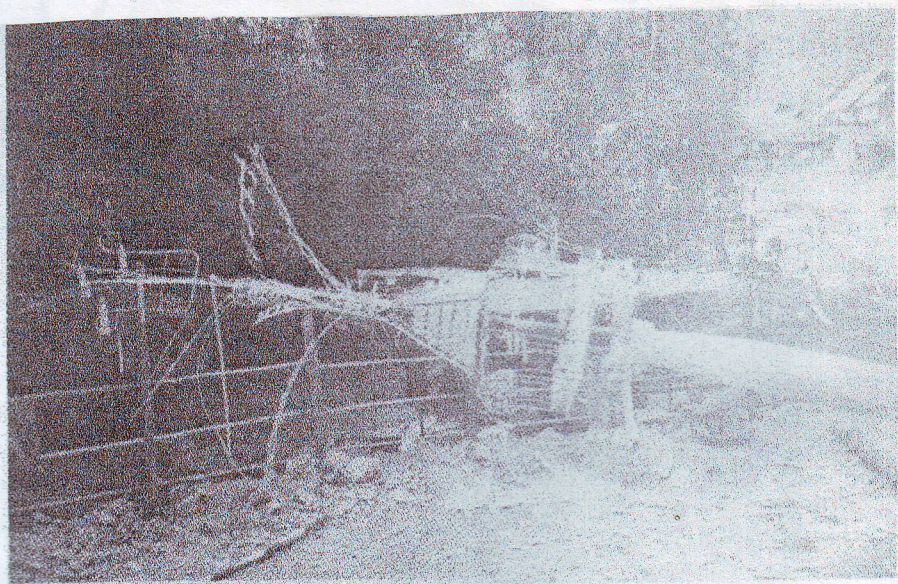


The customary ideology  
of Karenni People



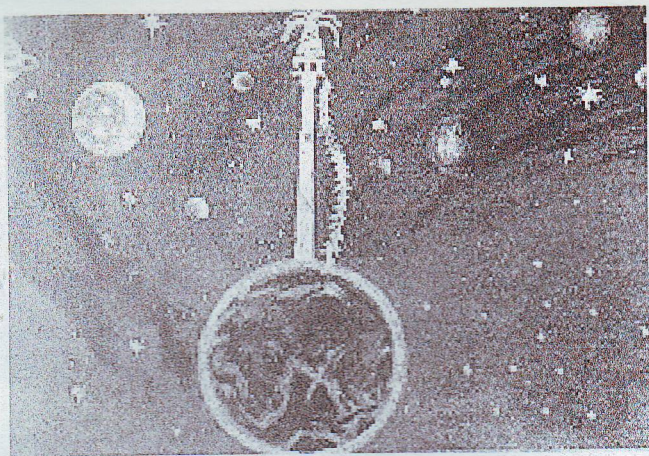


The ladies are washing down the black magic off the new Ee-Lu-pole with holy water by leaves of Ta-Myai-Maw.



The umbrella of the new Ee-Lu-pole.





Karenni people are believed that the Ee-Lu-pole was the first symbolic pole on earth which recognized the gratitudes of the Pyai-Thoo-Lu-Moo (the goddess of creation) who created this earth and the god who controlling this earth.

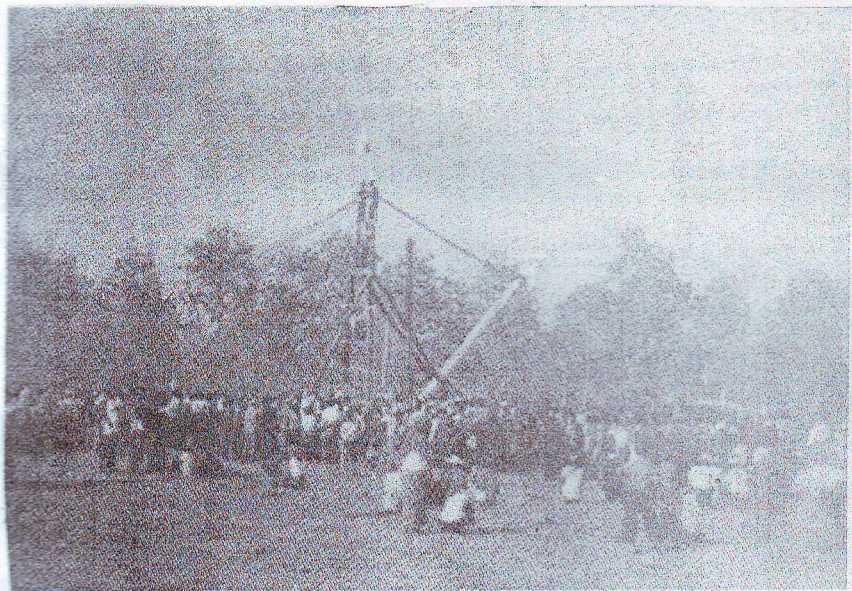


The Holl (spirit house ) of Kyenpogyi village.



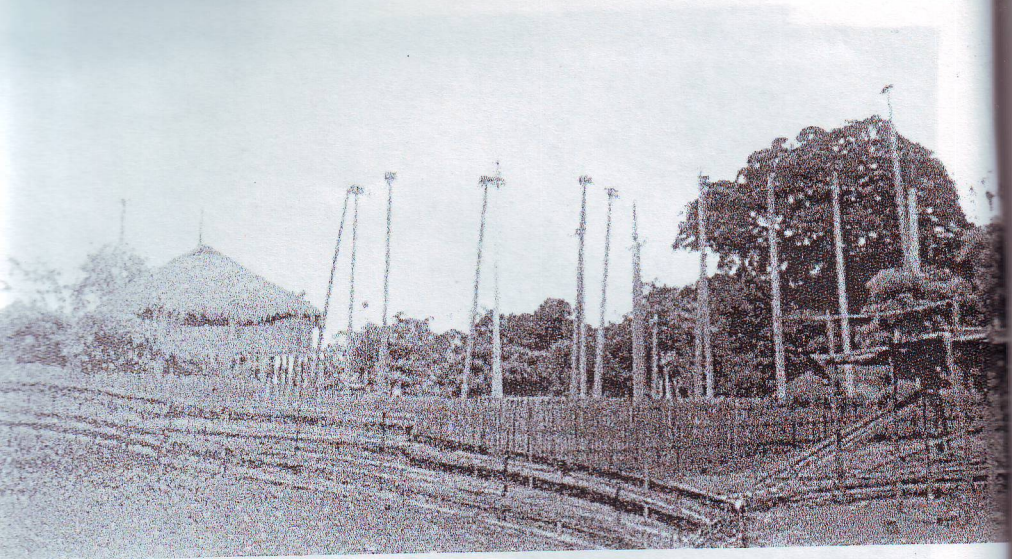


The dancers are paying respect to the new Ee-Lu-pole by dancing around it before erecting.



