



CHANGES AND CHALLENGES:

The Khami Chin People of Southern Chin State and Their Adaptive Livelihood Strategies

Kyin Lam Mang



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Foreword

Myanmar is undergoing an exciting and often unpredictable time of transformation on many fronts after decades of isolation. Outsiders have a only limited understanding of the complexities, dynamics and the depth of change taking place—affecting the social, environmental, economic, and governmental spheres, and directly impacting the livelihoods and practiced culture of the peoples of Myanmar. How are they actively taking part in their country's developmental process, and in the face of what obstacles? In this pivotal moment, Myanmar's need for both mind- and man-power to help fill the gaps of data and research on critical development issues has never been greater.

RCSD has established the Understanding Myanmar's Development (UMD) Fellowship program, supported by the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, to enhance the knowledge of Myanmar's development, strengthen the research capacity of Burmese researchers, and encourage them to become actively engaged in the study of development policy and practice. The fellowship seeks to promote sustainable academic exchange and dialogue among researchers from Myanmar, Thailand, and other GMS countries. Under this program, 30 fellowships have been awarded to mid-career researchers in their respective areas of social and economic change, agriculture, environment and climate change, health and health care systems, and social media and innovations.

In this volume, anthropologist Kyin Lam Mang—himself a native of Chin state—analyzes the livelihood strategies employed by the Khami Chin people in the face of change on a range of

fronts: political, economic, cultural and environmental. Focused on the Sami area of Chin state, this research examines a rapidly disappearing way of life as people in the region move away from traditional subsistence cultivation and into the globalized cash-crop economy. Coupled with massive changes in the accessibility of the region and the concomitant arrival of external influences (trade, military and political authority, religious missions, economic expansion), Kyim Lam Mang looks into the roots of the Khami people of Sami's current situation to find possible solutions to the constraints that keep them from receiving the fruits of a developing and growing Myanmar.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, PhD
Director, RCSD

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I would like to convey my deep regard and gratitude to Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, the director of RCSD, for his encouragement and kind guidance as I pursued this research. I would like to express my special, sincere thanks to Dr. Jennifer Leehey, my academic advisor and editor, whose valuable comments and extensive assistance with writing and revising helped to shape this paper to its present form. In addition, I appreciate the guidance and advice given by the other professors and advisors from RCSD at the program workshops held in Chiang Mai and Yangon in 2012-2013.

I have taken effort in my empirical research. However, it would not have been possible without the help and kind support of many individuals and organizations in the Sami area. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of them.

Abstract

This paper is an extended case study of the Khami Chin people in Sami area in southwestern Chin State in Myanmar. The paper reveals their social and economic transformation within the larger context of modernization and development. As traditional swidden agriculturalists, the Khami Chin people enjoyed self-sufficiency and food security from the pre-colonial times to until late 1980s. However, multiple factors have affected their livelihood strategies from the late 1980s to the present, and now they contend with the terrible realities of poverty. Based on field research conducted in the Sami area in 2012-13, as well as secondary sources, this research paper describes the multiple forces that have impacted the economic, social and cultural reality of the Khami Chin and how they have responded to these changes and challenges.

In this paper, I consider political, economic, cultural and ecological factors in a holistic way to understand the changes that have occurred. I look at the impacts of political and economic policies and administrative mismanagement in the last three decades, which have been compounded by ecological degradation and a natural disaster called the *mautam* crisis that struck in 2010, resulting in massive food shortages. I show how these multiple forces, working together, have transformed these once self-sufficient smallholder agriculturalists into wage laborers working for migrant merchant patrons in the Sami area. Other livelihood strategies for the Khami Chin include out-migration to labor in the jade mines of Kachin state or to other countries in the region. While Khami Chin people in Sami are losing their farmlands, they are also not able access even the low-quality education and public healthcare facilities provided by the government.

While my project focuses on a particular people in a particular area, I believe this study can shed light on the complex, multi-causal ways that social and economic transformations occur elsewhere in the developing world..

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1

INTRODUCTION

The Mi creek looks like a snake. Its mouth opens into the Kaladan River, while its body curls upward among the hills and blue mountain ranges of southwestern Chin state. To reach the small town of Sami on the bank of the *Mi-chaung* (*chaung* means “creek”), you must begin the journey in Kyaukdaw in northern Rakhine state, in western Myanmar. From Kyaukdaw you travel by boat up the Kaladan River for about a half a day, and at the mouth of the Mi creek, you transfer to a smaller boat and travel for another half-day’s further northward. In November 2012, I was making this journey. The tropical winter sun was setting but it was not yet dark, as the boatman yelled to me over the noise of the motor: “This is the last turning. We will get to Sami soon.”

Soon I could see people on the creek bank. Some were busy in the row of shop stalls on the bank, some were rolling up their mats of drying yams, some young men played football, women fetched water from the creek and children swam. In a moment, I disembarked from the boat, stepping onto the wide gravel bank, perhaps two football fields wide. The settlements where people live were further up on the hillside, hidden behind large trees...

In this research paper, I will describe the life and livelihoods of people in this remote part of southwestern Chin state, focusing in particular on the Khami Chin people who are the native inhabitants of the Sami area. I will trace the history of the Khami people in Sami from pre-colonial times to the present. Traditional swidden

agriculturalists, the Khami lived self-sufficiently in this area for more than two hundred and fifty years, relying on local natural resources. However, since the colonial period when they started growing cash crops for sale and trade, they have gradually been incorporated into new kinds of social and economic relations.

Khami people have been affected by multiple political, social, economic and ecological forces. Since about the 1980s, their economic situation has been in decline. Under successive Myanmar governments, Khami have faced a variety of hardships. During the period of direct military rule in Myanmar (1988-2010), the Khami had to contend with problems such as high inflation, fluctuating prices for their cash crops, exploitation by middlemen, forced labor imposed by soldiers, climate change, natural disaster, and rising population pressures on their land.

In this paper, I will show how various political, economic and ecological forces have created challenges for Khami people, threatening their livelihoods and impacting their social and cultural practices. I will show how Khami people have adapted to these challenges, for example, by growing new cash crops in response to market demands. Today, their main cash crop is *gamone* (*Kaempferia galanga L.*) a medicinal tuber highly valued in China, and they also forage for “elephant foot” yam (*Amorphophallus paeoniifolius*). My research findings suggest that the Khami Chin have been trying to adapt in many ways, but many are stuck in poverty, constrained by larger structural forces over which they have little control.

This study of Khami people and their adaptive livelihood strategies is the output of field research I conducted in several visits to Sami between 2012 and 2014, supplemented by secondary sources and desk research. My research has focused on economic and social transformations that have impacted the native Khami people in the immediate area around the town of Sami. Although I investigate the history since pre-colonial times, I am mainly interested in the changes that have occurred in the Sami area in the last thirty years (since about 1980) and how Khami people have responded.

Research Objectives

My main objective when I initiated this research project was to gain an in-depth understanding of the livelihood strategies of Khami Chin people living in Sami. I wanted to know how these traditional “*taungya*” (swidden)¹ farmers were managing their lives and livelihoods amidst changing economic conditions. This project is an extended case study of a particular people and their social and economic transformation within the larger context of modernization and “development.”

My own ethnic background is Siyin-Chin. I am from northern Chin state and live in Yangon, Myanmar’s main commercial city. My professional career is dealing in traditional Chin textiles that are produced in Chin and Rakhine states and marketed in Yangon, mostly to tourist and international markets. I have been working with Khami weavers in southwestern Chin and northern Rakhine states for about thirteen years, and I have had opportunities to travel to the area from time to time, although not specifically to Sami (until I began this project). In my interactions with the Khami weavers, I progressively learned about their daily lives: their hardships and opportunities. I undertook this project in order to learn more about the socio-economic and cultural changes I was hearing about, especially in Sami, the area that Khami-Chin consider their natal land.

My research objectives:

1. To learn in detail about the main livelihood strategies of Khami households in the Sami area today (including swidden agriculture, cash cropping, foraging and other strategies such as wage labor and out-migration).
2. To learn more about how Khami people lived in pre-colonial times, and their traditional cultural and subsistence practices.

1. *Taungya* is the Burmese term for swidden or “slash-and-burn” cultivation. I describe the method in chapter three.

3. To investigate the various political, economic and ecological forces that have impacted Khami lives and livelihood strategies from the British colonial times through present day, and how Khami people have responded to those changes and challenges.

In this project, I have paid attention to multiple causes and forces and their effects. I have considered political, economic, cultural and ecological factors in a holistic way to understand the changes that have occurred over the past several decades in the Sami area. While my project focuses on a particular people in a particular area, I believe this study can shed light on the complex, multi-causal ways that social and economic transformations occur elsewhere in the developing world.

