villages. Rashimoni led an attack against the Lengura E.P.R camp and Duragapur Police station together with the women guerrillas. Finally, all Hajong peasants decided to stop giving tanka or a share of their crops to the landlords. After a series of such actions, the landlords retaliated against the Hajong people by exerting pressure on indigenous peasants to take the greater share of crops from them. It was an extremely difficult time of injustice for the Hajong peasants.

What happened on January 31, 1946

As the Tanka movement was growing in strength, some members of the EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) attacked the Hajong peasants at the Hajong villages of Susong Duragapur on January 31, 1946. However, failing to find any peasants at the Baheratuli village, the EPR abducted Kumudini Hajong, a newly-wed housewife, and forcibly took her to the camp. At that time, Rashimoni was working in nearby villages educating the Hajong peasants on the impact of the Tanka Rule. After learning of what had happened to Kumudini, Rashimoni together with her peasant groups set up a blockade on the road and demonstrated against the EPR. Rashimo-

ni said, '*Moy timad, ekra timad huye aregra timadla maan rokkha moy kuribo, muriba lage murbo*' (I am a woman, it is my prime duty to save the prestige of another woman. I am ready to sacrifice my life for that). A fierce battle ensued between the Hajong peasants groups and EPR members at Baheratali village. Rashimoni Hajong and Surendra Hajong were killed during the struggle. Some EPR members were also injured and they ran away leaving Kumudini Hajong behind. On that day, Rashimoni made a remarkable stance, saving Kumudini Hajong by sacrificing her valuable life.

In 2004, a monument was built at Baheratali village in honor of Rashimoni Hajong by the civil society organization 'Hajongmata Rashimoni Memorial Trust'. Every year on the 31st of January, the Hajong people as well as mainstream Bengali people gather at the site of the monument to commemorate her death anniversary.

Matilal Hajong & Shohel Chandra Hajong



INDONESIA

Werima Mananta, a Female Fighter from Dongi Village



One of God's gifts to the Indonesian citizens is the beauty of its nature and the fertility of its soil. Because of these, the archipelago has become a target for exploitation by capitalists. One particular case is the Dongi Village, Central Sulawesi.

The name of the village, Dongi, according to *suarakomunitas.net*¹, was taken from "Dongi" a kind of local plant with a sour taste that grows abundantly around the Dongi Tua Village and some parts of Luwu territory. The To Karunsi'e community settling in Dongi Village is divided into three groups namely, To Karunsi'e Pae-pae, To Karunsi'e Sinongko, and To Karunsi'e Dongi.

The name "To Karunsi'e" came from the words "karo" meaning "main" and "si'e" meaning "barn", thus main barn. This refers to the geographical condition of To Karunsi'e which has fertile soil for cultivation of food crops, such as rice. In the old days, To Karunsi'e was known as Barn of Life.

¹ Community voices is an Indonesian media and portal which publishes news from grassroots community (<http://www.suarakomunitas.net/baca/80018/to-karunsi%25E2%2580%2599e-membangun-kembali-ke-jayaan-di-kampung-tua-dong> accessed on July 7, 2014)

At that time, To Karunsi'e was also called Witamorini which means "a fertile and secure land." In this territory, there had never been any lean time or scarcity. Always, crops in To Karunsi'e were abundant, barns were full with rice crops. This area was also known to be generous and even gave assistance in the form of crop products to indigenous people who settled around its territory, including the Rahampu'u tribe at Matano.

In that fertile land was born a strong woman who until the end of her life, fought to defend her village from capitalist penetration that would exploit the natural resources of her ancestral land. This woman was named Werima Mananta. She was born at Dongi Village on July 25, 1946, a year after the Republic of Indonesia declared its independence.

Mananta grew up at refugee camps in Central Sulawesi Province, during the rebellion of DI/TII² Kahar Mudzakar in the 1960s. According to the Indigenous

People Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) website³, after being evacuated for quite some time, Mananta went back to her homeland in 2002 with a strong desire to build her village.

However, she was deeply disappointed when she found out that her village (Dongi) had become a mining area for nickel which was then owned by PT Inco. It has since changed its name to PT Vale.

Some parts of her birthplace had been turned into golf course and office sites, while other parts had become mining areas. The fertile land which was God's gift had been destroyed.

Not only that, but the Dongi community's old ancestral gravesites had partly become a mining site. From then on, Mananta, together with her brothers and sisters, and some members of the Dongi community began to fight to seize back their ancestral lands which had been destroyed by the capitalists. Thus began the resistance.

² DI/TII is the abbreviation of Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Army). After Republic of Indonesia declared its independency on August 17, 1945, some of the rebellions happened in many archipelago areas, one of them was DI/TII. A kind of rebellion in the name of Islam and wanted to establish Islamic State.

³ <http://www.aman.or.id/2013/07/23/srikandi-pejuang-perempuan-adat-dongi/#.U7teckDzzIU>. Accessed on July 7, 2014

In 2003, Werima Mananta was chosen as the chief of the tribe of Dongi Village, replacing her sister Naomi Mananta. In 2005, Werima Mananta started to lead demonstrations against mining and the Luwu Timur district government which had planned to relocate the Dongi community. Besides leading demonstrations, Mananta also gathered support from the international community through cooperation with civil society organizations (CSOs) such as AMAN, Jatam⁴ and Walhi⁵.

The mining company felt threatened with her presence. They resorted to intimidations, both terroristic and gentle persuasions, even promising and luring Mananta with material things to stop her from leading the resistance. However, Werima Mananta continued to fight.

In 2010, Werima Mananta, together with Dongi indigenous peoples began the territorial mapping of Dongi Village customary area and they continued this until 2012 which resulted to a master plan of spatial and production planning of Dongi Village. Between 2012 until the beginning of 2013, the company persuaded

Mananta to negotiate for a settlement regarding the conflict with the Dongi Village indigenous people. No agreements were ever made even after three negotiations.

Werima Mananta, already aged 62 years old, continued to lead the resistance, fighting to defend her ancestral land despite suffering from failing kidneys. She is remembered by her successors with these words: “Better we die in our ancestors’ land than leave it”.

On July 19, 2013, Werima Mananta breathed her last breath. Werima Mananta died with dignity because she continued to fight for indigenous peoples rights. Her fighting spirit will be kept alive by indigenous peoples of To Karunsi’e.

*Story contributed by
the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN)*

⁴ Jatam = mining advocacy network. Jatam is an NGO which doing advocacy against mining industry.

⁵ Walhi = Indonesia Environmental Forum, is an environmental organization in Indonesia



JAPAN

Matsumura Kosaku: Brave Commoner



Matsumura Kosaku was a Karate expert in 1854. At that time, the Ryukyus Kingdom was under the control of the Satsuma clan. The Satsuma samurais' autocratic behavior was such that they raised quarrel with villagers and women, and their act was enough to intimidate people everywhere.

Matsumura Kosaku had heard the rumor about the Satsuma's samurais' bad behavior and he was angry at this, more so because they were bureaucrats. He then decided to put a stop to the improper and indecent acts.