Erecting the new Ee-Lu-pole





The compound of Ee-Lu-pole with the  
Holl (spirit-house ).



The Ee-Lu-pole festival of Kyenpogyi village



2002



## Contents

|   | pages |
|---|-------|
| 1. The Customary ideology of Karenni people   | 1     |
| 2. The Customary Beliefs of Karenni people  | 3     |
| 3. The Methods of choosing Ee-Lu-Byarseh<br>and Khai Byar seh                       | 4     |
| 4. The obligation of Ee-Lu-Byarseh and Khai Byar seh                                | 5     |
| 5. Ee-Lu or Tya-Ee-Lu (Pole Festival)   | 8     |
| 6. The erection of Ee-Lu or Kho Htwo Boo (pole)                                     | 17    |
| 7. The meaning of Ee-Lu pole  | 19    |
| 8. Two kinds of Hall (Sprit House)  | 22    |
| 9. The different Kinds of Ee-Lu-poles<br>and building in the compound of Ee-Lu-pole | 22    |



## Preface

Karenni people celebrated three kinds of pole festivals in a year. The first one is called Tya-Ee-Lu-Boe-Plya. During this festival, the people went to their paddy fields, vegetable farms, picked the premature fruits and brought it to the Ee-Lu-pole. They put the premature fruits on altar, thank god and then pray for good fruits and good harvest. The second one called Tya-Ee-Lu-Phu-Seh. In This festival they pray god to bless the teen agers with good conducts, and good heaths. The third one is Tya-Ee-Lu-Du. The festival concerned to every one. Every one can pray the god for himself and his family. Outwardly, it appeared to other people that they are worshiping spirits because they are feeding spirits. Karenni people believe that the god had sent the various kinds of sprits in to the world to harm the human beings. In the festival, they only feed the spirits and ask its not to harm them. The essence of the festival is to remember the gratitude of the goddess of creation, and to thank the eternal god who is controlling this world and then to pray the god for good future.

The prediction of chicken bone is not concerned to the feeding of spirit. Karenni people believed that in the beginning the god who controlling this world gave alphabet to every race. The Karenni got alphabet which written on leather. The dog ate the leather it shit and the chicken ate the shit. So the words of god remain in the chicken bone up to this present day. So, Karenni people have to look at the chicken bone. The intention of this book let is to let the other people know that all the Ee-Lu-pole festival is concerned to god.



## **THE CUSTOMARY IDEOLOGY OF KARENNI PEOPLE**

Religions, Economy and customary ideology have divided every nation in the world into different communities, different societies, different classes and different customs. Even in a race or a tribe there are many religions. These religions play on important parts in dividing people into different communities and societies. The descendants of Christian families will always participating in Christian community. A



few of them will embrace other religion and change into other religion. The descendants of Buddhist families will be Buddhist and participate in Buddhist community. Only a few of them embrace other religion and participate other religion communities. The Moslem will do the same. In this way the religions divide the people in a race or tribe into different religions communities.

In a race or in a tribe economy divided the people of the race and tribe into different classes. The classes include wealthy class, middle class and poor class. The descendant of wealthy class, with a lot of capitals will still retain the wealthy class. A few of them, who are lazy, an ambitious and indulgent will become poor. The middle class including intellectual class is playing an important part in every nation, race and tribe. They who descending from the middle class, because of capability of the family in sending them to schools, they will retain the middle class. A few of them, who are lazy, an ambitious and indulgent become poor. Some of them who are interesting in business will participate in wealthy class. In a race or in a tribe religious ideology divided people into different castes that is high caste and lower caste. These castes will alive in many generations to come.

Karenni called themselves Kayah Lee or Kazah Lee, meaning red people. Burmese called them Kayin Nee meaning red Karen. English followed the Burmese word Kayin Nee, called Kazah lee the Karenni. The customary ideology and customary obligation divided Karenni people into two societies. One is called Ee-Lu-Phu. One is called Khai-Phu. These two societies started since the occurrence of the Karenni people. This division may depend on the mythology of Karenni people. These two societies are living among every Karenni community. Wherever there is Karenni community there must be Ee-Lu-Phu and Kai-Phu societies. These two societies continue to exist, because the descendants Ee-Lu-Phu could not become Kai-Phu. They must be Ee-Lu-Phu, in the same way the descendants of Khai-Phu could not become Ee-Lu-Phu. They must be Khai-Phu. Because of these two descended lines the Karenni community still divide into Ee-Lu-Phu and into Kai-Phu. Every Karenni must know whether he is Ee-Lu-Phu or Kai-Phu. Before the ideologies of Christianity and Bud-



dhism entered into Karenni community the difference between these two societies was very strict. The Ee-Lu-Phu could not marry Khai-Phu and Khai-Phu could not marry Ee-Lu-Phu. They believed that if they marry, their children will become poor and could not participate in any society. Both of the societies believed liked this because their customary obligations are different. When some Karenni embraced other religions such as Christian or Buddhist, the different of their two societies become a little loose. Khai-Phu and Ee-Lu-Phu can marry each other, but their children must adopt on the father's side. If the father is Ee-Lu-Phu all the children must become Ee-Lu-Phu, and if the father is Kai-Phu all the children must be Kai-Phu. Today, especially in Karenni Christian communities there are no Khai-Phu and Ee-Lu-Phu societies. Though they do not accept these two societies any more, they will not become other race or nations. They are just Karenni. Today most nations or races are trying to maintain their goal of civilizations and helpful customs.