Research Methods

I first visited the small town of Sami for preliminary research for one week in November 2012. I met some ten Khami elders including upland rice and cash crop farmers and I explained to them about my project. We had a remarkable discussion. With their encouragement, I chose six key informants. These key informants allowed me to interview them and also helped me find me some 30 other people involved in different livelihoods to interview on my next trip.

In order to get a clear picture about real life in Sami; I stayed in Sami for almost 2.5 months (from February 21 to May 30, 2013) on the second trip. Since then, I have returned a few times to meet my respondents to confirm my findings – in June 2013 and in March 2014.

During my days in Sami, I interviewed upland-rice and cash crop farmers, and non-farmers with different livelihood strategies. While most of my informants were ethnic Khami-Chin people (or from another Chin sub-group), I also interviewed some ethnic Rakhine people living in the “Zaydan” (“market row”) part of town, including some of the migrant merchants who play crucial role in the community. I interviewed: five upland rice growers;

five cash crop growers; five upland rice *and* cash crop growers; five wage laborers; two school teachers, two religious ministers, one wood chopper. Among the non-Chin people, I interviewed a commercial-scale *gamone* grower and wholesaler, a boat builder, a storekeeper, one teashop keeper, and a pig breeder.

I employed qualitative research methods: in-depth interviews and participant observation. In my interviews, I asked open-ended questions and collected life stories as case studies. I visited the farmers' plots of farmland and made observations there. Occasionally, I got important clues to investigate further from some people meeting spontaneously in the teashop. Villagers would usually visit and talk with me in the evening when they were free from their farm work. I tried to get the information I needed from our free discussion. Sometimes I needed translation or interpretation by my research assistants because some elders could not speak Burmese well. Khami language is totally different from my mother tongue, Siyin Chin.

When I first visited Sami in November 2012, the township level authorities and the local authorities from the whole region were there. At that time the Sami village tract was being upgraded to "sub-township" status and there was an opening ceremony. I had the chance to talk with the sub-township administer. I introduced myself as a research fellow with the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University. Sami is always busy with strangers, such as cash crop brokers and traders and religious missionaries, so nobody was too curious about me. I was able to meet many local authorities came from various village-tracts and get abundant of information about the whole region, past and present.

In addition to my field research, I read secondary sources to learn more about the history of the region.

Structure of the Paper

In the next chapter, I provide background information about the geography and people of the Sami area and their current livelihoods. Then, chapters 3 to 9 are a chronological review of the changes that have impacted Khami people from pre-colonial times to the present. For convenience, I have organized the chronological review in terms of political periods based on the central government that was in power at the time. However, this does not mean that I am only interested in the effects of government policies. In each section, I consider ecological, economic and social-cultural factors that, together with government policies, have had an impact on Khami ways of life and livelihoods. I show how these different factors have interacted to create challenges for Khami people through several periods.

Chapter eight is the most important in the paper. Here I discuss in detail the dramatic changes that have occurred in Sami in the last few years. I discuss ecological changes in the area, the emergence of new markets for cash crops (specifically *gamone*), and the new kinds economic relations that have emerged between local Khami-Chin (and other Chin) laborers and merchant-traders from Kyaukdaw. I will also discuss how Khami people have been losing control over their means of subsistence. There is also a section on how patterns of land use have changed. Whereas previously, Khami people owned their land collectively, increasingly productive land is now held privately. I will describe how this change has occurred.

In chapter nine, I complete the chronology with a discussion of recent political changes in Myanmar since a new civilian government came to power in 2011, and the new roles being played by international development organizations. I will discuss how the people of Sami are thinking about their future.

In the final chapter I discuss some of the key themes that emerge from a chronological review of the changes and challenges facing Khami people.

2

THE SAMI AREA AND ITS PEOPLE

Geography

Chin State in western Myanmar has long been one of the most remote and undeveloped states in the country. Chin State borders Mizoram State (in India) and the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. (See Figures 1 and 2.) The population of Chin State is very sparse, about 400,000 people, and dispersed thinly. The entire state is formed with mountain ranges and most of the towns and villages are 5,000-7,000 feet above sea level. Poverty is endemic.²

Sami, which was formally a village-tract and now is a “sub-township,” is part of Paletwa Township in southwestern Chin state. Sami lies about 32 miles east of the small town of Paletwa. This part of southwestern Chin state is largely cut off from other areas in the state. Indeed, government employees based in Hakha, the capital of Chin State, must travel via Kalembo to Yangon and then to Sittwe (capital of Rakhine state) by air. Occasionally in the past, government employees trekked from Hakha to Paletwa and Sami, but that took three or four weeks. Access is really only feasible by river from northern Rakhine state. Because of this geography, Sami and Paletwa in southwestern Chin have had more economic

2. According to a 2011 nation-wide survey of Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA) conducted by Myanmar government and UN institutions, poverty incidence in Chin state is at 73 percent; and food poverty incidence at 25 percent of its population (UNDP, 2011).

relations with Kyaukdaw and other towns in northern Rakhine State over the past 60 years than with other parts of Myanmar.

Figure 1 Map of Myanmar



Figure 2 Map of Chin State



Bamboo and hardwood forests cover the hills and mountains around Sami.³ This is tropical rain forest and the annual rainfall is 80-100 inches. Streams and creeks flow between the foothills. Sami, as I said, is on the *Mi-chaung* (*chaung* means creek), which

3. Brown (1960[1908]: 5) describing the fauna in the early 20th c. mentions these species of trees: *Dipterocarpus turbinatus*, *Sauranja punduana*, *Schima wallichii*, *Duabanga sonneratioides*. He notes also several species of figs and palms.

is a tributary of the Kaladan River. Another smaller creek, called the Sami creek, flows into the Mi. In this area, there are abundant natural resources and multiple sources of protein that allowed the local Khami-Chin inhabitants to live self-sufficiently as swidden agriculturalists and foragers for about two and a half centuries.

The People

The people who are referred to collectively as “Chin” in fact comprise many sub-groups and speak numerous local languages many of which are mutually unintelligible. The various Chin sub-groups in turn comprise various sub-groups and clans, who may also have their own distinctive dialects.

According to colonial-era sources, Khami Chin people migrated from the northeast into the hilly area between the Kaladan River and the *Mi-chaung* probably about 50 or 60 years before the conquest of Arakan by the British in 1826 (Bennison 1933: 249; Brown 1960 [1908]: 11). Later these Khami people dispersed. Now there are various Khami sub-groups and clans living throughout southwestern Chin state and northern and western Rakhine state. They are known by various names: Khenla, Khongtu, Lemi (Akelong), Likhy (Likhaeng), Nideun, Nisay, Rengsa (Namboi). When I discussed this diversity with prominent Sami elders, they claimed all these people are linguistically Khami (sometimes also called “Khumi”) people.⁴ Among Khami people, it is common for different clans to speak somewhat different dialects. These clan-groups settle together in different territories.

The first settlers in the Sami area were Khami Chin. They settled in the foothills of the Pa-maung mountain where the Sami creek

4. One also hears the group names Awa Khami, Mro and Araing Khami. The modifier *awa* means “further south,” while *araing* means further north. Today the “Awa Khami” and other Khami groups in northwestern Rakhine state (and also the Chittagong Hill Tracts) are also called “Mro.” In Rakhine State, they have formed a political party called the Mro (or Khami) National Solidarity Organization party. Because of this political party in Rakhine state, some people in the Sami area in Chin state now prefer to call themselves “Khumi” to distinguish themselves from the Mro/Khami in Rakhine.

joins the Mi creek (the *Samikung* “Sami-mouth”). As I will describe in chronology, other groups of people came into the area later. During the colonial era, there were traders from Chittagong who settled in Sami, but they departed when World War II broke out. Since the late 1950s, migrant merchants from Kyaukdaw in Arakan (Rakhine) state have been moving into the Sami area, mostly to do retail and wholesale business. They established the *zay-dan* (“shop-row”) part of town, and so I will refer to them generally as Zaydan people. They have played a critical role in the local economy.

Since the 1980s, other Chin peoples have also been moving into the Sami area from neighboring townships. These include Mara and Matu people from Matupi Township (in the north), and Dai people from Mindat Township (in the east). There are also ethnic Burman (or Bamar) people in the area, from other states and regions in the country, working as government employees.

Today (2013), the population of Sami is increasing with many newcomers from neighboring townships. These newcomers include Khami people from neighboring areas, non-Khmi Chin people from Matupi and Mindat Townships, as well as new migrants from Rakhine state, mostly from Kyaukdaw. (See Table 1.)

Table 1 Households and total population in 1983, 2005 and 2013

Year	Old Sami HHs	Anaung-Wa HHs	Zaydan HHs	Total HHs	Total population	Source
1983	7	25	12	44	215	(Rabei 1987)
2005	6	99	133	238	1165	(Kyaw Win 2010)
2013	8	217	205	422	2342	Local Administration

Some of the population is seasonal. Traders as well as wage-laborers come up from Kyaukdaw for the high season of *gamone* and elephant-foot yam harvesting and processing, which is from October to April. About half of these migrants return to Kyaukdaw when the season is over, but the others stay on through the year.