One day, while he was walking on the street, Matsumura heard screams from a crowd of people. In the middle, he saw a screaming bureaucrat samurai wielding a sword and the people were running away with fear. It was the first time he actually saw an autocratic samurai with his own eyes, which he previously heard of only as a rumor. He pushed his way into the crowd until he faced the bureaucrat samurai. Matsumura had only a wet towel in his hand. The people were surprised and the samurai was flustered for a moment. The samurai held his sword over his head and cut down toward Matsumura who made a sudden dodge and took away the sword with a wet towel and threw it down into the sea.

Nashiro Satunushi Peichin

Worried and concerned that the people would be harmed, he managed to push and kick, then shot a sharp look at the samurai and quickly fled away. Later in the day, the Satsuma samurai, burning and angry with resentment, tried to find Matsumura and even went to a school where many young men came from the village called Tomari. At the school, he asked every young man about his opponent, but not one of them answered that they knew Matsumura Kosaku, nor did anyone give his name.

Matsumura was worried that he could get his fellow villagers in trouble, thus he left his home in Tomari village in the middle of the night and headed to Nago, and requested from his acquaintances that he be allowed to stay there. He stayed in Yamanoha village for a few years and by then, things had calmed down. He left his dear home in Hichiya Mui Forest, and went back to his old home in Tomari.

His remains are presently found in the middle of the Hichiya Mui Forest.

Translated by Shisei Toma

Nashiro Satunushi Peichin was a government bureaucrat in the Ryukyus Kingdom then. He was deeply concerned about the crisis of the disposition of Ryukyus because it was being annexed to Imperial Japan in 1872 as announced by the Meiji government of Imperial Japan. He and his colleague, Kochi Chojo went to China as confidential agents to appeal and petition to the Qing dynasty government to assist them regarding their concern on Ryukyus in 1876.

While there, he explained the crisis in Ryukyus to the public on the main streets in Fujian, China. Despite his efforts, his homeland Ryukyus Kingdom became a prefecture of Okinawa in 1879.

In 1880, Nashiro Satunushi Peichin headed to Beijing to appeal the independence of Ryukyus once more to the dignitaries in the Qing government. However, he was informed that the Sino-Japan talk resulted to China giving up the Ryukyus to Japan. After this last effort for his homeland's independence, he abandoned all hope.

After his trip to Beijing in 20 November 1880, he took his own life with these last words "I will die, but I still believe that God will help us." He was 40 years old then.

Translated by Shisei Toma





MALAYSIA

Penan Hero: Headman Kelesau Naan



“We say we want to preserve the Forest because we have a good life here. We are the Penan and we are the VOICE for the rainforest of Sarawak, Malaysia.”

History of our Situation as Penan

According to headman Kelesau Naan, Penans are peoples originating from the Baram area dating back a few thousand years ago. No other people and no government existed before in the area. Only the Penans lived there together with the Temedo (or the rhinoceros, abundantly found in the Baram area) and other animals. The Penans are the only true nomadic people in Sarawak and are among the last hunter-gatherers in the world. We make our home under the rainforest canopy, deep within Sarawak’s virgin jungle. Until today, we continue to roam the rainforest using blowpipes to hunt wild boar and deer. Previously, the Penans worshipped a supreme God called Bungan. However, an increasing number of Penans have converted to Christianity as they abandoned the nomadic lifestyle in favor of settlement in longhouses.

Sarawak is known as the land of the White Rajah, the hornbill and the Orang Utans. Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia being equivalent in size to Austria. It is often described as Borneo's "Hidden Paradise" with its vast rainforest, which is home to the world's richest and most diverse eco-system. It is also here where you find the world's largest flower, *Rafflesia*, and a myriad of species of flora and insects still waiting to be discovered.

Sarawak was once ruled by the Sultan of Brunei. The first government was established during his rule. Then, in 1838, the Sultan gave James Brooke, a trader, a portion of Sarawak as a reward for his help in defeating his enemies. Later, James Brooke acquired the whole of Sarawak through manipulation and imposition of taxes on the people.

When the people protested, James Brooke made use of the local Dayaks to fight against the other indigenous groups who refused to pay taxes. By then, other indigenous groups such as the Kenyah, Kayan, Kelabit had entered the Baram area. The Kenyah originated from Usun Apau in Central Borneo while the Kelabit came from various places in Upper Limbang-Brunei area such as Sungai Ruap, Batu Lawi, Temburong and Lawas. They settled down in the Baram area to seek refuge from enemy attacks during the headhunting period. (A full account of the history of Sarawak is not possible here, but briefly, James Brooke and his descendants

continued to rule Sarawak until 1943, followed by British colonialists from 1943 to 1963, with an interruption during 1945-1946 when the Japanese occupied the state. In 1965 Sarawak together with Sabah were incorporated into the Federation of Malaysia).

Threats by Logging and Plantations

The Government made modern laws that contradicted the adat, or native customary laws. Penan rights over land and forests in the Baram area, which pre-existed these modern laws by thousands of years, were not recognized by the government under the new laws. Penan customary laws uphold full rights of the Penans over the land and areas in the Baram Area. Our leaders and hundreds of our people are willing to face arrest and imprisonment to protect and preserve our ancestral rights over our ancestral lands.

Ignoring our ancestral rights over our land, the government created and passed laws that allow the issuance of licenses to timber companies for logging. They also allow plantation companies to open up large areas for oil palm cultivation, thereby destroying the forests and polluting the rivers. Air pollution is also caused by open burning of the cleared land resulting in haze. The irony is that the government has also passed laws prohibiting the killing of protected animals, for example, the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), which imposes fines

or imprisonment to wrongdoers. Meanwhile, the government issues licenses to companies, allowing them to legally encroach into virgin forests for logging, thereby disturbing the wildlife and their habitats. More importantly, the forest that provides food for both humans and wildlife are destroyed.

In view of the situation, our Penan community leaders reiterate that our customary rights must be respected, including the right to make our own laws on the management of forest resources and animals. We have a deep pre-existing understanding of the protection, management and conservation of the forest and its natural resources. We know how to manage the forest and harvest its resources in a sustainable manner. There is no need for the government or any outside agency to teach the indigenous people. Instead, the government and outsiders should learn from the Penan and other indigenous peoples. When logging concessions were established and sold to international corporations by the government, our presence and dependence on the forest, our native customary land rights, and our sustainable forest practices were ignored completely. By the end of 1986, 2.8 million hectares of forest had been cleared in Malaysia, much of which was our ancestral land.

In the 1980s, our leaders started to organize the communities. They turned to more powerful actions and erected 25 blockades across logging roads in the Baram and Limbang Districts of Sarawak. Later the same year, the State Assembly declared the action of blockading a logging road an illegal offense punishable by a two-year prison sentence without trial and a RM6000 fine.

In a further attempt to make our voices heard, a delegation of Penan chiefs and elders from several ethnic groups including the Kenyah, traveled to Kuala Lumpur aiming to meet with National Ministers. The Penan people erected a wooden blockade in the late 1980s, which lasted for seven months before being torn down. Still, logging continued to destroy the Penan's source of food, medicine, building materials and other requirements for life derived from the resources of the forest. The government failed to act on its promise of monitoring the activities of the logging companies. To prevent any further infringement on our native customary rights (NCR) over our land, the Penans erected a new blockade on roads cutting through their customary lands in the 5th Division Penan of Upper Limbang.