### “THE CUSTOMARY BELIEFS OF KARENNI PEOPLE”

The customary beliefs of Karenni people are mostly depending on their mythology. They believe that they are descending from Phyai-Thu-lu-Moe (the goddess of creation). The Phyai-Thu-lu-Moe (the goddess of creation) had created a place called Daw-Tho-Moe-Khu, some where in the universe. No human can re-enter Daw-Tho-Moe-Khu. An eternal god is controlling this world and universe. To save human beings the god had sent angels, good spirits and souls into the world. To punish and induce human beings the god had sent Satan and many evil spirits and souls into the world. For these consequences when they are in danger the Karenni people always called the name of god. These spirits and souls came to guard the mountains, forests, rivers, trees etc. If the human beings respect the spirits and souls that guard the mountain, rivers, forests etc they will helpful to them. If the human beings despise them they will harmful to them. The evil spirits and souls such as ghosts, demons, devils etc are always harmful to the



human beings for this consequence the human beings have to give them something to eat.

The obligations of Karenni community are depending on their beliefs. The obligations to sacrifice and worship god, angels, good spirits and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya are the responsibility of Ee-Lu-Phu. The Ee-Lu-Phu must lead the rituals. The obligation to feed the spirits and souls that (guard the mountains, forest, rivers) ghosts, demons and devils is the responsibility of the Khai-Phu. The Khai-Phu must lead the festivals.

*(The explanation of the Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya*

*The Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya is a soul of wisdom and power, which sent into the world by god. The human beings who practice asceticism with righteousness can obtain it.)*

In every Karenni village where the poles of Ee-Lu are erected, there must be Ee-Lu-Phu. In every Karenni village where there is a place for Khai-Leh, there must be Khai-Phu. These two societies still active in Karenni community. In every Karenni village there are Ee-Lu-Phu and Khai-Phu societies. In village where poles of Ee-Lu or Ko-Htoe-Boe are erected the Ee-Lu-Phu society always elected Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh (chief of Ee-Lu). In big village they had to elect vice Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh (vice-chief). In every village where a place of Khai-Leh was confined the Khai-Phu society always elected Khai-Byar-Seh (chief of Khai-Phu). In the village is big the Khai-Phu society elect vice-Khai-Byar-Seh (vice chief). The Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh have to lead the sacrifice and worship, and the Khai-Byar-Seh have to lead the feeding of spirits and sot<sup>13</sup>.

#### THE METHODS OF CHOOSING EE-LU-BYARSEH AND KAI BYARSEH

In every community of Karenni village when the Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh is died or moved to another village, or found of guilty and had forced to resign or he himself could not follow the principles and rules



of Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh and had been resigned, it is needed to choose a new Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh. At this time the elders of the village must hold a meeting including Ee-Lu-Phu and Khai-Phu societies in the village and must choose a new Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh from the Ee-Lu-Phu society. The man they choose must has dignity, honesty, righteousness, able to follow the principle and rules of Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh and must be a descendant from a family of Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh. The new Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh must permanent in his position till his death, if he will not move to another village or place. He must perform the obligation of Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh till his death. In the same way, when Khai-Byar-Seh in a village is died or moved to another village or place, or found of guilty and forced to resign or could not follow the rule and regulation of Khai-Byar-Seh and had been resigned, it is needed to choose a new Khai-Byar-Seh. The elder of the village must hold a meeting to choose a new of Khai-Byar-Seh from the Kai-Phu society. The man they choose must has dignity, honesty, righteousness, able to control the village, has qualities to follow the rules and regulations of Khai-Byar-Seh, and must a descendant from a family of Khai-Byar-Seh. He must in his permanent position till his death, if he will not move to another village or place. All the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh, and Khai-Byar-Seh are choosing from men, because they believe that the women could not perform the obligations of Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh and Khai-Byar-Seh. If Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh or Khai-Byar-Seh wants to resign it must depend on the decision of the village elders. The consequences of the resignation must put forward to the village elders for their decision.

## THE OBLIGATION OF EE-LU-BYARSEH AND KAI-BYARSEH

When a man becomes Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh, he must avoid the meat of deer, dogs, cats, tigers and the meat of the animals, which bit to die by the tigers and snakes. In ancient time all the members of Ee-Lu-Phu had to avoid the above-mentioned meats. But today only the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh has to avoid it. He had to avoid the flesh of deer because Karenni people believed that animal eat seasonal vegetable, so that it fleshes is hot and encourage sex. He has to avoid the flesh of dog



because that animal is disgraceful animal. He has to avoid the flesh of animals, which bit to die by the tigers and snakes, because the poisons left in the flesh and impact human senses. He has to avoid the flesh of tigers, cats and foxes, because it relies on the flesh of other animals so that its flesh provoke wrath. Besides all these during Ee-Lu festival (Poles festival) he had to avoid alcohol, fish pickle, bean pickle because these make sweat smell which dislike by the god, angels and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya. He has to rely only on rice, corn, yam eggs and pure fishes. He has to avoid the food, which has been fed to the spirits, because he is concerned to the God only, and presumed to be higher than all spirits.

During Ee-Lu- festival (Poles Festival), the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh has to bathe the water of (Pho-Shi-Thah) in order that to make himself holy. (Pho-Shi-Thah) is a fruit, which believe to clean unluckiness and black magic. After bath he has to put on new dresses, and waiting to accept sacrificial things from the crowds. He has to live in the Hall (Spiritual House) in the compound of Ee-Lu (Poles). He has to light candles and led the prayer for the crowds. The Karenni people believe that the god used to send angels and Pre-Pro-Pre-Pria to visit the Hall (Spirit House) during the Ee-Lu (Poles) festival, so Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh have to stay at the Hall until the finish of the festival. According to the Karenni custom Kai-Phu societies were not permitted to enter the Hall (Spiritual House). The women also not allow to enter the Hall. So the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh have to accept the sacrificial things such as yams, sugar canes, candles, bananas etc, brought by the Khai-phu and women for sacrifices. The Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh has to light candles and pray for them. The Hall (Spirit House) is sacred place. Even Ee-Lu-Phu societies have to wash their feet before entering into the Hall. Alcohol and any meat were not allowed to bring in for sacrifices. Only a kind of fish, which never eat another fishes, was allowed to bring in for sacrifice.

In Karenni community there are three kinds of Ee-Lu festivals in a year.

1. The first is Tya-Ee-Lu-Bo-Plya. This festival is to sacrifice rudimentary fruit such as paddy, yams, corns, cucumbers, pumpkins



etc, to the god for good harvest.