Overview of Livelihoods

The native Khami people are traditionally swidden farmers growing upland paddy and also foraging. However, since British colonial times, they have been involved in producing a variety of cash crops. Under British rule, they grew tobacco and cotton. Later, crops such as sesame and chilies (grown on hillsides in swidden plots), and mangoes and the *djenkol* bean (*Archidendron pauciflorum*)—grown perennially—became important. Currently, as I mentioned, the main cash crop is *gamone*, a kind of medicinal tuber that is mostly cultivated on hillsides. The farmers also forage for elephant foot yam in the open season for sale and domestic consumption. *Gamone*, elephant foot yam tubers and orchids are sold, via brokers, to China.

In the Sami area today, most of the people who are involved in small-scale farming and foraging are ethnic Chin people, including Khami and other Chin sub-groups. Large-scale commercial growing and processing of *gamone*, however, is mostly done by Zaydan growers and merchants. In recent years, Khami and other Chin people in the area have gotten jobs as wage laborers for Zaydan patrons on their *gamone* plantations. There is also a seasonal *gamone* processing center run by migrants from Kyaukdaw where local Chin people may find work at harvest time. I will explain more about *gamone* in later chapters, and I will discuss how these new kinds of economic relations have developed.

Previously, only Zaydan people did the wholesale and retail businesses in the Sami area. However, now some local Khami and other Chin people run retail stores: there are about ten such stores in the Anaung-wa ward. Some of these shopkeepers also buy some farm products to process and sell to wholesalers, but only on a small scale.

Some of the other, non-farming occupations in the Sami area include: government employees, religious ministers, seasonal wood and bamboo choppers, boat transporters and seasonal boat builders. Government employees in Sami may be Khami Chin, Chin people from other sub-groups, ethnic Rakhine people or Burmans from elsewhere in the country. The Christian religious ministers are native Khami or from other ethnic Chin sub-groups.

Seasonal woodcutters are people from Kyaukdaw who go into some of the remote hills around Sami to chop down timber for house and boat building and also for firewood.

Dai Chin people (from Mindat Township) also work in the timber business, cutting down big trees and producing posts and planks for house building. Meanwhile, Mara Chin people in Sami may make their living buying and selling pigs and cattle. They trade on Indian border in the area that is their natal homeland.

The Town of Sami

Under the British colonial administration, the small village of Sami was on the west bank of the *Mi chaung* (“creek”). (See Figures 3 and 4.) Today there remain only eight households on that side of the creek, which is called “Old Sami” or sometimes “Pan-taung” after the last headman’s name. Most of the population is on the east side of the *Mi chaung*.

On the east side, there are two wards: “Zaydan” and “Anaung-wa.” They are now connected by a small wooden footbridge that was built in 2010 with help from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Kingdom of Belgium. Zaydan is the area that was settled by migrants from Kyaukdaw. There is a row of shops including grocery shops, teashops, traditional foods-sellers, a barbershop, watch and radio repair services, vegetable vendors, a video hall, a billiards hall and a Desk Top Publishing (DTP) service. People lived crowded together in this ward.

Anaung-wa ward is where Khami and other Chin people live. There are schools, a police station, a hospital, and a few shops. There are houses for government employees and ministers. Residential houses are scattered on the hillsides. People live in traditional-style bamboo houses as they have built for hundreds of years. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 3 Map of Sami town

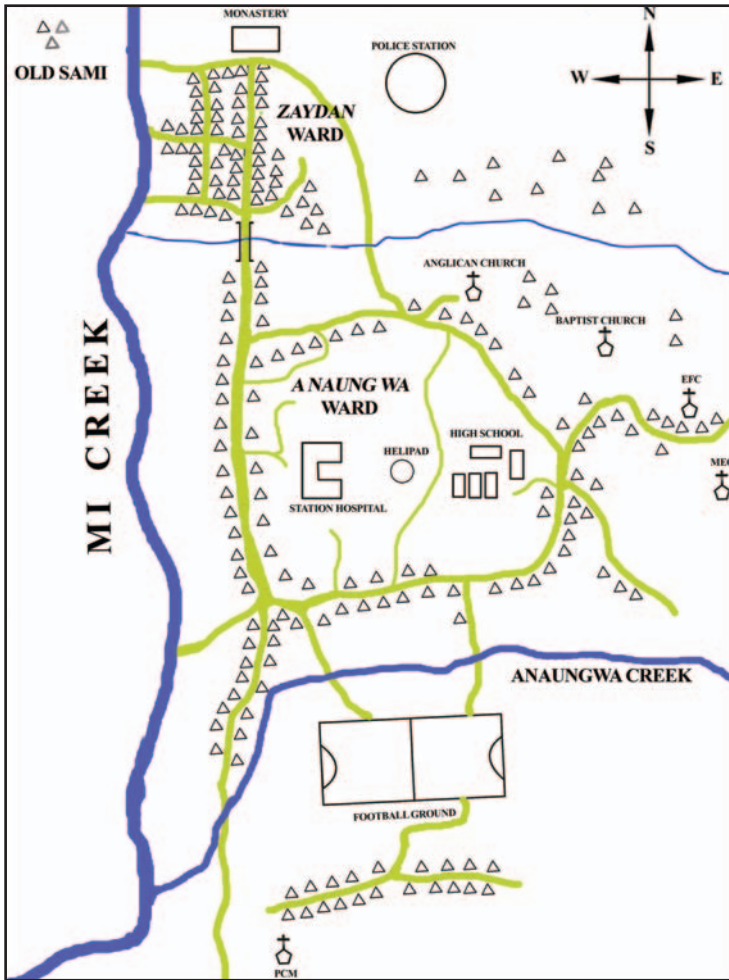


Figure 4 Panoramic view of Sami town

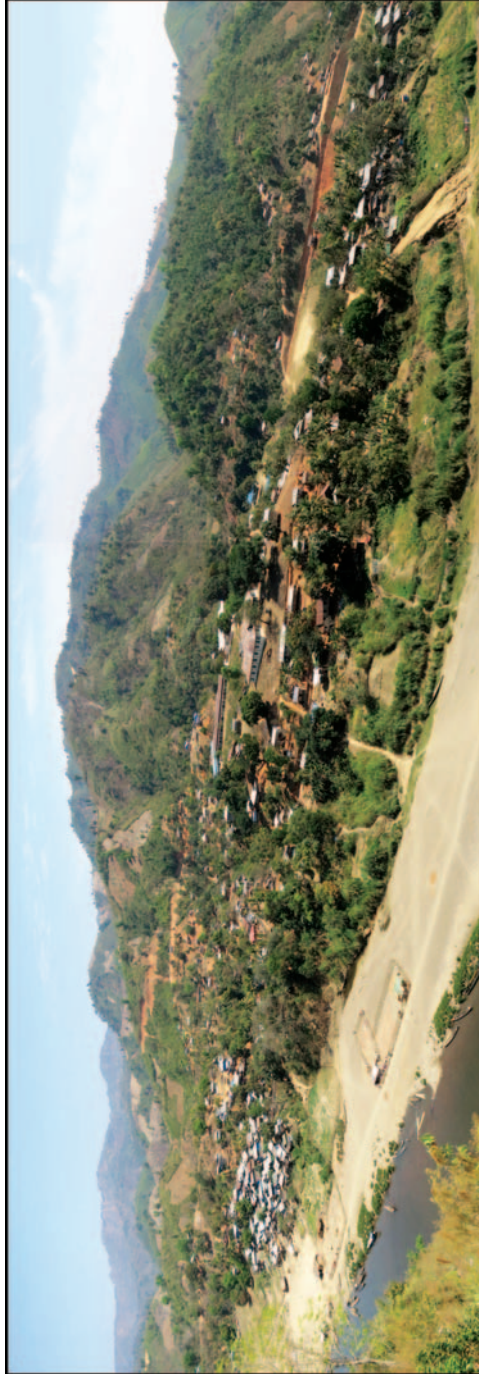
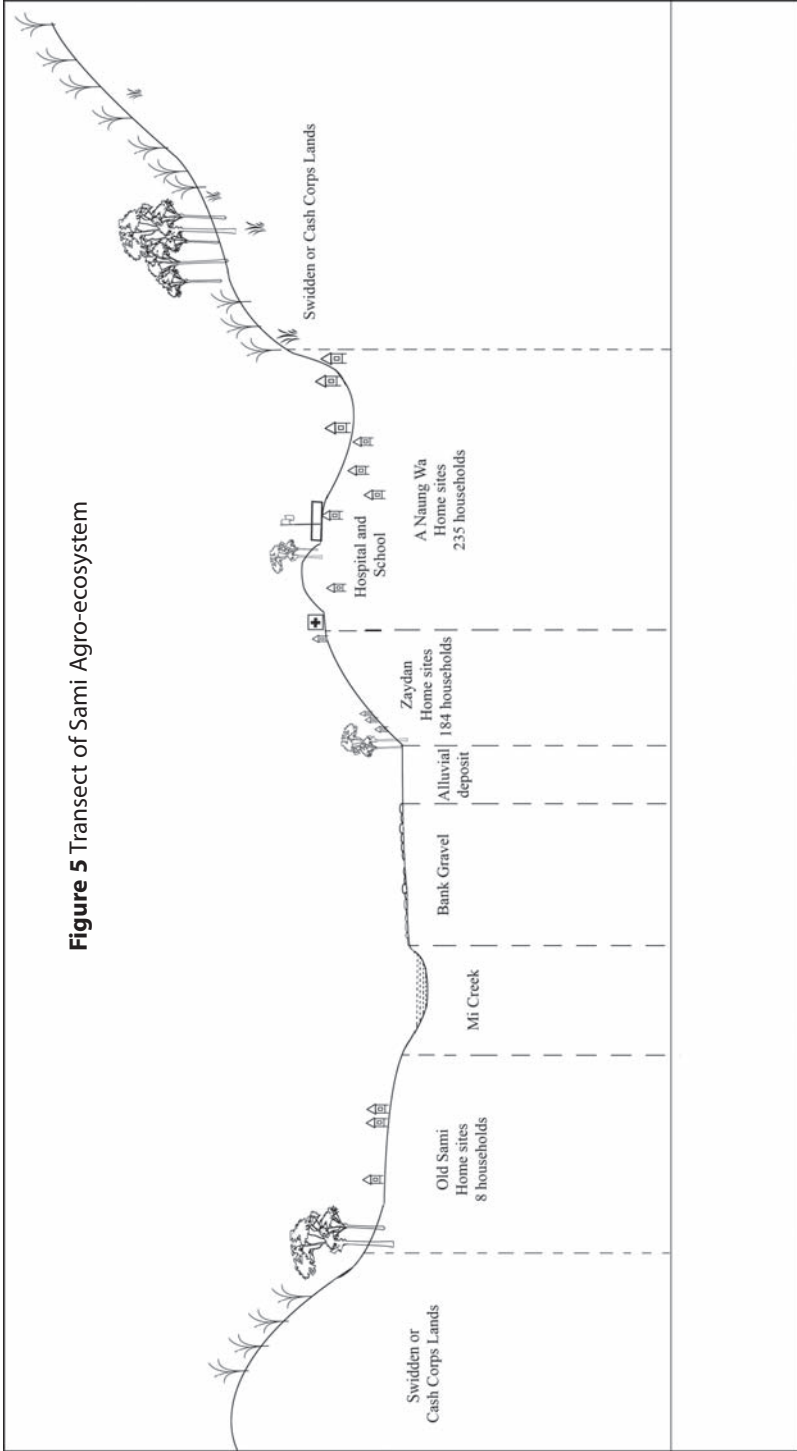