Despite international pressure on the Malaysian government to stop logging and to recognize indigenous rights, 27 more Penans were arrested at the end of the year for blockading. The court trials proceeded slowly, mainly due to numerous delays caused by the officials. Meanwhile, logging continued. Continuing pressure from the logging companies and the lack of recognition by the government led to the construction of 17 more blockades resulting in further arrests of 222 more Penans in 1989. Among those arrested was our lead Headman Kelesau Naan, who was imprisoned in Miri, Sarawak for one month.

In 1991, Kelesau Naan and other Penan community leaders from the 4th and 5th Division Baram and Limbang erected another blockade at the upper Segah river near the village of Long Ajeng. This blockade stood for

nine months. However, it was later dismantled due to trickery by the government, after they informed the Penan community that they would conduct a registration for the issuance of the National Identity Card. No one was arrested during the dismantling of the said blockade.

Meanwhile, logging continued to encroach into Penan land in 1993. This resulted in the creation of another blockade led by Kelesau Naan and other leaders in the Upper Baram area at Ba Sebateu. This blockade was eventually dismantled eight months later on the 28th of September 1993 when the Samling logging company used the Police, Police Field Force and Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) against the people. They used tear gas to disperse and dismantle the blockade resulting to the arrest of 11 Penan men. In addition, several people were injured including a young boy, whose eventual death a year later was suspected to have been caused by the use of tear gas during the incident.

Another incident happened in 1997 when Penans from Long Sepigen, Long Kerong, Long Sait, Long Lai and Long Lamai confronted the Merawa Timber company, Kelsea Camp, the sub-contractors under the concession of Samling Timber. The company had encroached into native customary rights land in Long Kerong. The communities from the surrounding villages went to lend their support to stop the logging in that area. All the Penan leaders, led by Kelesau Naan, went to Ba Segita where the Penan community had been trying to negotiate with the company to stop working in the area. In response, the Samling company brought in the Police and Police Field Force. The Police fired shots

into the air in an attempt to scare the community away. They arrested four Penans. In the end, the company ceased its logging operations as a direct result of the struggle and resistance of the Penan.

From 1980s until early 2000, the Penan community of Ulu Baram numbering several thousands and other indigenous groups set up symbolic blockades along logging roads. This move was a last resort to protect our Native Customary Rights over our land and forest after attempts to hold a dialogue with the Sarawak Government and logging companies failed to materialize. Despite the arrest and imprisonment of 500 of our people and having to face various trials in court, our Native Customary Rights over land are still not recognized. Unsustainable logging is still ongoing and our people continue to struggle to assert our rights to determine our own development.

Apart from logging, in 1995 a sustainable forest management project in Sarawak called FOMISS was initiated between the German and Malaysian governments following the Rio Earth Summit in Brazil. The Sarawak Government, Forest Department, German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and a multi-national logging company called Samling Strategic Corporation Sdn Bhd, agreed to use Samling's concession area in Ulu Baram involving virgin rainforest for the pilot project.

Agenda 21 was signed by participating countries at the Rio Summit as an action plan meant to safeguard the world towards a sustainable development path. The document states among others the requirement

for all “stakeholders” to be involved in any project. In the Forest Management Information System Sarawak (FOMISS) project, stakeholders included the Penan communities whose land and forests are within the pilot project area, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Sarawak government through the Forestry Department, Samling and of course GTZ for their technical input. A few years later, the GTZ-FOMISS Project was discontinued due to the strong protest and campaign of the Penan people.

Headman Kelesau Naan, Jawa Nyipa, Bilong Oyau and Pelutan Tiun filed a case in court to overturn Abdul Taib’s Concession Grant to Samling (Suit NO: 22-46-98). The legal case languished in the courts since 1998. Manoeuvres to bring in neighbouring Kenyah litigants to lay claim on the same land as the four Penan plaintiffs further delayed the trial. In its decision, the civil court ruled that the suit must be heard in the native customary court first before Samling’s concession can be challenged in the Miri High Court. The native customary court has yet to decide which communities have a stronger claim to the disputed land. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC), which delineated the Forest Management Unit (FMU) in October 2004, refused to recognise that these NCR claims raised any legal conflict. In a letter written to MTCC in 2004, 19 native community chiefs from the Selaan-Linau area said: “Many of us have suffered due to the Samling logging operations: our rivers are polluted, our sacred sites damaged and our animals chased away.”

The Penan village of Long Kerong is located within a logging concession operated by the Malaysian Samling group. Part of the community’s territory had been certified by the MTCC as logging concession without the Penan’s consent. After a strong campaign locally and internationally, we successfully stopped logging encroachment into our NCR land at Long Kerong.

The Death of Headman Kelesau Naan

Kelesau Naan, aged 80, was respected by all communities because he was a strong and great leader who had opposed logging activities since the 1980s. On October 23, 2007 Kelesau Naan had gone missing. He told his wife, Uding Lidem, that he was going to check on the animal traps he had set near their hut by the Sungai Segita river, located about 2 hours walk from the Village Long Kerong long-house. He left the hut never to return. His wife waited for him the entire day and when he did not return on the second day, his wife went to their village at Long Kerong to inform the people that he was missing .

Immediately, the villagers started a search. Failing to locate Kelesau despite the use of tracker dogs, the villagers feared that their headman had died. Many suspected that Kelesau had been killed and murdered because of his anti-logging activities. On December 17, 2007, the villagers discovered what appeared to be Kelesau’s skull and bones of his thighs, ribs and hands, which suddenly surfaced near Sungai Segita. Family members of Kelesau and many Long Kerong villagers insist that the bones were that of their headman Kele-

sau and that he was murdered due to his vocal opposition against logging. Kelesau's son Nick, who lodged a police report with the Marudi police over the incident lamented that the police were not serious about the possibility that his father had been 'murdered'. Nick said that the week-long search for his father following his disappearance had covered the very same place where his bones were later found.

Nick Kelesau said, "If my father had not been taken and killed but had died naturally after an encounter with a wild animal, why did we not come across his remains during the (earlier) search?". Another possibility is that Kelesau's death was the result of inter-tribal differences that had arisen over the anti-logging resistance. Long Kerong villagers - including Kelesau who was in the frontline - felt that they had the most to lose



if they yielded to loggers. The reason is because Long Kerong leads into the last tract of non-logged areas of the Sela'an Suling Permanent Forest Estate (PFE) concession. When loggers made moves to encroach into their rainforests in 1996-1997, the barricades that Long Kerong had set up were so effective in keeping the loggers out that the State force was needed to end it. The area is now claimed by 18 Penan villages in Upper Baram as the Penan Peace Park, after the death of our hero Kelesau Naan.

The death of Kelesau Naan marks the passing of a Penan hero. Indigenous peoples of all walks of life feel Kelesau Naan's death as a deeply personal loss. He was a man who made us truly proud to be Penan, a freedom fighter who was truly loved by all of us. You are our great Hero who supported our voice to preserve the last remaining piece of Borneo rainforest. We hope to win this fight for you and for us. You have disappeared and left us but in our heart, you are never forgotten by all of us, your wife, children and friends. We promise to keep firm to our words and never give up the battle on your behalf and for our next generation.

Our lands are given to us from God and are a gift to us by our ancestors a thousand years ago. We were born here and grew up here in the Upper Baram area. Our rights and our land cannot be taken away from us because it is a part of us. We will never surrender our rights to others who easily forget their promises made to us.