2. The second is Tya-Ee-Lu-Phu or Tya-Ee-Lu-Phu-Seh. This festival is especially for the youths. A new pole has to erect for the youths. The youths have to bring sacrificial things such as yams, sugar canes; bananas etc, to the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh, and Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh have to pray for their futures and health.
3. The third is Tya-Ee-Lu-Du. This festival is concerned to the whole Karenni community. Every people can bring sacrificial things to the Hall or to the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh, to pray for their futures and health. A new pole is to be erected or repair an old pole for the festival.

During these three festivals the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh has to pay different obligations. In Tya-Ee-Lu-Bo-Plya, the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh has to build an altar for sacrificial fruits and pray for a good harvest. In Tya-Ee-Lu-Phu or Tya-Ee-Lu-Phu-Seh, the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh has to choose a tree for a new pole for the youths to accept the sacrificial things from the youths and pray for their future. In Tya-Ee-Lu-Du, the Ee-Lu-ByarSeh has to choose the tree to cut down for the new pole or if is not a time to erect a new pole, he has to repair an old pole for the festival. Choosing the tree for the new Ee-Lu (Pole) is an important job for the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh. He has to choose the tree by looking at the chicken bones. Some time he can choose a wrong tree. After fell it down and some holes are found in the tree, he has to choose a new tree. After cutting down the tree he has to order the crowds to cut off the skins of the tree. He has to measure tree for the length of Ee-Lu and cut it for pole. He has to order and control the crowds to bring the stem of tree to the village. After arriving at the village he had to order some men to guard the pole, because this tree of pole must not cross by dogs or women. The stem of tree must keep under shadow for a day and a night without toughing it. After then the stem of the tree must cut into Ee-Lu (Pole). Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh must control the whole process of Ee-Lu (Pole) until after erection of Ee-Lu (Pole). For the whole Karenni people the Ee-Lu (Pole) is an importance and sacredness. It is a monumental sign for the remembrance of Phyai-Thoo-Lu-Moe (The goddess of creation).



## EE-LU OR TYA-EE-LU (POLE FESTIVAL)

The belief in Tya-Ee-Lu (Pole Festival) maybe among the oldest creeds of human beings. The Karenni people believe that they themselves, animals and the world were created by (Phyai-Thoo-Lu-Moe) the goddess of creation. So, for this purpose first we have to explain who is (Phyai-Thoo-Lu-Moe) goddess of creation; how she created the world, the human beings and the animals. Without the explanation it will not perfect. Thus we have to explain briefly as below.

In the beginning there was nothing in the space. Only male and female winds were blowing in the space without destination. One time the female wind was unable to follow the male wind. The male wind turned around and asked the female wind. "Why you cannot follow me?" The female wind replied. "As I am a female, I'm pregnant." So the male wind circled round and round the female wind, till at last the female wind gave birth to a big cocoon (silk egg). From inside the cocoon (silk egg) came out the (Phyai-Thoo-Lu-Moe) the goddess of creation. The goddess sat on the cocoon (silk egg), and looked round into the space. She could see only four stars. They were red, yellow, white and reddish-white stars. Then goddess of creation looked into her cocoon and saw a cloud. She then created a big spider with the cloud and ordered the spider to build a world for her children to live in. The spider joined the four stars and built a large spider's web. The goddess looked at the spider web and saw that her children could not live on the spider web. So she rewound the spider web including the four stars and put them back into her cocoon (silk egg). She then looked back into her cocoon again and let the cloud come out. She then, ordered the cloud to build a world for her children to live in. The clouds come out from the cocoon twisting and twisting. It then rolled into space and circled round and round, at last the world was formed.

When the crust of the earth became hard, the goddess of creation descended on the highest place of the earth and created a place called Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu (the sky village). With mud, the goddess of creation started to create the human beings and animals. At that time there were no sun and moon. To get light, she created a mirror



mountain. She also created mushrooms ferns for the foods of human beings and animals. At last the sun and moon appeared. Since then south, west, north, east and time started to occur. Days and night started to occur and then the rain started to fall. Because of the heat of the sun all the mushrooms and ferns disappeared. As there were no food for human beings and animals, the goddess created wheat, paddy, oat, and various kinds of grasses. During that time a seed of paddy and oat were as big as cucumber. The human beings ate the paddy, wheat and oat and they became very fat and lazy. They slept all the day and became ill. Most of human beings were become ill. At last they went to the goddess of creation and asked for health. The goddess ordered them to erect (Kho-Htoe-Boe) pole and celebrate (Ee-Lu) festival. During the festival all human beings had to dance around the pole and praise for the gratitude of goddess aloud. During that time the highest plants which grew in (Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu) was only the (Ta-Poe-Maw) a plant which make with broom.

As the order of goddess the human beings cut the (Ta-Poe-Maw) erected it and danced around it everyday. In this way the human beings became healthier. To lead the dance the goddess also sent a semi-goddess called Na-Au-Moo who had a large and tall body. As the Na-Au-Moo led human beings to dance everyday the human became very healthy and strong. During that time there were no musical instruments for the dance. They had to imitate the sound of gongs by mouth, they had to imitate the sound of drums by beating their breasts, they had to imitate the sound of cymbals by clapping their hands, they had to imitate the song of flutes by blowing their fingers. As they had to dance everyday their palms and breasts became hurt, and their sound became to swallow. Then they went to the goddess and asked for the instruments. The goddess created gongs, cymbals, flutes and drums for them. With this instruments they danced every day regularly. As the Ta-Po was only a plant of broom, it was very small, so during the dance the Ta-Po used broken and disappeared away. The human beings wanted a big pole. The human beings searched in the whole region of Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu, but they could not find the trees there. The tall and big trees were growing beyond a very deep valley in the



east. Because the valley was so deep that no human beings had ever reached the bottom of it. So, they went to the goddess and asked for advice on how to get the long and big stem of tree over there for their pole. The goddess created a copper bridge across the deep valley for them. The goddess ordered that they who cross the copper bridge must be abstemious.

The human beings crossed the deep valley by the copper bridge and cut down a tree called Ta-Myai-Maw for their first (Kho-Htoe-Boe) pole. So, to this day Ta-Myai-Maw is the distinctive kind of tree which Karenni people hold to be sacred. They brought the Ta-Myai-Maw stem, cut into pole and erected the first Kho-Htoe-Boe pole in Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu. During crossing the bridge some human beings did not obeyed the ordered of goddess. They did not followed abstemiousness, so the curse fell on the Na-Au-Moo who could not control the human beings and fell from the bridge into the deep valley without seeing by any human beings. After erected the pole the human beings started to dance around the pole. As they were dancing they could not find the Na-Au-Moo.