Figure 5 Transect of Sami Agro-ecosystem



3

KHAMI CHIN IN PRE-COLONIAL TIMES

Khami-Chin people moved into the area now known as Sami about 50 or 60 years before the conquest of Arakan by the British in 1826. Previously they had inhabited a region further to the north, but because of frequent invasions of that area by the “Shandu” people (who are now known as Mara, a sub-group of Chin), the Khami migrated southwards into the hilly region between the Mi creek and the Kaladan River (Bennison 1933: 249).

By reading colonial-era sources we can guess some things about what life was like for Khami and other hill people in pre-colonial times. All the sources suggest that there was a lot of fighting among the hill tribes prior to the British annexation. Hill people not only raided neighboring tribes but also occasionally made forays into the lowland villages to the south (Brown 1960[1908]: 7).⁵

Khami societies were ruled by local chieftains. Each small group of Khami had a hereditary lineage chief. An elder I spoke with in 2013 told me that leaders of smaller lineages would take a ceremonial oath and offer a sacrifice of *mithun* (highland cattle) as tribute to the chief of a stronger lineage. In this way, smaller

5. I have drawn heavily on this colonial-era “gazetteer” written by G.E. Brown. It was first published about 1907 or 1908. My source is a 1960 reprint of the document.

lineages would become subject to a stronger one's administration, and the powerful chief would be effectively promoted from lineage chief to a "clan chief," called (in Khami) *khukung*. In Burmese, he is called a *taung-min* or "hill-king." The *khukung* controlled a wide, mountainous area that he could rule well. He managed the land use for his people every year.

In this part of the world, the primary staple food has always been upland rice. Since pre-colonial times and continuing today, hill people have relied on traditional *taungya* (swidden) cultivation system for growing rice and other crops.⁶ In this method, cultivators chop down the trees, bamboo, and brush in a particular plot of land, let the material dry, and then burn it off in order to improve soil fertility. Traditionally in the Sami area, cultivators used a plot of land for only one season and then abandoned it. The next season, they found a new plot of land, rotating from one plot to another. After about a ten-year fallowing interval, an abandoned plot of land could be used again for cultivation. However, this was rarely necessary in the pre-colonial period, as Khami generally did not live in a single place for long time due to inter-tribal conflict. (Later I will describe how land cultivation practices changed after highland people became more sedentary.)

In the traditional *taungya* cycle, brush and trees were cut in January and February, and burning took place in late March and early April. Villagers would set a date and all the plots around a village would be burnt on the same day, with all adults contributing their labor. (They would warn away people from neighboring villages by blocking paths with fresh cut tree branches.) The day after the fire, the plots would be prepared for sowing. Rice seeds were sown before the first rains in April. To sow rice seed, the cultivator used a specific tool called a *lai-paung*, a spade-like knife made of iron set on a long bamboo pole handle. (See Figure 6) Typically a man and woman would work together: the man would punch holes into the ground and open the hole with the long handle, and then his wife would drop 10 to 20 rice seeds into each

6. *Taungya* is the Burmese term for this kind of agriculture, also known as slash-and-burn, swidden or shifting cultivation.

hole and then fill the hole with soil. There was wide spacing, perhaps a foot, between each hole, so there would be plenty of room for the plants.

Figure 6 *Laipaung*: tool for sowing rice



With the first rains in April and May, the seedlings came out of the ground in bunches. Later, in June and July, farmers would plant other crops, such as cotton, sesame and vegetables (for example, gourd and pumpkin) among the rice seedlings. All the cultivation relied on rainwater. During the rainy season the rice plants and weeds grew together and cultivators had to weed at least twice in a season. The rice fields were harvested from September through November. After harvesting and threshing, the rice was stored in sacks or big baskets in villagers' houses, or, if a villager's yields were especially large, in a separate storage hut.

At each step of the *taungya* cultivation process, from cutting trees to harvesting, a Shaman conducted a traditional sacrifice ritual. *Taungya* cultivation started with rituals to improve the fertility of soil and ended by celebrating the harvest festivals. The final ritual of the harvest festival was performed by slaughtering pigs and goats.

In the “off” season (late November and December), Khami were free from their cultivating tasks. They spent their time foraging and hunting in the forests. Generally Khami women and young boys and girls foraged for edible fruits, leaves and tubers (such as elephant foot yam) and the men hunted. Khami also foraged for mushrooms and wild bamboo shoots in the rainy season.

In those days the forests were dense and the human population was sparse, so there were many wild animals to hunt. Khami hunted wild pigs, barking deer, and sambhur deer to eat. They would also hunt wild elephants and tigers to protect their villages and enhance their status. Hunting was highly valued in Khami society. When a man killed a tiger or elephant, he held a big festival of achievement.⁷ The measure of the achievement of the head of a family was indicated by the number skulls of wild animals he had shot in his life, all of which hung on the outer side of the wall of his house. Hunting was carried out all times of the year.

Khami also practiced animal husbandry, raising pigs, chickens, goats and dogs. Traditionally, they did not raise buffalos in the hills; however, they did breed mithun (*Bos frontalis*), which are partly wild, partly domesticated oxen, also known as “hill-cattle” in colonial sources (e.g. Brown 1960[1908]: 5-6). In pre-colonial times, the free land was plentiful and mithun could range widely in the forests and not get mixed up with other owners’ animals. The mithun knew their owners and would come back to the village about once a month. It was important to keep the mithun away from *taungya* plots so crops would not be destroyed.

Mithun were not used as draft animals for loading and pulling, but solely for sacrifices and feasting purposes. Before the arrival of Christianity into this area, hill people practiced animism and they held many different sorts of seasonal rituals and cultural celebrations. On their special occasions, Khami held great sacrificial feasts and invited relatives and others from nearby

7. An elder I spoke with told me that elephants were valued for their tusks, which could be ransomed for prisoners of war captured by the Shandu people. A pair of tusks could ransom one prisoner.

villages to participate. The feasts lasted for days with eating and drinking of rice wine. Brown reports that “in olden times” (i.e. pre-colonial) a village might slaughter 30 to 40 head of cattle for just one feast (*ibid*: 22-23).