Our museum is the cave, mountain and rivers. Our history is in the animals, sago and traditional medicine. We have our own banks, supermarket, fishponds, water pipes and existing livestock. God created the earth for us to live. He takes care of the plants and also created the animals. Yet God allows us to live freely, to own and take care of God's creation. We can share all these with the poor and those who can care for them because the creatures of God exist only once.

We know that human beings are good in destroying the forest, rivers and animals but they cannot create them. Money and property can be created by human beings but they are not as beautiful as God's creation.

Goodbye our hero Kelesau Naan. Our great Hero.
May God grant you peace and may you rest in peace.

*Story contributed by
Komeok and Jaringan Arang asal SeMalaysia (JOAS)*



NEPAL

Indigenous Hero: Iman Singh Chemjong



There are people who from birth show extraordinary behavior, skills and talents with their voice, dancing, speech, playing, art and writing skills that are unique and set them apart from others. Such skills and peculiarities are found in few and allow a person to become a famous hero who is never forgotten by society and a nation.

Limbu historian, writer, linguist, lexicographer, folklorist and philosopher of Nepal Kirant Iman Singh Chemjong was born on January 01, 1904 in Renkebung, West Bengal, Darjeeling. He received his certificate of education in 1928 from St. Xavier's College, Calcutta.

King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah invited Chemjong to join Tribhuvan University in Nepal in the capacity of "Limbu expert" in 1961. For years until his death, Iman Singh Chemjong headed a one-man Limbu research team at the university. He held a "Kirant Bhasha Tatha Sanskriti Bishesagya (specialist in Kiranti language and culture)" position at the Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu as evidenced by his book *Kiratakalina Vijayapurako Sankshipta Itihasa* published in 1975.

Chemjong dedicated his entire life to studying, documenting various facets of Kirati tradition and culture at a time when such activities were frowned upon and even punished by the Nepalese ruling elite as being subversive and "anti-national". His research into, and publication of, a Kiranti history and culture challenged perceptions of the Nepalese official.

He is a very popular scholar of culture, language, literature, script and history of the Kirat community. He has written many books in the field. In his lifetime, he published the following: Kirat Itihas (Kirat history) 1948, Kirat Sahitya ko Itihas (History of Kirat literature) 1952, Kirati Dantya Katha (Kirat folklore) 1961, Kirat Mundhum (Kirat scripture) 1961, Limbu-Nepali-English Dictionary 1961, Kirat Mundhum Khahun (Kirat religion) 1965, Kirat History and Culture 1967, Kirat Darshan ko Saransh (about Kirat philosophy) 1969, Lepcha-Nepali-English Dictionary 1969, Kiratkalin Bijayapur ko Itihas (about Kirat Bijayapur history) 1974. All these published books are his major contribution. He worked as a Kiratologist in CENAS of Tribhuvan University, and at the Nepal Postal Services Department, Nepal Philatelic Bureau. Kathmandu issued his Postal ticket in 1998.

Iman Singh Chemjong is the pioneer of Kirant tradition where he promoted the oral tradition such as the Limbus' experiential religion called Mundhum which is centered on animistic rituals and practices. However, due to the assimilation of Limbus into the Hindu mainstream, many Limbus adopted Hindu names and started to participate in Hindu worships and festivals.

Limbus never really severed their ties to their rich religion and culture that stretched back to ancient times. Limbus worship their own supreme god Ningmaphuma. One such devoted Limbu worshipper was Chemjong's own mother, Devapu Hangma. Limbu Mundum

religion is a rich cornucopia of oral traditions encompassing Kirati theology, mythology, history, genealogy, culture and traditions, and having a devout mother gave Chemjong a distinct advantage to learn all these.

Today, the Limbu and Kirant communities are spread across Asia and mid- and eastern Nepal, West Bengal, Assam, Sikkim, Bhutan, Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Europe and America. They revere Chemjong as a hero who single-handedly researched and documented Limbu and Kirati life.

Family members, relatives, friends and colleagues remember Iman Singh Chemjong as an "academic person whose contributions are the treasures of Kirati people and of Nepal as well. He was an activist for self-determination." Another one says that "For one who preferred to dress up English style, he was smart and talked in perfect Limbu tongue. He was honest, and he did meaningful work to forward research on Kirat tradition."

Iman Singh Chemjong was an academician and expert of Kirat culture. As the hero of Nepal, he died in 1975, leaving a voice of self-determination for the Nepalese Indigenous Peoples.

NGO-Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities (NGO-FONIN)

Heroes Of Mai Pokhari Conservation: Nirmal Mai & Narayan Dil

The Mai Pokhari (Lake) lies in Mai Pokhari VDC (Village Development Committee) of Ilam East Nepal. It is a natural lake that covers 90 hectares and has an altitude of 2,100 m and was declared as a Ramsar site in 2008. Ilam is famous for five 'As': Alu, Amliso, Adua, Alaichi and Aolan which in Nepali stands for potato, broom, ginger, cardamom and milk, respectively.

The conservation and rich biodiversity of Mai Pokhari is attributed to the invaluable knowledge and dedication of Narayan Dil and Nirmal Mai, a couple from the Sunuwar indigenous peoples, to conserve and enhance the said wetland's ecosystem and biodiversity and making it a site of spiritual significance for the people. The land reform (Bhumi Sudhar) program recognized the Mai Pokhari as an important religious site and has been fenced with iron wire.

According to religious beliefs, Bala Guru (meaning "never marry") came with 16 different flames to the Mai Pokhari to worship. Bala Guru respected Mai Pokhari and asked for answers or reasons about the origins of the open and isolated area in the Siwalik (fragile ecosystem). He received the answer ***"We are nine sisters at the north of the Pokhari. and we are for the welfare of the Nation"***. Bala Guru was surprised but he expressed his wishes for the Nation to the spirits of Mai Pokhari. "Nirmal Mata (Mother) you are lucky because you are staying in Mai Pokhari. Nirmal Mata, as long as you are here, when visitors, relatives, brothers, sisters visit this place, please put a drop of water from Mai Pokhari into their head while singing a religious and spiritual song of Kailash Mother." Mata from then on poured pure water on people visiting Mai Pokhari for fortune, peace, welfare, for energy, power and success and to get rid of any kind of problem and troubles.

Both Nirmal Mai and her husband Narayan Dil visited different religious Pokhari like Bishnu (Timbu), Luximi, Jamle, Lamba, Nir, Majur, Ramlaxuman, Jhampte, Dhunge and Dhuth Pokhari. They brought water from these Pokhari to purify with religious songs at Mai Pokhari. It is believed that Mai Pokhari has peculiar spiritual power to save the Earth from wind, thunder, lightning and other kinds of calamities.

The couple planted and reforested the contour of the Mai Pokhari with various plants enhancing the biodiversity of the forest. The plantation was such that the restoration was holistic and natural, rich in rare species that survive until today. The couple possessed a sense of history, and adhered to dynamic and religious culture while respecting nature and restoring wetland ecosystem.



When water from external source was supplied into the Mai Pokhari through pipe connections, Nirmal Mai was unhappy, as she deemed it was not good to mix such water into the Mai Pokhari as water supply shortage or long droughts could happen. She also knew that the Mai Pokhari was a sacred mother grove, like a living god, as one time she observed with her husband, a beautiful and multi-colored flame that had a sound in the lake. She believed the Mai Pokhari is the great living God, as she loved nature and culture.