They noticed that Na-Au-Moo was missing. They went out to find Na-Au-Moo, but they could not find anywhere. At last, they went to Pre-La-Day-Phu, who was a semi-god and could travel from star to star. They begged him to find Na-Au-Moo for them. Then Pre-La-Day-Phu went out on journey to find Na-Au-Moo. At last he found the Na-Au-Moo fallen dead in the bottom of deep valley. Pre-La-Day-Phu told the human beings that Na-Au-Moo had fallen dead in the bottom of deep valley. The human beings were so missed the Na-Au-Moo that they went to (Ma-Ryai-Kya-Htoo) who was semi-god with very long legs, and asked him to bring the body of Na-Au-Moo for them from the deep valley. Ma-Ryai-Kya-Htoo brought the body of Na-Au-Moo and put near the new pole. The human beings dissected the body. Then, in memory of Na-Au-Moo, they built the hall (a spirit house) with her bones and fleshes near the pole. To this day Karenni people built halls (a spirit houses, which is a place, supposed to be a resting-place for gods, angels, good spirits and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya) in the compound of Kho-Htoe-Boe pole. When the spirit house of Na-Au-Moo was fin-



ished the human beings invited the all gods, goddess, semi-gods, and semi-goddess to the memorial celebration of Na-Au-Moo. But they forgot to invite the male and female wind. The wind was angered and blew through the Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu. The entire new pole and spirit house was disappeared with the wind. The human beings were very disappointed. They went the goddess and said that they wanted to go down to the lower part of the world. If they live in Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu the wind will blow again and they will disappear with the winds. In the lower part of the world they could take shelter of the trees and rocks. The goddess created a Maw-Rwee (sky root) to the lower part of the world for them. This sky root was the main road that connected the Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu and the lower part of the world. The goddess comprehended that the human beings and animals would need foods when they arrived at the lower part of the earth, so she ordered them to cut and eat the barks of the sky root. To plant on the lower part of the world, the human beings took with them, the seeds of paddy, wheat, and oat and seeds of various kinds of vegetables, which had been created for them by the goddess. During that time the seeds of paddy, wheat and oat were as big as cucumber. As the human beings could not carry them down the sky root, they threw them down to the lower part of the earth. The seeds broke into pieces. All the human beings, animals an insect descended along the sky root to the lower part of the world. When they arrived on the lower part of the earth, the human beings collected the broken pieces of the seeds of paddy, wheat, oat and seeds of vegetables and started to plant them. So the seeds of paddy, wheat, oat and vegetables become small up to this day.

The human beings did not forget the gratitude of goddess; when they arrived on the lower part of the world, they cut down tree erect Kho-Htoe-Boe Pole built spirit house and celebrated Ee-Lu festival every year in order to thank goddess up to this day. As the human beings ate the barks of the sky root and their population were increased. Though the barks of sky -root replaced every morning, its did not enough for the increasing population of human beings and animals. They had to compete in getting the barks. One day a lazy group of human beings could not get the barks. They became very angry. So



-they cut the sky root and the sky root rolled up to the Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu. Since that day all the human beings and animals could not eat bark of the sky root, they had started to find other foods to rely on for their existence. Seeing that the goddess became very angry, but she still helping the human beings. As the human beings were far from their goddess, they did not obey her order any more. They became selfish, greedy and jealous to each other. They did many evil things. Since they were far from the goddess, the animals did not understand the words of human beings anymore. The human killed the animals and ate them. Seeing this goddess became very disappointed. For these consequences, the goddess assembled with the god who created the stars in the whole space, and asked the god to control and look after the world and human beings, which she had created. After then, the goddess climbed up to her birthplace, the silk cocoon {silk egg} to create new worlds.

The god who had been assigned to control the world and human beings started to control the world and human beings. The god sent {Ta-Nai-Maw-Khu-Phu} angels good spirits, and {Pre-Pro-Pre-Pyra} righteous souls in to this world to save human beings and to encourage them to do good deeds. The god also sent evil spirits, Satan demon fairies, ghost supernatural creatures etc in to this world, to punish human beings, and induce them to do the evil deals. These spirits came to guard the mountains, rivers, streams, trees, forests etc. Because of these two opposite spirits, that the human beings had to be divided into two societies, according to their obligations. One society had the obligation to worship god and goddess and to lead the rituals of sacrifice to the god and goddess. The other societies had the obligation to feed the spirits and request them not to disturb the human beings and to lead the rituals of feeding festivals. These societies had been remained among Karenni community. In Karenni community, the society, which has the obligation to worship god and goddess and to celebrate the rituals of sacrifice to the god and goddess, is called Ee-Lu-Phu society. The society, which has the obligation to feed the spirits which guarding the mountains, rivers, trees, forests etc is called Khai-Phu society. Every year the Ee-Lu-Phu society has to lead the-

celebration of worship and sacrifice to the god and goddess. They had to erect the Ee-Lu (pole) and then celebrate Tya-Ee-Lu (pole festival). Khai-Phu society also participated in this festival. But they could not pray and sacrifice directly to the god and goddess. They have to pray and sacrifice through the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh (chief of Ee-Lu-Phu) society. The Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh have to accept their sacrificial things, light candles and pray for them. Karenni people believed that, as all good and evil spirits were sent into this world by god, they must come assemble in the Ee-Lu pole during the festival. So, most of the families come to the festival, feeding the spirits which they thought concerning to them and, request them not to disturb their future. They also bring chickens, to predict their future by looking the chicken bones. Because the believed that god will bless the chicken bones to predict the right future.

In every compound of Ee-Lu pole a spirit house must be built. Karenni people believed that, angels, good spirits and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya would come to rest in the spirit house, during the Ee-Lu pole festival to deliver prayers and sacrificial things of people to the god. Every village which celebrating Ee-Lu pole festival yearly, the spirit house has to be built. In some small or temporary villages, they just built a model of spirit house in which the Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh (chief of Ee-Lu-Phu society) could not live. But in big and permanent villages, they built a big spirit house in which Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh could live with a place of altar, on which they can light the candles and put the sacrificial things. Karenni people believed that the spirit house is a place for angels, good spirits and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya to rest in, and no other spirits could not enter. They even forbid women and Khai-Phu society to enter. Even if a person from Ee-Lu-Phu society who wants to enter in, he must take out his shoes and wash his foot before entering. They believed that the spirit house is a sacred place of god. During the festival the people are dancing and shouting the praise of the gratitude of the goddess of creation. These shows that they are still obey the order of the goddess and never forget the order. Though they are far away from the goddess, they are still believed in goddess and god. In consequence they still celebrate the Ee-Lu pole festival up to this day.