In 2012, my key informants explained about the traditions of feasting. Some of the common festivals were called: *rieng pui* (“more important feast”) and *rieng tang* (“less important feast”). Another festival, called (in Burmese) *nwa hto pwe* (“cattle killing festival”) was usually held after harvesting. (Some Khami sub-groups call the feast *khwe sani sa-deh* or *si sa-deh*.) It was held by a single sponsor, a rich man in the village. Only a rich man could hold a big festival one or more times in his lifetime. The feast was a means for the host to show off his prosperity and demonstrate his achievement. The close relatives and surrounding villagers would be invited and they would bring cooked rice while the host would slaughter mithun, cattle, pigs and goats and prepare rice wine for the participants. A very big feast enhanced the host’s social status.

If there was any trade activity between Khami-Chin and neighboring tribes in the pre-colonial era, there is no indication of this in the sources I consulted. The Khami were largely self-sufficient for their calorie consumption from upland rice cultivation. They had abundant game, fish and domestic animals for protein consumption and feasting. It is likely they did not need to trade for salt, as Khami traditionally seasoned their food with ash-filtrated alkali water.⁸

We know that the Khami have an old tradition of textile making. They grew cotton in the pre-colonial period and made clothing and blankets with hand spun cotton and natural dyes. Textiles were used as dowry and also kept as family heirlooms.

The Khami could easily get bamboo from their environment to build their houses. They practiced social reciprocity and a bamboo

8. All Chin people including Khami have used ash-filtrated alkali water to season their food. Since the colonial period, salt has been available, but people still use the ash-water, especially to cook meat.

house could be built in a day with the hands of all members in a village. All the parts of a house, from posts to floor planking to ladders, doors and windows, were made from bamboo products. Even the roof was made of bamboo leaves.

4

BRITISH COLONIAL PERIOD (1826-1948)

At the conclusion of the first Anglo-Burman war (1824-26), under the terms of the treaty of Yandabo, the Burmese territories of Arakan and Tenasserim became annexed to British India.⁹ The area that is now known as Paletwa Township (including Sami) became a British possession. Initially it was part of the “Akyab district”¹⁰; later it was established as a separate district, called “Northern Arakan District,” with its own superintendent. The area is also referred to in colonial sources as the “Arakan Hill Tracts.” (Brown 1960[1908]: 5-6.)

Colonial rule had far-reaching consequences for the livelihoods of the Khami-Chin and other peoples in the area. Under the British, new kinds of trading relationships were established between different groups in the area. Crops such as rice, cotton and sesame started to be grown for the market not just domestic use. Tobacco was introduced and became an important cash crop in the colonial period, supplying local demand in the plains.

The British had a two-tiered administrative system in Burma, with Burma proper under direct rule of colonial administrators, and

9. Vumson, in his book “Zo History” mentions that Khami peoples in various villages revolted against British annexation with spears and bows and arrows. But the old hunting and fighting tools of the native people were no match for British rifles and the British took over the area (Vumson 1986: 106).

10. “Akyab” is today known as “Sittwe.” It is the capital of Rakhine State.

the frontier areas under indirect rule. In the Sami and Paletwa areas, which were indirect rule, existing native chieftains were appointed to serve as local headmen. Under the Village Act, they were paid to collect revenue, receiving a commission of 10 percent (Brown 1960[1908]: 5-6).

In the mid-19th c., disputes among the tribes in the region began to calm down and Khami people started to migrate in various directions, including southwards to the sources of the *Pi-chaung* and *Mi-chaung* and the Kaladan River (Bennison 1933: 249). Some groups gradually moved downriver and settled in the localities where they live today. Some moved to the mountain ranges; some went further south to the areas that are now northern and northwestern Rakhine. Some of them even reached the Chittagong Hill Tract where their descendants now live as Bangladesh citizens.

In this period, British authorities were trying to foster more peaceful relations between groups by encouraging “trade and traffic” especially between hill peoples and lowlanders (Brown 1960[1908]: 8). In 1868, the British established a market in Myauktaung, about 68 miles north of Akyab (today called Sittwe). Brown writes: “This market proved a great success, and the hill people soon learnt to do a large trade in sesame, cotton, tobacco and other hill produce with dealers from Akyab” (*ibid*: 8). The dealers from Akyab in those days were ethnic Arakanese (Rakhines) as well as Chittagonians from Bangladesh. Later, traders from Chittagong established shops or enclosed bazaar stalls in other villages in the area, wherever the British set up police-posts. By 1876, fifty years after British annexation, the British had established police outposts and stations in the Sami area and elsewhere across the northern Arakan District.

The village of Sami was established at this time. The Chittagonians Mr. Haw Bay and Mr. Suidi were the first immigrant traders to settle down in Sami (Rabei 2010). These two men bought Khami farm products and they ran shops and a bazaar in Sami. Later, other Chittagonians arrived, forming a small community of about four or five families on the east bank of the *Mi-chaung*. They stayed there until World War II broke out.

Writing in 1908, Brown describes the marketplaces in the Arakan Hill Tracts:

These shops are patronized by all the tribesmen from far and near, from both the un-administered as well as the administered area. Salt, foodstuffs, wearing apparel and dry goods of all descriptions are purchased... These Chittagonian stall-keepers appear to be doing well for several of them have recently been enlarging their premises. (Brown 1960[1908]: 8)

Brown observes that in the town of Paletwa, “all the shops and trade are in the hands of Chittagonian ‘*bunyas*’ or traders who buy up all the tobacco and rice they can lay their hands on..., [and] little appears to be done in this respect by the hill people... themselves” (*ibid*: 8). In other words, hill people were the source of the cash crops but they were not involved in further trading activities.

In the colonial era, *taungya* cultivation continued to be practiced as in the pre-colonial period, with rice, cotton, sesame and vegetables grown together in plots on steep hillsides. In the remote “un-administered” areas there were still a wide range of wild tree and bamboo forestlands that could be prepared for *taungya* cultivation. However in the “administered” areas near the towns, land suitable for *taungya* was becoming scarcer. Brown describes the cultivable wasteland in the administered areas as: “poor... and more or less worked-out” (*ibid*: 21).

While cotton was grown together with rice in the hills, tobacco was planted in lowland areas on the banks of rivers and streams. The Khami used American origin tobacco seeds. These were broadcast on the alluvial deposit land along the river in November. When the plants were about two feet high, the lower leaves were broken off and deposited around the stem of tobacco as a mulch or fertilizer for the mother plant. The remaining leaves were plucked in April, dried and prepared for the market.

The introduction of cash cropping had multiple consequences on social and economic life. According to Brown, at the time of his observation, the hill tribes were starting to suffer from “scarcity of food grain” (p.21). He attributes this to several factors, including the pooriness of the soil and the fact that people were inclined to devote their efforts to cash crops, especially tobacco. He writes:

"Paddy *taungya* cultivation which involves more labour and trouble may be said to be not receiving the same amount of attention as tobacco cultivation, which the people have found an easy and lucrative source of livelihood" (*ibid*: 21).

As the market demand for American-origin tobacco became higher the Khami and other hill tribes focused their efforts on tobacco for sale rather than the more labor-intensive *taungya* rice.

Cultural Life under Colonial Rule

The traditional sacrificial feasts continued, with people spending the money they earned by selling their crops. Brown gives us an idea about how colonial-era officials viewed these practices:

A greater portion of the surplus cash, which with a rich prolific soil is acquired...with but little trouble by cultivation, is generally soon squandered in feasting and drinking – valuable hill and lowland cattle, pig and goats being killed regardless of expense: as many as from 10 to 20 animals often being slaughtered at one feast (*ibid*: 23).

The British administrators saw the feasting and drinking as a waste of the hill peoples' wealth and time. Some of the Khami elders I interviewed in 2012 also shared this critical view of their cultural practices. One elder told me that Khami maintained their costly feasts because they valued their social and cultural traditions. He added, that he now realized the culture was actually shaping their daily life into hardship. While the Khami in Sami believed in animism, he said, they practiced such rituals and paid less attention to their livelihoods. Then, later, when their income decreased, they could no longer contribute animals to be slaughtered in others' feasts. Thus the feasting practices gradually declined.

The elder told me that a major value for the Khami at that time was to get married at an early age. People would raise livestock, such as mithun, cattle, pigs and goats for the celebration. Men needed cattle (mithun and lowland cattle) in order to settle the brideprice—which is a gift of wealth from a man to his new bride's

family, specifically to her parents and her father's brothers. A traditional brideprice gift included cattle, gongs, and spears. In the colonial times, life was getting harder and it was more difficult to settle the full bride price immediately. Paying the new father-in-law was the priority, but it was acceptable to delay payment to the bride's paternal uncles. In some cases, if a man could not settle the full bride price in his lifetime, he would leave the obligation to his sons and grandsons.