As the years passed, the people in the area saw the opportunity for tourism of Mai Pokhari and were permit-

ted to do so by the Ilam district office. They brought boats in the lake and this caused the death of many fishes in the lake. They also removed a blanket grass (Galichhe Jhar) which is an endangered plant species in Mai Pokhari. When Narayan Dil watched the degradation of Mai Pokhari, he fell ill and died after nine days. He was 86 years old. Nirmal Mai also passed away in the following years.

The Mai Pokhari was declared a Ramsar Site in 2008 without the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and the meaningful participation of the indigenous custodians who are heroes of conservation.

Nirmal Mai and Narayan Dil's dedication to conserve and restore many species, culture, and religious and spiritual values of the Nepalese society must not be forgotten. The Mai Pokhari wetland ecosystem is currently an important corridor for fauna, wildlife, biodiversity, culture and is also considered a religious sacred place.

The new generation received the knowledge to save life and nature from Nirmal Mai and Narayan Dil!

The customary system of the indigenous society teaches obedience and respect for the sacred Mai Pokhari grove. It is a norm, an important religious and cultural moral obligation that conservation must be recognized. FPIC must be ensured with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and benefit sharing and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities ensured in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) and Ramsar National reports in accordance with the ILO 169, UNDRIP and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to which the government of Nepal voted in favor of/is a party to.

Additional notes from Wikipedia: Mai Pokhari, a lake situated 15 km north of Ilam is a place of pilgrimage. A very old temple of the goddess Bhagwati lies beside the lake. Known as the abode of nine gods and goddesses, the lake has nine corners. A heavy blanket of trees surrounds the area. As all ancient places, this place also has a story where it is said that in the age of the good, birds kept watch over this lake. They picked up all the leaves that fell into this pond and kept it beautiful and pristine. Besides its religious background, the place has sentimental value, for many martyrs were killed at this very place in the agitation of 1961. — ed.

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PHILIPPINES

Gilbert Paborada: Opol's Indigenous Shield



First encounter

It was in the afternoon of August 29, 2011 at the Philippine Independent Church chapel in the town Opol in Misamis Oriental province that I first heard Gilbert Paborada speak.

“Ang among mga area, gipangtanuman na man nila ug mga palm oil. Wala na miy mabuhat sa among panginabuhian. Labi na ug ako, daghan ang mga storya nga ayaw gyud ug anha dira kay patyon ka. (They have already planted palm oil in our areas. There is nothing we could do. Especially for me, there are many stories going around that if I go there, I would be killed),” Gilbert said.

Gilbert was speaking at the altar and in front of his fellow lumads (indigenous peoples in Mindanao) and farmers from the hinterland villages of Bagooboc and Tingalan in Opol.

“Sa pagkakaron nagpadayon gyud sila ug tanum kay nawad-an naman mi ug paglaum. Nangita nalang gyud mi ug rebelde nga mutabang sa amo nga gidaugdaug kay wala naman nagpakabana sa amo ang mga ahen-siya sa gobyerno (As of now they continue to plant because we have lost hope. We tried to look for rebels who can help us who are oppressed because government agencies don't cooperate with us),” Gilbert added.

Sitting in the pews among the lumads and farmers, were me and my fellow activists from the local church and Kalumbay, the regional indigenous people's alliance in Northern Mindanao.

“Ingon sa akong ugangan nga maayo nga mudangop sa mga lumad. Kung organisado, ang mga imbestor dili makasulod kung dili muagi sa mga lumad. (My mother-in-law told me that it would be best to seek help from indigenous peoples. If they are organized, investors cannot just enter if they would not go through indigenous peoples),” Gilbert recalled.

In his village, the local tribal council just got organized on March 4, 2011 right after A. Brown Company had started planting oil palm seedlings in their villages in 2010. These datos (traditional leaders) claimed that they agreed with the entry of the oil palm plantation.

“Ang mga tao gutom na. Wala nay mga panginabuhian. Hadlok na pud sila musukol. Nabuhi ra jud ang ang paglaum sa mga tao sa pag-abot sa Kalumbay. (The people are hungry. There are no more livelihoods. They are afraid to fight back. The people's hopes became alive again when Kalumbay arrived),” Gilbert said.

For resisting the forced planting of oil palm in their cassava and corn fields, the people of Bagocboc and Tingalan have experienced threats and intimidation from local village and company officials. Some of them have been arbitrarily arrested by local police. Thus together they formed their organization of indigenous peoples and named it Pangalasag which means “indigenous shield.”

“Naghinaut ko nga ang among nabuo nga kapunongan, mahimong malig-on. (I hope that the organization we formed will grow strong),” Gilbert said.

The meeting that never happened

“Ugma ang atong hisgot sa Kalumbay ofis (We will have a meeting tomorrow at the Kalumbay office),” I texted Gilbert that morning on October 3, 2012. Later in the afternoon, my phone rang and a colleague reported that Gilbert had been shot. We rushed to that narrow concrete street leading to the interior of the urban poor village of Puntod in Cagayan de Oro City.

Witnesses said that Gilbert had been on his way home when two unknown assailants aboard a motorcycle shot him. One gunman shot him in the head while he was already on the ground. Gilbert sustained five gunshot wounds and died on the spot.



We arrived and saw the reminder of that horror. On that narrow concrete street, Gilbert's blood caked with a layer of dirt on top of it. Right in the middle, a wooden cross was placed in between two rocks. The gas lamp's flame was already extinguished.

We ran to the police station where Daisy, Gilbert's wife was. She was there weak, laconic, and clutching a clear plastic bag with a blood-stained wallet, receipts, and ID. She demanded that the police give her husband's cellphone back.

A widow's continuing fight

"Adtong 1990, naguban ko sa akong silingan nga muadto sa bayle sa Opol. Operator sa radyopono ug petromax si Gilbert. Iya ko gipangutana kung kinsa ko. (In 1990, I went along with my neighbor to a vil-

lage dance in Opol. Gilbert was the operator of the radiophone and gas lamp. He asked me for my name)," Daisy recalled the first time she and Gilbert had met.

Gilbert was the middle child of three siblings and was orphaned of their mother at a very young age. His father remarried and he lived with his uncle and auntie. Since his childhood, tilling the land to farm rice, cassava, corn, and coconuts was how he knew to live.

"Caring kayo siya. Makita gyud nimo nga tinud-anay. Nabalaka siya sa among kalahian nga bukid siya gikan ug sa syudad ko gapuyo. (He was so caring. You can really see that he was genuine. He was worried of our difference that he comes from the hinterlands and that I live in the city)," Daisy remembered.

After a year since they met, Gilbert asked for Daisy's hand in marriage from her parents. They then went to live in the village of Bagocboc in Opol.

"Sige iya ginaingon nga ang yuta nga iyang ginatikad para sa pagskwela sa among anak. (He always said that the land he tilled was for the future education of our daughter)," Daisy recalled.

In 2010, A. Brown Company entered their villages to start the planting of oil palm. Daisy saw how Gilbert could not be kept still or be silent about the company's forcible entry into their land.