The Ee-Lu-Phu societies have to lead three consecutive Ee-Lu pole festivals in a year. The purposes of these three festivals are different.

1. The first Ee-Lu pole festival must celebrate in October. This festival is called "Tyar-Ee-Lu-Boe-Plya. This festival were celebrated when the plants of paddy and some vegetable just starting to bear the fruits. The people went to their paddy fields, vegetable farms, picked the premature fruits and brought it to the Ee-Lu pole. There they built an altar and put all the premature fruits on the altar. Then they pray to the god for their good harvests. They pray god to bless the plants to produce good crops. In this sacrifice the Ee-Lu-Byar-Seh (chief of Ee-Lu-Phu society) had to pray for them.
2. The second Ee-Lu pole festival must celebrate in March. This festival is called Tya-Ee-Lu-Phu-Seh. The purpose of this festival is to pray for the teen ages. They pray for teen ages to grow up in good health, in good wisdom to obey the words of teachers, parents and old people and to retain good conduct. This festival has a permanent place other than permanent place of big pole compound. In this festival they also cut and erected pole. The pole must be decorated as the big pole of the big pole festival. But the pole must smaller and shorter than the big pole of the big pole festival. During the festival the teen ages brought sacrificial things such as boiled eggs, cooked sticky rice, bananas etc. to the Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh. Then the Ee-Lu-Byar Seh sacrificed and prayed for them. In this festival, after dancing at the pole festival, the teenagers had to entertain the old people and friends at their respective homes.
3. The third Ee-Lu pole festival must celebrate in April. This festival is called Tya-Ee-Lu-Du. Tya = means to recognize or sacrifice, Ee-Lu = means merits. Which mean sacrifice for merits. This festival is for all ages of people. The purpose is every person has right to pray to the god for the welfare of his family, for his health, for his economy, for his business, for his good future etc. This is important and paramount festival of Karenni people. Every person has to invite relatives, friends and old people to his house and entertain them with foods in order to obtain merits. All the families

including the families of Khai-Phu society had prepared sacrificial things, such as sugar canes, bananas, candles, boiled yams and eggs, cooked sticky rice or cooked rice of the first class white rice. Then they brought all these sacrificial properties to the pole festival. The Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh accepted all these, then lighted the candles and sacrificed these for them to the god, angels, and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya. They also brought chickens to the pole festival, killing its and looked chicken bones under the new pole. Because they believed that the god blessed the new pole and the new pole would empower the chicken bones to give correct answers.

4. The big pole festival which concerning the whole people of Karenni State is called "Tya-Ee-Lu-Du-Ta-Khai-Leh". This festival must celebrate on 27<sup>th</sup> April. It could not celebrate permanently in a village. It cost too much for this celebration. A village could not accept this festival more than once. To accept this festival is depending on the capability of finance and the desire of the villagers. So, this festival had to move from village to village, from place to place every year. In this festival every village brought chickens to look the chicken bones for the future of their respective village, under the new pole. To give respect to the new pole, every village brought their gongs and drums to dance around the new pole. The meaning of this festival is to show the unity of the whole people of Karenni State. The symbol of the unity is the new pole that had been erected during this festival. Besides this big pole festival of State, every village must celebrate big pole festival for the villagers of the village every year respectively. Every village must not celebrate the big pole festival in the same day. In other word the Tya-Ee-Lu-Du (big pole festival) of a village must not coincide with big pole festival of another village. During the festival the villagers need to invite their relatives and friends from other villages and, if they celebrate the festival in the same day, the relative and friends could not free to come to the festival. For Karenni believed that if they could not entertain their concerning relatives and friends during the festival they could not obtain complete merits. Every big pole festival must celebrate in April. They choose



auspicious day by looking the chicken bone. They celebrated the festival for three days. But as for the big village such as Kyetpogyi and Bawlakeh, they celebrate for five days. When a village is going to celebrate pole festival, first it must invite all the surrounding villages. Secondly the villagers of the village had to invite their concerning relatives and friends from far and near. The villagers of surrounding villages after preparing the sacrificial things practicing dance they came to the festival. After giving sacrificial things to the Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh of the spirit house they danced around the new pole. The meaning of the dance is to pay the respect of the new pole. The villagers had to entertain all guests in order to obtain good merits. Besides, they had to pack cooked rice, curries and meats, then sent to the families of their concerned relatives and friends with some wine to confirm their relatives and friendship.

During the festival the Karenni people used to kill buffaloes pigs, chickens, etc and fed some of the flesh to the spirits which supposing guarding mountains, rivers, forests, trees etc. Because Karenni people believed the god, angels and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya control all the good and evil spirits. So that if they feed the spirits during the festival, they will obtain good merits. They fed only small parts of the flesh of the animal to the spirits. They cut the remaining part of the flesh into equal weight and distribute to the every household in the village. The meaning of this is to show the unity and equality in the village. Every village celebrates the pole festival separately. When pole festival finished every family in the village have to start the cultivation for the coming year. They were starting to clear the paddy fields, gardens and starting plough to lay the seeds for the coming year. Not only the people of the villages, but the whole Karenni people starting their new jobs after the pole festival. Every Karenni people have the opinion that when the pole festival is finished he must start for new jobs, new career and new life. By this way you can count pole festival as New Year for Karenni people. But the difference is that the other races have an exact New-Year date, but Karenni has only in month. During this pole festival, the people used pouring water on each other and

young people used bathing older people with sweet smelling water. These showing to wash away the old impurities on a person and making a person's body and mind as cool as water. The people of surrounding villages who come to the pole festival have to give respect to the newly erected pole by dancing around it. Before they go back to their respective villages they have to go to dancing round the houses of Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh and village elder in order to pay respect to them. Thus Tya-Ee-Lu-Du (big pole festival) is the customary festival of Karenni people.