Through the colonial period, the Khami and other hill people maintained their animist traditions. In fact, Christianity was not introduced to the area until the 1940s. Khami elders told me that they relied on traditional healing rituals conducted by shamans. These involved sacrifices of animals such as dogs, pigs, goats, or chickens, with different animals being used depending on the kind of illness to be treated. Especially for the people living in the remote, un-administered territory around Sami, there was no access to any kind of healthcare or education services. People had to rely on their traditional cultural practices.

According to Rabei (1987), during British rule, there was no official school in Sami at all. There were primary schools in four villages along the Kaladan River (in Paletwa, Daletme, Shinletwa and Tronein) but not in Sami.¹¹ None of my sources mentions any government clinics or health care facilities.

11. However, Kyaw Win (2010) mentions in his history of Sami that there was a private secondary school in Sami in the British period run by U Thiripyanchi Htat Hlaing, a legendary leader of Khami people.

5

WORLD WAR II AND INDEPENDENT BURMA

World War II, which broke out in Europe in 1939, came to Burma in 1942. Imperial Japan invaded British Burma, aided by General Aung San and his “30 Comrades” who subsequently formed the Burma Independence Army. As the Japanese advanced, the British Army withdrew towards India and Bangladesh and World War II. At this time, the war came to the Arakan Hill Tracts.

In the Sami area, an immediate consequence of the war was a breakdown in trade. The Chittagonian merchants who had settled in town fled west in order to escape from the war.¹² Until the end of the war, the Khami and other hill people had no access to markets to trade their cash crops. They grew only upland rice for their food security.

World War II ended in 1945 and after a brief return of British rule, Burma regained her independence in January 1948. However, the newly independent state soon descended into political violence. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB), the ethnic Karens and other political and ethnic groups had grievances, and when

12. There were four or five Chittagonian families in Sami when the war broke out. All fled back to Chittagong except for one man, named U Akhaung who had married a Khami woman. He remained in Sami and was involved in politics in the Socialist era. In 2012, he was 82 years old and still living in Sami.

negotiations failed they took up arms to challenge the authority of the central government. The state, led by Prime Minister U Nu, struggled to establish credibility and stability.

In the Sami area, far from Rangoon, there was relative calm. After World War II, cash cropping became possible again. The Chittagonians did not return to the area perhaps because doing business in Chittagong or in Arakan was easier for them. But other groups moved in fill this role, namely Arakanese traders from a small town called Kyaukdaw, near Myauktaung in northern Arakan state. For the first ten years, approximately 1948 to 1958, these traders came up to Sami and ran a temporary market on a seasonal basis: they put up platforms on the wide area of gravel deposit between the Sami village and the *Mi-chaung* and stayed there through the cool and dry months (October to April). When the rainy season began they would return to Kyaukdaw. Around 1959, some traders, namely U Aye Pe, U Hnin Tha Aung and U Ngek Pyaw Aung settled in Sami village, in an area along the river. This area came to be known as “*zay-dan*” (“shop-row”). They were followed by U Maung Pu and U San Htui Aung. These first migrants from Kyaukdaw were very friendly with the native people and actively participated in activities in the village (Kyaw Win 2010).

Through this period, the Khami hill people sold sesame, chili, cane, bamboo, teak, cotton and tobacco and bought salt and other goods from the traders. They sold their farm products for cash or bartered for merchandise.

Khami sold bamboo and teak to the traders for resale in Arakan where the timber was used to build houses and boats. Naturally, teak and other hard woods were also available in Arakan, but rafting the timber down the *Mi-chaung* and Kaladan River was relatively more convenient and cost-effective for traders. In this way, teak from the Chin hillsides flowed into Kyaukdaw and Akyab (Sittwe) for years. In those days, there were no motorized cargo boats on the Kaladan River, only traditional hand-rowed canoes and wind-assisted rafts. There was also no boat building expertise in the Sami area.

In the years after Independence, the political administration of the area changed. The former “Arakan Hill Tracts” area was designated “Paletwa Township.” It became part of Chin State in 1952. The decision to join Chin state was made by referendum of the people living in the township who were predominantly of Khami-Chin ethnicity.

My informants told me that the Sami area was still quite isolated in this period. However, under U Nu, the government in Rangoon was beginning to extend some administrative functions. Sami got its first primary school in 1959. The entire Sami area got 18 primary schools in the period from 1948 to 1962. However, middle-school students still had to leave the area to join their classes, going to Paletwa or further away to Kyaukdaw or Mrauk-Oo in Arakan.

In this period, Christianity started to have an influence. An ethnic-Mizo missionary who came into western Burma from Mizoram in India first introduced Protestant Christianity in the Sami area in 1943. In the post-World War II era, however, the missionaries from Mizoram could not take care of their members. Then the Anglican Church became active in the area, and those first Christians in Sami converted again, changing their denomination to Anglican.

6

THE SOCIALIST ERA (1962-1988)

The next major political shift in Burma occurred in 1962. Ethnic conflicts continued through the U Nu era, and in parliament there were rising demands for a federal system and threats of secession. General Ne Win took power in a *coup d'état* in 1962 with the justification that the military had responsibility to defend national integrity. Taking power on March 2, 1962, he dissolved parliament and established the “Revolutionary Council” administrative body, led by high-ranking military officers. He nationalized the private business sectors. The Revolutionary Council established a single legal political party called the “Burma Socialist Program Party” (BSPP) with General Ne Win as the first chairman. In 1971, the Party was transformed into a civilian government (run by selected retired military officers), and in 1974, a new constitution was adopted which guided the centralization of power. General Ne Win himself became a civilian, serving as both chairman of the BSPP and president of the state. The dictatorial regime ruled the country with an ideology known as the “Burmese Way to Socialism” claiming to be creating a new socialist society based on the grassroots efforts of peasants and laborers. In fact, through their ruinous policies, they drove Burma to the status of “Least Developed Country.”

Through most of the country, rice farmers struggled under the new socialist policies. The lands used for wetland rice cultivation were nationalized under state ownership. Where previously farmers had “landholding” rights, these were replaced by “land

tilling” rights: that is, a farmer had the right to work a plot of land as long as he was growing rice on that plot. The right to till lasted just one year and farmers had to renew every year. In addition, under the BSPP, every farmer was obligated to sell a fixed quota of food grains to the government at a fixed price. This was called the “Compulsory Delivery Quota” (Young, Cramer & Wailes 1998: 19). Even when the paddy yield was low or there was not enough for the farmers’ own consumption due to drought or disaster, there was no exception to this rule. If necessary, a farmer had to borrow rice from someone else and sell it to the government. The farmers who failed to deliver were detained.

While this was the general policy for wet rice (paddy) farmers, it did not extend to all of Chin State. The upland rice farmers in Sami told me they were not obligated to provide the “Compulsory Delivery Quota.” Thus the “Burmese Way to Socialism” did not affect Khami-Chin upland farmers as much as it did Burman wet-rice farmers.

Along with highland rice, the Khami people in the Sami area continued to grow their usual cash crops of cotton, tobacco, sesame and chili. Beginning in the early 1960s, villages along the creek started to grow perennial trees like mango and jackfruit. Initially, people grew the fruit for their own consumption, but later, they began to sell the produce to the Arakanese merchants. The *djenkol* bean was introduced in the 1970s during the socialist era too. Villagers started to cultivate perennial *djenkol* trees in big gardens near their villages (normally not in *taungya* plots), and selling the produce to traders. Because *djenkol* can be treated with salt, it is not very perishable. It is easy to store and transport, so it makes a good cash crop.¹³ The Arakanese merchants bought the produce for resale in Kyaukdaw and Sittwe in Arakan.

The people also continued foraging and hunting. Especially before harvest time, farmers needed to hunt the barking deer and wild pigs that could destroy their crops. During the free time in the

13. *Djenkol* is a soft-shelled bean or nut somewhat similar to an almond. People boil *djenkol* or soak them in salty water to eat as a side dish. *Djenkol* is grown in lower Burma and in Shan and Chin states.

rainy season and after harvesting, they spent their time in foraging for different kinds of mushrooms and for wild fruits, vegetables and tubers. From creeks and rivulets, Khami also collected fresh-water fish and hard-shell aquatic creatures: black stone-shrimp, black crab, and cone-shaped snails (in Burmese, *khayu*) are very common in the Sami area.

An elder Khami I spoke with recalled that through the 1960s and 70s, the price of commodities, such as clothes, *longyis* (sarongs), cheroots, medicine, lentils, sugar and condensed milk were still very cheap in Sami area. People did not earn a lot of money from cash cropping, but they also did not need to spend much money, as there were no luxury goods to buy there. The Khami people were accustomed to living on what they had around them. Every household still made their own homemade blankets and traditional clothing. Khami wore their traditional clothes for special occasions and passed on their woven textiles as dowry.