"Maski ginahulga na siya nga patyon, dasig kayo si Gilbert. Wala siya mahadlok. Naay mga gabii nga maghisgot lang mi sa lain laing isyu sa katilingban sama sa pagmonopolya sa mga langyaw sa atong nasud. Ako nalang gyud siya ingnan nga matulog na mi kay gabii na. (Even if he was already threatened to be killed, Gilbert remained passionate. He was not cowed. There were nights that we would talk about different societal issues like the monopoly control of foreigners in our country. I would sometimes complain that it was already very late at night)," Daisy remembered.

Since Gilbert's death, Daisy has never stopped engaging in Pangalasag's meetings, in interviews with media, and in dialogues with local officials in Cagayan de Oro and national agencies in Manila.

"Ako jud gidahum nga makamit namo ang hustisya. Usahay naa pa gihapon nang pagbati nga muabot ra si Gilbert sa balay. Usahay pud akong anak muingon nga maayo pa ang uban kay naay papa. (I am really hoping that we can get justice. Sometimes I still feel that

Gilbert would still come home. Sometimes my daughter would say that others are lucky since they still have their father)," Daisy shared.

At times Daisy would still feel some physical pain in her chest. "Sakit pa gyud gihapon. Mura ug nahitabo ra gahapon. Pero dili ko muundang hangtud makamit namo ang hustisya. (It still hurts. It still seems that it happened only yesterday. But I will not stop until we get justice)," Daisy said.

Selfless sacrifice

"Maski ako ikamatay, ako gyud ni pakigbisogan ang among yuta. Gikan pa ni sa among mga katigulangan ug dili ra ni para sa ako kundili para sa akong anak sa iya pang mahimong anak (Even if it kills me, I will really struggle for our land. This came from our ancestors and this is not just for me but for my daughter and my daughter's children)," Gilbert once told me. We were standing on an elevation in Tingalan as he pointed to the oil palm seedlings that sprawled on the rolling hills before us.

From that afternoon in that chapel, to that hill in Tingalan, and to that blood caked with dirt on that narrow concrete street, Gilbert has shown us his selfless sacrifice not only for his own family but for all the families of his fellow *lumads* in Opol. To this day, I am grateful for the honor to have worked with him and to have been inspired by Gilbert Paborada, Opol's indigenous shield.

By John Ryan Mendoza

Nicanor delos Santos: “Ka Kano”, Remontado-Dumagat Martyr

In the Eastern mountainous area of Tanay, Rizal are found 7 barangays or communities of the Remontado-Dumagat indigenous peoples. This place located in the Sierra Madre mountain range is what they refer to as their ancestral land. The Remontado-Dumagat people are known for their skill in hunting and gathering. They plant rice and corn, which is their main source of livelihood. Their ancestral land is rich in natural resources, including two big rivers called Kaliwa-Kanan (Left-Right), from which they are free to catch fish, shrimps, gather shells, frogs and other aquatic life. The Remontado-Dumagat are a quiet and peaceful people who most often avoid conflict within their community.

During the 1980s, the peaceful and simple life of the Remontado-Dumagat was broken with the entry of a government project under the dictatorship of then President Marcos. It was called the Kaliwa-Kanan Dam. This project was part of the Lungsod Silangan Project, which was to be funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Some years later, the administration of President Estrada included the Kaliwa-Kanan dam project in the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) program at an approved cost PhP48 billion. The first phase of the project was to be implemented by the Metro Manila Water Sewerage System (MWSS) with the assistance of the Office of the Southern Cultural Communities, which was tasked to hold consultations and handle issues related to the affected indigenous peoples. The dam project covers and will affect the entire territory of the Remontado-Dumagat in the 7 barangays of Tanay, Rizal. At the present, the NEDA is working with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) for the implementation of the project.

From the results of public consultations that were held, it is clear that Remontado-Dumagat peoples are firm in their principles and conviction to defend the land on which they have lived since time immemorial. They assert that they have the right to life based on their belief that “kapag mawawala na ang kanilang lupa (sila na din), ito ay isang balong malalim ng kamatayan kaya’t wala silang ibang magagawa kundi ang magtanggol at makipaglaban...” (If their land is lost, and they with it, it will be like a deep well of death; thus they have no other option but to defend and fight...

Nicanor de los Santos, also called “Ka Kano” was a quiet man, an indigenous Dumagat who grew up in Tanay. He would always only listen to the worlds of the elders in the community. In my frequent conversations with him while working on our Community Health and Nutrition Program, he would often remark that the principles and positions taken by the elders to defend and fight for their land and rights were correct.

I worked together with Ka Kano in the implementation of our Community Health and Nutrition Program. As we went about our work, Ka Kano would blossom and grow into a skilled organizer, who was effective in conscientization and mobilization of his fellow indigenous peoples within the seven barangays. He was never deterred by the long hikes across the mountains and the frequent crossing of rivers before reaching the farthest community of Santa Ines.

The Remontado-Dumagat communities were successful in setting up their own organization called Kaisahan ng mga Katutubo sa Sierra Madre (KKSM) or Unity of the Indigenous Peoples of the Sierra Madre. Henceforth, their previously isolated and sporadic actions were consolidated. They conducted education courses and training in public speaking and paralegal skills. Ka Kano was one of those who became an effective and keen spokesperson among the Remontado-Dumagat. During each meeting and consultation in the community, he was able to clearly articulate the basis of their struggle to defend their rights to ancestral land and self-determination.

Ka Kano was an efficient and determined organizer whose conviction never wavered despite experiencing numerous difficulties and harassment. Together, we experienced having to jump from the high riverbank to escape from the military who were chasing us. We experienced having to cross flooded rivers just to deliver a message to our fellow indigenous peoples regarding a big mobilization.

It was January 22, 1987, when the historic “Mendiola Massacre” happened in Manila, Philippines, in which state security forces violently dispersed a farmers’ march to Malacañang Palace. Thirteen farmers were killed and many more activists were wounded when government anti-riot forces opened fire on them. The farmers were demanding fulfillment of the promises made by President Cory Aquino for land reform and distribution of lands at no cost to beneficiaries. Around 75 Remontado-Dumagat, including Ka Kano and myself, joined this long protest march all the way from Tanay to Mendiola. After the military shot at the protesters and dispersed the march, all 75 of us were scattered. Ka Kano patiently searched for his fellow-indigenous people who had fled to safety during the attack. Fortunately, all 75 of the Remontado-Dumagat were found to be safe. Ka Kano showed a brave front by smiling, his sharp eyes crinkling, while joking to comfort his companions and alleviating their tiredness and low morale. A few days later, he once again enthusiastically joined the indignation rally to condemn the Mendiola Massacre.

Ka Kano never showed any weakening of his will to fight. He continued to organize the community even when some members of the organization became inactive due to the impact of the year-round militarization of their community. Again they set up their organization called MASKADA (Makabayang Samahan ng mga Dumagat), of which Ka Kano was elected as Secretary General. At the same time, he also served as

member of the National Council of Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP), a national federation of indigenous peoples, and as member of the Regional Council of BALATIK, positions he held until the time his death.

On December 8, 2001 Ka Kano was preparing the members of his organization to participate in a national mobilization to commemorate International Human Rights Day. Together with a companion, Ka Kano went to Antipolo City to buy food that they would bring with them. While waiting for a ride, he noticed a man accompanied by a military soldier pointing at him. He ran for fear, having experienced militarization in their province at that time. The military man shot at him, killing him in the middle of the street in front of many people.