"The main purposes of the celebration of Tya-Ee-Lu-Du (big pole festival)"

1. To praise the gratitude of goddess and god.
2. Before the goddess of creation climb up to her silk egg (cocoon) she had assigned this world to the god, so, to praise the gratitude of god who is controlling the world and to pray for the blessing for the coming year.
3. To get good merits by entertain guests with foods, and to confirm relatives and friend ship.
4. To pray for the blessing of god for successful crops in coming year.
5. To feed the concerning spirits and request them not to disturb in coming year.
6. To obtain good characters and good conducts.
7. To clean themselves of old impurities and embrace goodness for the coming year.

"The erection of Ee-Lu or Kho-Htoo-Boo (pole)"

In every celebration of Tya-Ee-Lu-Du (pole festival), the Ee-Lu pole or Kho-Htoo-Bo pole must be erected. If a new pole is not erected an old pole must be repaired by putting new umbrella on top of it. Because the Ee-Lu pole or Khoe-Htoe-Boe pole must act as a symbol for the festival. Meaning of Tya-Ee-Lu is (Tya = to recognize or sacrifice, Ee-Lu = merits) recognition of sacrifice and merits. A new Ee-Lu pole is not need to erect in every pole festival. In this case



there are differences between villages. Some villages erect new Ee-Lu pole in every five years. Some villages erect new Ee-Lu pole in every three years. But in some villages they erect new Ee-Lu pole every year. The difference is depending on each village since started pole festival in the beginning. In the beginning some villages promised to erect the new pole in every five years, some promised to erect in every Three years and some promised to erect in every year.

When a newly established village started Tya-Ee-Lu -pole festival, it is not allowed to erect Ee-Lu pole at once. In the first year it must erect only Kha-Tya (altar). Then, next year it has to erect Ee-Lu pole. The erection of Kho-Htoe-Boe or Ee-Lu pole is representing the time when the human beings lived on Daw-Thoe Maw-Khu under the control of the goddess of creation. During living on Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu the human beings could get their food easily and need not to work. They were just slept and got up to eat. For this result most of the human beings became sick. They went to the goddess of creation and requested to heal them from sicknesses. The goddess ordered them to erect Kho-Htoe-Boe or Ee-Lu pole and dance around it and praise her gratitude. The human beings did as the order and they all became healthy. During that time there was no tall tree grew on Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu. The tallest plant was only Ta-Po-Maw (broom plant). The human beings had cut the broom plant and erected for Ee-Lu pole. Then they danced around the erected broom plant and shout out the gratitude of the goddess. At that time there were no gongs, no drums, no flutes and no cymbals. All the sound of the instruments was made by mouth. For the sound of gongs they had cried out by mouth, for the sound of drums they beat their breast and cried out the sound of the drum, for the sound of cymbals they clapped their hands. For the sound of flutes they blew their fingers and made the sound of the flutes by mouth, as time past, the human beings could not do this any more. At last they went to the goddess and request for help. The goddess created gongs, symbols, drums and flutes for them. The human beings used those instruments and danced every day. Goddess also ordered Na-Au-Moe, a Simi-goddess to lead the dance for human beings. As the Ee-Lu pole of broom plant was so small, that when ever, it bumped

against by the instrument, it broke and disappeared away. So the human beings wanted to erect the Ee-Lu pole of the stem of the tree. But there were no tree ever grown on Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu. Big and tall tree grew only in the eastern place of Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu, which the human beings could see with their eyes. But the place was divided from Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu by deepest valley, which no human beings could ever cross it. The human beings entered in the front of the goddess and requested her to help them in crossing the deepest valley in order to cut the tree for their Kho-Htoo-Boe or Ee-Lu pole. The goddess created the copper bridge cross the deepest valley for them. The human beings crossed the deepest valley by the bridge and cut the tree, which was a kind of Ta-Myai-Maw for their first Ee-Lu pole. To this day the Karenni people assume Ta-Myai-Maw as a sacred tree. For every new village that has just to erect its first Ee-Lu pole, it has to choose the Ta-Myai-Maw as first Ee-Lu pole. Next time for the endurance from the weather it cut the teak for its next Ee-Lu pole.

### "THE MEANING OF EE-LU POLE"

Erecting the new Ee-Lu pole or repairing the old Ee-Lu pole is representing the remembrance of the gratitude of the goddess of creation and the eternal god who is controlling this world. The Ee-Lu pole is a symbol which representing the mythology of Karenni people. The rounded head of the pole is representing this world. On the top of the rounded of the head, the umbrella is representing the Daw-Thoe-Maw-Khu, the place that created by the goddess of creation for the human beings and animals. The leaf which hanging down from the umbrella to touch the ground is representing the sky root, which created by the goddess for human beings and animals to go down to the lower part of the world. But according to the assumption of the meaning it is different from mythology. The meaning of umbrella of the pole is the resting place for god, angels and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya. The meaning of decorated leaf which hanging down from umbrella to touch the ground is the eternal god controlling this world from heaven. There is no custom for every village to erect new Ee-Lu pole every year. Some



villages erect new pole in every two years. Some villages erect new pole in every five years. The erections of new pole vary from village to village. This is depending on the promise made in the beginning when a village started to erect its new first pole. When the year to erect new pole arrived, the villagers have to search tree suitable for new pole. The tree must straight and without defects. When the day to cut down the tree arrived, they take chicken to the tree and look at the chicken bones. If chicken bones say yes, they cut down the tree. If chicken bones say no, they have to look for another tree. Some villages have to go and cut down the tree up to 10 or 15 miles far from their villages. After cutting down the tree, they cut in length according to the Ee-Lu pole. Then they bark the stem. If the stem is small they carry to the village on their shoulders, if the stem is big they drag it with the ropes. If the stem is big they invite surrounding villagers for help. However the journey is difficult, they have to bring the stem to their village. Where the journey is so difficult they have to sleep on the way one or two nights. When they arrive at the village, they put the stem in the compound of Ee-Lu pole. They put one night to cool the stem. During cooling the stem they have to guard it. Because, the dogs, pigs and women must not cross the stem. On the next day they cut into rounded head. On top of the rounded head they cut into slender top for putting umbrella of the pole. During cutting stem into Ee-Lu pole, another groups have to make umbrella of the pole. The umbrella is made with bamboos and woods. They sculpt the plate of wood and bamboo into the shape of various kinds of leaves for the decoration of umbrella. While making umbrella a group of women have to weave the leaf of the pole. The leave of the pole is weaving with cotton threads. When the leaf is finished they give it to the group who making the umbrella and they put some decorations on it. The Ee-Lu Byar-Seh has to choose a place to dig a hole for the erection of the pole by looking the chicken bones. When all are ready, they erect the pole by human forces. After erecting the pole they build steps of shelves up to the top of the pole to put umbrella. After putting umbrella they wash the whole pole with white lime and dismantle all the shelves. The Ee-Lu pole is ready for every body to give respect by dancing around it. After dismantling the

shelves they erect an altar under the pole with wooden plank, which already attach to the Ee-Lu pole. This altar is called Ka-Tya, which used for putting foods for the low spirits. Then, to give respect to the pole, the villagers bring instruments such as gongs, drums etc and start to dance around the pole.