Khami did not venture very far from their villages. One 60-year old gentleman I spoke with (in 2012) told me that Khami people his age had never been to neighboring townships. In the socialist era, Khami people did not need to travel to sell their farm products to nearby towns as the Arakanese wholesalers were in Sami.

In the BSPP era, there were various ethnic insurgencies against the central government in Rangoon and some of these conflicts came to southern Chin state. In 1972, the Burma Communist Party (BCP) and a group known as the Mizo National Front (MNF) raided a police outpost in neighboring Than Taung village-tract, southeast of Sami on the Lemyo River. Because of the insecurity, the police post in Sami was withdrawn temporarily and the high school was also closed for some time. Between 1973 and 1975, armed soldiers with the BCP and the Arakan Independence Army (AIA) came into the Sami area and they levied taxes on the villagers to support their operations. People in the region felt insecure: they feared for their lives in this time (Win Kyaw 2012).

However, one Sami schoolteacher I interviewed said that, relatively speaking, the socialist era was easier for villagers than the later, post-1988 era of military rule when people suffered *corvee* (forced) labor and other hardships (which I describe in the next section).

In the socialist era, Khami people were mostly left alone. The whole country was isolated from the world, and remote areas like Sami in some ways reflected the situation of the country in general.

Under the socialist administration, there was some attention to education and healthcare in the Sami area. The government established several schools and also a healthcare center in Sami. However, when discussing this with my informants, I was told that the BSPP government provided only the buildings and did not provide enough qualified, adequate employees to run those institutions regularly. Government employees were either Burmans from the central part of the country, Chin from northern Chin state or Arakanese from Arakan. They might be posted in this remote area as their first posting, or perhaps as a kind of punishment for wrongdoing in some other post. Thus, the employees were not active at their jobs at all. The Khami elders told me that in the socialist era there was not much difference from the British era: the government seemed to spend money on education and healthcare for Sami area, but in reality the people got only a few benefits.¹⁴

Cultural Life in the Socialist Era

The traditions of feasting and other cultural practices gradually faded in the Sami area beginning in the British times through the 1970s. The last harvest celebrations and seasonal feasts were held during the socialist era. Most Khami people I talked to said that they missed those celebrations: those feasts were their last farewell to Khami culture. An elder Khami man told me: “Outsiders might

14. Regarding the school system, I learned that the primary school in Sami established in 1959 was upgraded to a middle school in 1967. Later, in 1986-87, the middle school was upgraded first to a “community-supported” high school and then to a state high school. By 1987, the Sami region had one state high school, three “community-supported” high schools, three middle schools and 53 primary schools. “Community-supported” means that the parents would pay for the teachers themselves. Teachers would be local Khami-Chin or Arakanese people. They would use Burmese-language books but explain the lessons in local dialects (Khami or Arakanese).

see our culture as strange or poor, but we really felt peace and harmony in our community.” The feasts were symbolic of the community’s prosperity, success and happiness.

In the socialist period, there was increasing cultural influence from the lowlands. In 1969, a Khami-Chin monk introduced Buddhism into Sami. He was from Misa village (south of Sami) where there were many Buddhist Khami. Shortly afterward, Buddhist Khami and Arakanese built a Buddhist monastery in the Zaydan (“shop-row”) quarter of Sami. At this time, Christianity was still not very strong in this part of Chin state, and many native Khami developed connections with Arakanese Buddhists. (Still today there are many Buddhist Khami in the Sami area.)

The Mara Evangelical Church (MEC), which was well established among the Mara people of southern Chin and western India, began sending missionaries to Khami areas in the 1960s. The MEC established a mission in Paletwa in 1966. However, the MEC church was established in Sami only in 1980. Then, in 1984, the Zomi Baptist Convention sent missionary teams under the slogan “Chin for Christ in One Century” (CCOC). Many Khami people converted to be Baptists because of this CCOC movement. Somewhat later in the 1980s, Methodism and Roman Catholicism were introduced. The Catholic, Anglican and Baptist Churches attracted many followers and became quite large. These Christian churches believed it was their mission to stop the Khami people’s animistic beliefs. Christian churches also introduced ideas about gender equality, educating parents about the importance of girls getting an education. It is worth noting that these Christian churches and missions did not run schools or clinics in Sami area, but they did promote the idea of education.

In addition, the churches contended with the rising use of opium among local people. One of my key informants, Mr. K., an Anglican priest and founder of a local NGO told me briefly about the history and impact of opium at Sami from 1973 through 1983. He said opium was introduced into the Sami area by some traders from Matupi and Paletwa townships, and ethnic Mara traders from an area north of Sami. These opium smugglers travelled from village to village distributing the drug, and many young and

middle-aged men became addicts. The men's labor decreased and they misused their income, and families became poorer. This affected children as well because the children could not go to school if the families couldn't pay fees. As a result, the uneducated population in the region was increasing. Thus, Christian churches in Sami area started to combat opium addiction. Mr. K told me that, because the community and local churches were strongly against opium trading, eventually the local authorities began to control the opium dealers as well.

However, I learned from another informant, an elder Arakanese man, that the Burma Communist Party (BCP) in the area played an important role. BCP soldiers killed opium dealers and users by slitting their throats to end the scourge. Today there are no longer opium addicts in Sami area. However, alcohol addiction continues to be a problem in some Khami families in Sami area.

By the late 1980s, the economy of the country was in serious decline due to mismanagement by the BSPP government. Throughout Burma, only smugglers and traders were getting rich in those years. Only the well-to-do families of high-ranking government officials could access the luxury goods available in the cities. For most ordinary people in the last decade of the socialist era, the situation was worsening. All over the country, people encountered high commodity prices but found it difficult to generate income. There was high inflation and also a shortage of rice.

When the government could not settle its international debts, it had to apply for the status of "Least Developed Country." In an effort to reverse inflation, in September 1987, the government announced that certain bills would be demonetized (devalued). Many ordinary people lost their money and people started to panic. With this event, after all the hardship of the socialist era, people's outrage burst and a nation-wide protest movement started on August 8, 1988, which came to be known as the 8888 uprising. The anti-government demonstrations lasted 40 days and, after two presidents lost their offices, on September 18, 1988, the military seized power.

7

DIRECT MILITARY RULE (1988-2010)

On September 18, 1988, the military formed the “State Law and Order Restoration Council” (SLORC) to administer the country. Shortly after taking power, the SLORC announced that it would hold multi-party elections and promised to hand over power to a new civilian government. The authorities did hold general elections in 1990, but when the opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won a landslide victory, the generals failed to cede power. The military junta – which was reconstituted as the “State Peace and Development Committee” (SPDC) in 1997 – continued to rule the country for over 20 years.¹⁵

During the 1988 uprising, there were protests in many towns in Chin state. After the SLORC took over, some Chin activists went to India, where they formed a new insurgent force, the Chin National Front (CNF), to fight the *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar military).

Callahan writes that Chin state experienced “steadily increasing day-to-day domination of the junta” (2007: 39) through these years

15. In 1989, the SLORC military authorities instituted the “Adaptation of Expressions” Law under which many place names around the country were officially changed. In 1989, the English-language name of the country was changed from Burma to “Myanmar.” At the same time “Arakan” became “Rakhine.” I will use the post-1988 terms for discussing events in the post-1988 period.

of direct military rule. Between 1990 and 2005, the number of armed force battalions in Chin State increased from one to ten, and the 5000 new Burman soldiers in the region “placed new pressures on an already weak economy” (*ibid*: 40). Myanmar authorities justified the expanded military presence as a response to the security threat posed by the CNF. However, Callahan suggests that a more likely explanation is the junta’s desire to gain “access to natural resources, key border areas and evolving trade routes” in the area (*ibid*: 59, fn44).

In Sami, a military outpost was established in 1990, right next to the old police station that was established in the colonial era. The new military outpost housed about fifty *Tatmadaw* soldiers. There were many new challenges for people in the Sami area. Every key informant told me that in the period of military rule was a critical turning point for Khami people’s livelihoods and their social and cultural reality. In this period, farmers’ incomes decreased and people often faced food insecurity. Moreover, under the junta, Khami people felt that outsiders were ruling them, something they had not experienced under the socialist administration.

One major hardship was that soldiers in the region imposed corvee (forced) labor, which meant that people had less time to work in their own fields. Villagers had to porter for the military (carrying ammunition and food) and cut trees for the military-owned timbering ventures. Moreover, every village tract in the area had to donate food to the military outpost: they had to donate chickens each month and a basket of chilies and ten baskets of sesame each year at harvest time.

In fact, both the CNF and the *Tatmadaw* put pressure on the villagers. The CNF charged taxes on each household, 5,000 kyats per year: so, for example, one village tract had to pay 250,000 kyats to 300,000 kyats. At the same time, *Tatmadaw* soldiers demanded the same amount that the villagers gave to the CNF. However, if villagers could not afford to pay because of a poor harvest, they could postpone payment to CNF but not to the *Tatmadaw* soldiers.