Based on the findings of a quick reaction team “QRT” sent by KARAPATAN-ST, it was revealed that the killing of Ka Kano was done by military elements of “Operation Panther” under the leadership Maj. Lauriano Tolentino of the 21st Infantry Battallion Philippine Army (IBPA). At the same time that he was killed, then President Gloria Arroyo was visiting Antipolo City. The military quickly released a news report claiming that Ka Kano was a suspected “trigger man” against President Gloria Arroyo.

Fearing for their security, the whole family of Ka Kano – his wife and 7 children – became Internal Refugees in Southern Tagalog region for a period of more than one year. In spite of their difficult condition, Ka Kano’s wife Adeling and all her children down to the youngest who was only three years old then, fully believed that it was the military of Gloria Arroyo who had killed him. Adeling became a spokesperson of BIKTIMA (an organization of human rights victims), while some of her children joined the New Peoples Army, or followed in their father’s footsteps to become organizers or mass leaders.

The demise of Ka Kano weighs as heavy as the mountain range of Sierra Madre with all its history, songs and poems of struggle. With his death, the grief and heartache of each indigenous Dumagat in the whole Serria Madre mountains turned into fervor for the further advancement of the peoples’ struggle. Ka Kano is likened to Cordillera hero Macliing Dulag who was likewise killed by military soldiers while resisting the Chico Dam project. Both of them stood strong and fought for the rights of indigenous peoples to ancestral land and self-determination.

Kakay Tolentino



TAIWAN/CHINA

Man Du Chun-Hua –Bequeather of Ancestral Taiwan Pingpu Aboriginal Songs and Culture



Man Du Chun-Hua, a much respected lady, was born in 1910, 15 years after Japan had usurped Taiwan from the Manchu government. Man Du Chun-Hua spent her early life in an atmosphere of Japanese colonial control, although, the Pingpu Papora aboriginal people had not been strictly prohibited from performing their traditional rituals and various cultural activities. Man Du Chun-Hua loved the traditional villages and their cultural life very much. She learned many multi-Pingpu original rituals, ancestral songs and other traditional knowledge and skills.

Parsing the lady's name, Man Du Chun-Hua: Man is her married name, Du is her family name, Chun-Hua is her first name; while her nick name is "A-Ma." In fact, the names Man and Du could be traced as far back as 200 years ago. During the Manchu colonial era in Taiwan, Taiwan's aborigines were forcibly given a "selected surname", to be used together with their Taiwan aboriginal traditional name. One hundred years later, when Taiwan's political rights were transferred to Japan, the Japanese government posted the "selected surname" on the official household registration docu-

ments. Since then, Taiwan Pingpu aborigines lost their traditional father's or mother's first name given to the child, which then totally got lost in the Han Chinese surname system.

When she was 18 years old, Man Du Chun-Hua married into one of Papora aboriginal settlements "Green Fan Shikongshan". Although her life was difficult, she never forgot to learn and inherit the ancestral spirit rituals, celebrations and ancestral songs. As a family elder and headman of the settlements, Man Du Chun-Hua not only performed Papora traditional culture and way of life as something to constantly see and hear. She also believed that the traditional culture and way of life was an important force for ethnic cohesion. Once lost, the tribe would have nothing to bind them together and several generations of descendants would be completely unaware of their identity and culture heritage.

During the 1930s to the 1990s, Taiwan's economic and social system greatly changed. Still, Man Du Chun-Hua continued chanting her lovely ancestral songs until past her six decades. She continued singing to the younger generation, in order to teach them and promote their cultural heritage. Her continued effort was like a thin thread binding the lifeblood of the cultural heritage of the ethnic settlements.

The late 1990s saw the rising trend of Taiwanese academics who researched and studied Pingpu Aboriginal history. Encouraged by the efforts of Pingpu Aboriginal ancestry, they began to trace back the origin, history and culture. They spent much time learning the traditional language and culture with Man Du Chun-Hua. She had finally gotten the tribe's recognition and attention. Even when she was already 90 years old, Man Du Chun-Hua still tirelessly attended the traditional cultural events and participated in audio and video recording of Pingpu Papora ancestral spirit rituals, celebrations and ancestral songs. Her efforts bore fruit in preserving the culture and bequeathing this for others to inherit.

Man Du Chun-Hua died when she was 100 years old, to the great regret among the younger people in her tribe. During her eulogy, while playing and singing the Papora ancestral songs that she had taught them, the posterities all prayed for her, memorializing her contributions, and blessing her as she continues singing constantly in the presence and keeping of her Papora ancestors.

Echo Zhang li-pen and Su Hsin

Elder Zhang Guilin -
Inspiration of Taiwan's Pingpu aboriginal and
traditional ethnic consciousness



Since the beginning of the Age of Discovery in the 17th century, Taiwan has been reduced to an object of contention among colonial states and regimes. For nearly 400 years, Spanish, Dutch, Manchu, Japanese, and even the current national government, had ruled Taiwan, with the policy objective of destroying the ethnic culture and ethnic consciousness of Taiwan's Pingpu aborigines. Successive colonial regimes tried to change the traditional customs, religion, life habits, and of course the traditional name, of Taiwan's Pingpu aborigines. After 400 years of extreme pressure, difficulties and predicament and gradual loss of traditional culture and ethnic awareness, Pingpu aborigines had been disoriented by the colonial regime and had to comply with obedience in order to survive. Therefore, it is a continuing cause for Taiwan Pingpu aboriginal population to protect the inherent traditional cultural and ethnic consciousness.

Zhang Guilin, Taiwan Pingpu Papora aboriginal elder, was born in 1922 during the Japanese rule in Taiwan. At a young age, he was left fatherless and lonely but because he grew up in Papora aboriginal villages, he was nurtured in Papora traditional culture. Thus the strong sense of ethnic cultural heritage and sentiment are deeply rooted in his mind. Since his youth, he had seen the most powerful weapon - the reality of social status. The cumulative economic strength and the social status could help maintain Pingpu aboriginal tribe and protect consciousness of traditional culture.

He knew that the elders system is mainly of the Pingpu Papora aboriginal traditional social structure. The collective wisdom of the elders is respected and obeyed by all Papora people. He also had insight on the traditional Papora system that respected the youth and pampered children. Thus, though he lost his father at an early age, he still obtained total care and assistance from his tribe.

Elder Zhang Guilin was very smart and studious in his childhood. After graduating from a six-year elementary school, he was unable to further his studies because of poverty, but this did not impede his enthusiasm to learn and acquire knowledge. Then, he was recruited by South Extension Mechanical School in Japan which was equivalent to high school level. During his school life, he had learned short-term mechanical and construction techniques, and these led him to establish the foundation and future of manufacturers of the wood processing industry. This would later earn him considerable wealth.

Elder Zhang Guilin attained importance and social status and economic capacity to lead and inherit Pingpu Papora aboriginal traditional rituals and ethnic cultures which did not get much attention for six decades. He revived the ethnic consciousness which was collapsing completely, and he rebuilt and reclaimed the Papora position in the indigenous populations which had been in existence for thousands of years in Taiwan.