In next day the villagers from surrounding villages which had been invited come with sacrificial things and dancing instruments such as gongs, drum etc. When they arrived at the Ee-Lu pole compound they circle the Ee-Lu pole compound including spirit house three times. Then to give the respect to the new pole they dance around the new pole. During the dancing they who carry the sacrificial things go to the spirit house and give sacrificial things to the Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh. They who bring chickens, they looked chicken bones under the new pole. When the dancing is stopped the villagers who are waiting to invite the guests invite the dancers. They lead the dancers from house to house to eat entertaining foods. A bout 1 to 2 PM, they hold wrestling competition. This competition is to choose the winner of wrestlers. After the wrestling competition the surrounding villagers came to dance around the new pole again, in order to pay the last respect to the new pole. Then they circle the compound of Ee-Lu pole, and leave from the compound. Before leaving the village they go to dance around the houses to Ee-Lu-Bya-She and villages' elders, to pay respect. Usually, the pole festival is celebrating for three days. The first day is calm sacrificial day. During this day the villagers bring sacrificial things to the hall (spirit house) and the Ee-Lu-Bya-She sacrifice and pray for them. The second day is for guests. The third day is for villagers to pay respect to each other. During this last day, the villagers go and dance around every house in the village to pay respect. As there were no definite rule since the beginning, the erection of Ee-Lu pole and the decoration of the umbrella are different from village to village. When a new village is formed, the Karenni custom does not allow erecting the Ee-Lu pole during the first Ee-Lu pole festival. Instead, a Ka-Tya (altar) is to be erected. Like Ee-Lu pole, the villagers have to find the tree without any defect. They carry the stem of the tree back to the village. Then cut into Ka-Tya (altar), with rounded head on the top.



On the top of rounded head they put a rectangular wooden plank for putting sacrificial things. The Ka-Tya is not so tall. It just above human head, for people can put their sacrificial things. The Ee-Lu pole is allowed to erect in the second year of Ee-Lu pole festival.

### "TWO KIND OF HALLS (SPIRIT HOUSE)"

In every big and permanent village there must be two kind of spirit houses. One is called Hoe-Du (big spirit house). It is built for the purpose of resting-place for god, angels, good spirits and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya. They believe that the god, angels, Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya used to come to the spirit house during the festival to accept the sacrificial things and the prayers of human beings. The second one is called Hoe-Ket (small spirit house). It is built for lower spirits such as spirits which guarding mountains, rivers, forests etc. They believe that those lower spirits used to come to the Ee-Lu pole festival to accept the feeding foods and the requests of human beings.

### "THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF EE-LU POLE AND BUILDINGS IN THE COMPOUND OF EE-LU POLE"

In every big and permanent village there are many different Ee-Lu poles and buildings in the compound of Ee-Lu pole.

1. Ee-Lu poles; erected for the remembrance of gratitude of the goddess of creation.
2. Taw-Ti; It is a kind of Ee-Lu pole, but it's a square pole. It is erected on the back of spirit house. It is erected for the remembrance of gratitude the god, angels, and Pre-Pro-Pre-Prya.
3. Tho-Lo; It is cut into the shape of Ee-Lu pole with rounded head. But it is big and shouter. The Picture of sun, moon, stars and the living creatures are inscribed on it. This pole must be lasted for a generation. When a generation is over, next The Ee-Lu pole is

horses. So they have to set up stable far spirit horses.

5. Kha-Tya; (altar) is erected for putting sacrificial thing or feeding foods.
6. Ta-Ret; It is a square shelf like a table. It is built by bamboo and wooden plank. It is a place to feed lower spirits. Most of the big and permanent villages have complete poles and buildings in the compound of Ee-Lu pole. But some village does not have complete poles and buildings. This is depending on the ability of Ee-Lu-Bya-Seh and the villagers.



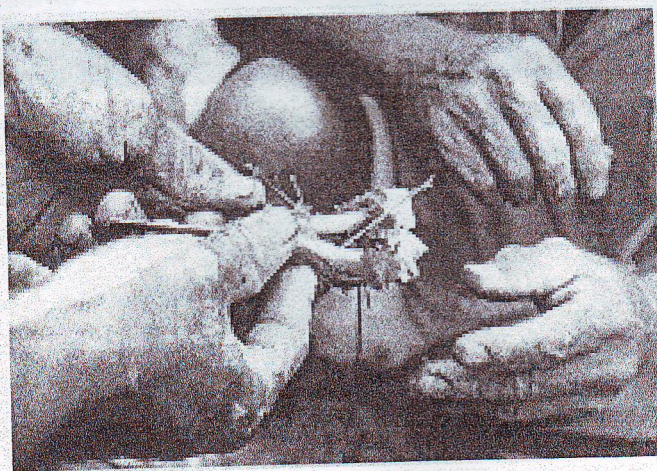
**Contact Address:**

Karenni Foreign Office  
P.O Box 19  
Mae Hong Son 58000  
Thailand  
Phone: 053 611691

Karenni Evergreen  
P.O Box 78  
Mae Hong Son 58000  
Thailand  
Phone: 053 613610  
E-mail: keverg@cscoms.com  
knyo2002@cscoms.com



The man is saying the words of prediction to the chicken in his hands.



After saying the words of prediction to the chicken killed it and then took out the bones of the chicken for prediction.





The Ee-Lu-bya-seh of Kyenpogyi village is sitting  
on the ladder of the Holl (spirit house )

Collected and scanned by Shay Reh  
(KnCC internship at Kantarawaddy Times -December 2011)