Elder Zhang Guilin sacrificed all his life and strived to maintain Papora aboriginal traditional culture and ethnic awareness. He created his economic strength to achieve personal social status, so that Taiwan Pingpu Papora aboriginal descendants could gain a place in the world and assert their “right to speak.” He used

personal power to promote ethnic heritage and traditional rituals and culture, to preserve traditional cultural awareness, to maintain the tribes’ unity, and to prompt the tribe people to rebuild the unique relations settlement system. He passed away in the spring of 1998, surrounded by many Papora people.

Elder Zhang Guilin’s achievements are marked by his admirers and named the most important bridge in their tribe, the “Guilin Bridge” for posterity and to commemorate his contribution.

Echo Zhang li-pen and Su Hsin



TIMOR LESTE

Bere Siga : Protector of Community Forests



Bere Siga was born in Maliana district of Timor Leste on January 1, 1923. He belonged to the Cemac tribe. Due to Japanese rule in Timor Leste in 1942, Bere Siga migrated when he was 19 years old to a village named Postu Fatumea in Covalima district, situated in the western part of the country. Postu Fatumea (currently Fatumea sub-district) belongs to the Tetum Teric tribe. In 1980, he was appointed and assigned by the community as makle'a't or forest man to take care of the community forest. It was astonishing that the elders had appointed him even though he was not a member of the tribe.

As makle'a't (forest man), Bere Siga's main job was to protect the forest from illegal logging, especially during the prohibition period (tara bandu or hanging prohibition) and report any violation to the community justice (Lia Nain or owner of justice) for further investigation and penalty. During the period of prohibition, nobody is allowed to take anything from the forest except for communal purposes or ritual ceremony. Because of his assigned role, Bere Siga had no alternative job except to take care of the community forest everyday. He was allowed to collect anything from the forest for his daily needs as payment for his job. Because of his dedication and success, he served as forest man for almost five years, way beyond the usual term of one

year. Through his leadership, he was able to protect the community forest successfully. He planted betel nut trees and coconut trees in a critical area of the forest covering about 7 hectares.

In 1985, the Indonesian military forcibly took control of the forest and ordered every household to clear the forest for cultivation in order to avoid hunger. Due to intimidation, the community leaders just followed their orders. But Bere Siga argued and negotiated with the military commander to use other lands for cultivation. He was able to argue against the military by showing them that the community had never experienced hunger since the end of the civil war in 1979. However, the real reason behind the Indonesian military's move was to facilitate the military patrol against independence fighters. Because of his precarious position, Bere Siga gave his 13 cows to the military as a bribe in exchange for saving the forest, and to save his own life too because the military had identified him as spy of the independence fighters. Despite giving his cows to the military commander, the order was not totally changed. The community was still required to clear up the forest for cultivation, about 0.25-0.50 hectares per household.

To make matters worse, in June 1985, the military forced Bere Siga to leave the Fatumea sub-district without his family, together with 50 other people, as part of the transmigration program to the Tilomar sub-district. His land and plantations including his betel nut trees, coconut trees and others were confiscated by the military and given to those who were faithful and supportive of them. Bere Siga experienced a very difficult life in the new place. His family was scattered, his two young sons dropped out of school and his daughter married at an early age. Since he left, the culture of Tara-Bandu was totally disallowed and the forest man (Makle'at) was replaced by militias appointed by the military.

Two years later in 1987, Bere Siga returned to Postu Fatumea to gather his own family together and to reclaim his properties for his family needs. Unfortunately he was captured and sent off to preventive detention on the suspicion that he had returned to protest against the military and to influence the community. He was released from jail after seven days on the condition that he would promise never to visit Fatumea Sub-district again for his whole life. He agreed and signed the declaration letter because he was able to bring his family back with him to Tilomar sub-district.

Because of his valuable contribution, struggle and suffering to save the community forest, the community secretly collected donations for Bere Siga in the amount of IDR 25,000.00 and sent it to him. With the money, he was able to buy lands for cultivation and to send his two young boys to primary school again. Thus he was able to live a normal life from 1990 until 1999.

After the referendum in 1999, Bere Siga was invited to attend a community ceremony of forgiveness and community popular justice. At the ceremony he was able to get back his properties and other plantations in accordance with the customary law of the tribe.

In his speech during the ceremony, Bere Siga declared, “Forgiveness is our culture not adopted from elsewhere to let everyone live in peace and harmony. We all understand our culture, but outsiders will never understand us because they are not the same as we are and do not belong to us. Our forest has gone together with the Indonesian regime. In our territory, every place has a name.” Pointing to an area named sandalwood forest (Alas Kamelin), he continued: “That area before consisted of sandalwood trees but now there are no sandalwood trees at all. Our young generation might ask - why is that place named sandalwood forest when there are no sandalwood trees? We are the owners of the land and other resources. We will not issue certificates to limit ownership and access to our ancestors’ land. Keep our ancestors’ land as communal lands for our tribe for all generations. Stories about the past give us lessons and new inspiration to secure our ancestors’ land to benefit our life”.

Nowadays, 80% of Fatumea sub-district has no forest. Since Fatumea is situated in the highlands, this has caused landslides in about 75% of the territory. The culture of Tara-Baru and the appointed forest man (Makle’at) is still practiced regularly every year. However, the community can no longer afford to replant trees because most of the young people have left for the city to seek a better life for their own future. The good practice of community forest management was not transmitted to the younger generation. Although Bere Siga did not belong to the Tetum Teric tribe, his contribution is recognized and valued by the community.

Bere Siga died on May 28, 2009 at the age of 86. To remember his contribution, the tribe’s leader called on everyone in the community to pay their respects to him for three days prior to conducting the funeral ceremony in accordance with the culture of Tetum Teric tribe.

The story told by his elder son: Benjamin Vicente (Atoc Bere) and certified by Community Leader.

Translated by Ergilio Ferreira Vicente.

Indigenous Voices in Asia Network (IVAN)



Our Voices Our Rights

Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) established the Indigenous Voices in Asia Network (IVAN) in July 2013. The IVAN is a platform to promote solidarity and cooperation among indigenous journalists, non-indigenous journalists and indigenous rights activists in advancing and defending media freedom, freedom of information, indigenous peoples' rights and democracy in Asia.

Our Objectives

- To raise the visibility of and generate greater public attention to the indigenous peoples issues and concerns using all forms of media;
- To promote and defend the democratic rights of citizens to freedom of media and to have access to all forms of media;
- To mobilize media through dissemination of relevant information on indigenous peoples in Asia using different forms of media towards generating better understanding and attention to indigenous peoples rights and issues;
- To strengthen the capacities of indigenous peoples to effectively engage with media and to establish their own media;
- To provide support to media practitioners in relation to security and other concerns.

What We Do

- Sharing and mainstreaming information about indigenous peoples' issues in respective members' countries;
- Empowering indigenous media practitioners and indigenous rights activists through capacity building activities;
- Engaging with national governments and regional mechanisms for indigenous media professionals and rights activists to have greater access to information and rights to communicate/ media;
- Networking and building solidarity with mainstream media for increased understanding and sensitivity to indigenous issues;
- Raising awareness about indigenous peoples' issues and rights through producing multimedia and educational materials;
- Assisting indigenous communities to set up and manage their own media enterprises.