Village headmen had many difficulties. Previously, a village headman received a small salary from the BSPP government, but this ended in 1988. Yet when *Tatmadaw* soldiers patrolled through

the hills, village headmen had to host them with food and alcohol, which was costly. Sometimes the soldiers accused the headmen of supporting the CNF, and bullied and detained them.¹⁶

Another problem related to the selection of the headman for the town of Sami. Under military rule, Paletwa Township administrators appointed Sami headmen with final approval by the officer at the military outpost. The native Khami people I interviewed told me that, after 1990, the Paletwa administrators consistently appointed headmen who were not Chin, but rather residents from the Zaydan quarter, i.e. ethnic Rakhine people whose families had come to the area from Kyaukdaw or elsewhere in Rakhine state since 1959. During the SLORC-SPDC years, three Zaydan men were appointed as headmen, one after another. Although these headmen received no salary, some people knew how to use the position to make money, by taking a “cut” from legal and illegal trade in the area. This is a key reason why Khami people felt that outsiders were dominating them.¹⁷

Economic Conditions under SLORC-SPDC

Under SLORC-SPDC rule, there was relentless inflation throughout Myanmar.¹⁸ In the Sami area, villagers had to contend with rising

16. In either 2006 or 2007, a group of headmen from the Sami area made a formal complaint to the Chairman of SPDC about bullying by the local Sami outpost officer. They reported that the officer had detained village headmen and demanded money for their release. Later, the outpost officer was fired and replaced.

17. Previously, in the socialist era, village headmen were appointed by the Paletwa Township BSPP unit. In that time, the Sami headmen were always Khami-Chin people. However, Zaydan people were starting to become involved in local government in the socialist era. For example, U Aye Pe, one of the first settlers from Kyaukdaw and a good-hearted man, became a local judge.

18. In my personal experience, general commodity prices rose about 30 times between 1990 and 2000, and about 300 times between 1990 and 2010. The inflation was out of control and people with low and fixed incomes such as farmers and also low-ranking government employees suffered the worst. It is often observed that rising inflation encouraged corruption among government officials.

commodity prices and also fluctuating, unpredictable prices for their produce. In this period, tensions increased between Khami farmers and the Zaydan wholesalers they sold their crops to. The Khami farmers I interviewed complained that these wholesalers took advantage of them, for example by weighing the produce inaccurately and then offering them perhaps 20% less than they should. In his short history of the Sami area, Win Kyaw, a Khami resident in Sami and a former local pastor and NGO founder, writes that Zaydan shopkeepers have two different sizes of basket with two different measuring weights. “The larger basket and the heavier weight are used to buy things while the smaller basket and the lighter weights are used to sell things” (Win Kyaw 2012: 3). The comment gives us an indication how Khami people felt about the Zaydan merchants they dealt with.

Moreover, in the late-1990s, it was known that the office of Military Intelligence (MI) based in Paletwa was fixing prices in order to take profits from the local sesame trade. The MI office set an artificially low price that Zaydan wholesalers could offer Khami producers for their product. The wholesalers then resold the grain at market value to dealers in Kyaukdaw and the MI office took the difference. Local police and soldiers from the military outpost also followed this practice. Obviously, the system exploited Khami farmers who could not get a fair price for their grain. At this time, the military government was touting a post-socialist shift to new “market-based” economy, but the reality for Khami and other hill farmers was that prices were more controlled than previously.

In general, during these years, the markets were affected by larger macro-economic shifts in the country. Through the 1990s there was decreasing demand for cotton and tobacco, which had been the main cash crops in this region. Regarding cotton, my informants explained that the changes were gradual. Beginning in the late 1980s, blankets and ready-made clothes began to be imported into Myanmar from China. The modern, ready-made garments were relatively cheap and the synthetic blankets were warmer and easier to wash. As imported goods began to spread all over the country, there was less local demand for cotton and textiles. In the Sami area, small-scale commercial cotton production declined and then ended. Meanwhile, a few Khami

people continued to grow cotton for their own use, as Khami have old traditions of textile production and women are skilled at spinning and weaving. Over time, however, many Khami households stopped growing cotton at all. At present (2013), imported goods are available in every shop in Sami, and mobile vendors with blankets and garments are selling their wares even in the remote hill villages. Poor villagers can purchase these items on an installment basis.

Likewise, demand for tobacco decreased through the 1990s. Tobacco was grown to supply local demand for cheroots, the traditional hand-rolled Myanmar cigars. (Local demand was from Kyaukdaw and Sittwe in Rakhine state.) However, beginning in the late 1990s, factory-made cigarettes (including Chinese- and Myanmar-made) became much cheaper, displacing cheroots. In Sami, small-scale cheroot making declined and at the present time (2013) has almost ended, although some farmers still grow a few tobacco plants for their own use.

With cotton and tobacco in decline, the main cash crops for Khami farmers in the 1990s were sesame and chilies. However, it was difficult for farmers to make profit with these. Khami continued with their *taungya* rice cultivation, producing enough to sell to non-farming residents (government employees and shopkeepers) in Sami proper. In the villages along the creeks, people also cultivated mango and jackfruit. They planted groundnut in the alluvial deposit lands where previously they had grown tobacco.

One positive development in this period was the market for *djenkol* bean improved. As I mentioned, *djenkol* was introduced in the socialist era (1970s), but at that time there was not so much demand. Because of difficulties with transportation, wholesalers could only bring the product as far as Kyaukdaw or Sittwe, so there was not a large market. However, in 1997-98, the road linking Yangon and Rakhine State was completed and afterward there was market demand for *djenkol* from Yangon. Consequently, the price of *djenkol* bean started rising. *Djenkol* bean prices reached 15 kyats per piece and the owners earned 500,000 to 1,500,000 kyats. At the same time, the new road allowed for the influx of goods from China and elsewhere.

Beginning in 2002, the SPDC authority began to promote commercial-scale tea production in Chin state. The official policy and slogan was “Chin State must be a Tea-State.” In many Chin State townships, land was confiscated by the military or sold off to wealthy families to create tea plantations, a policy that undermined traditional land management practices (Callahan 2007: 41). However, Paletwa Township was not brought into this program because of the high rainfall (about 150-180 inches per year) in the area. The authorities decided its climate was not suitable for tea.

Of course the most valuable products from this part of Chin State were forest products: teak and bamboo. However, the timbering industry was controlled by the authorities (military, police and the forestry department) and local people mostly did not benefit. In fact, as I mentioned before, Khami people were pressed into labor for this industry. Villagers had to cut down trees using their traditional axes and pull the logs to the creek or stream where they would drift to the nearest village.¹⁹ There the next group of villagers would relay them toward the sawmill on the Kaladan River.

Commercial timbering in the area advanced rapidly with the introduction of a new technology: chainsaws. Timbering led to rapid deforestation of the hillsides and this had impact on the ecology of the region. As forest cover was removed, hillsides heated up, which affected the local rainfall patterns and temperatures.

Elders I spoke with also remembered that in the early 1990s, a group of strangers came and cut down the cane that was growing naturally in Sami’s remote forests. It is believed the cane choppers were working with soldiers from the local military outpost. At this time (2013) no cane is left in the forests.

19. Local villagers doing forced labor did not have access to chainsaws but only used their traditional tools. In SLORC-SPDC era, villagers were permitted to cut trees and brush for taungya plot preparation, however they were not allowed to use the wood – especially the teak – to build houses unless they paid bribes to local authorities. Since 2010, the situation has changed somewhat. Some local Khami people now have chain saws. However, villagers still have to pay the authorities for cutting and using hardwood.

Without question, these were difficult times in the Sami area. As local commodity prices continued to rise, highland farmers found it difficult to meet their household needs. There was also corvee labor and bullying by soldiers to contend with. As a coping strategy, many people migrated. On the one hand, hill people from various Chin sub-groups in the area came down into Sami proper to try to find wage-labor jobs. At the same time, some young people left the Sami area to try to make a living elsewhere. Some young men moved to Mizoram State, in India, where they could do wage-labor jobs or swidden-farming for Mizo or Mara people.²⁰ Some went to Kachin State to work in the infamous jade mines at Phakant, where working conditions are terrible and there are high rates of injection-drug use among laborers. Some Khami young people worked hard in Phakant in order to earn money to migrate further: they wanted to cross the border to Thailand or Malaysia.

The “push” factors encouraging out-migration were the rising local prices for commodities, soldiers’ bullying and also the *mautam* crisis that I will discuss below. There were also “pull” factors, namely the rapidly increasing value of the US dollar and other neighboring countries’ currencies relative to the declining Myanmar kyat. With both push and pull factors operating, Sami young people had many reasons to look elsewhere for better jobs and a better life.

The *Mautam* Crisis of 2008-2010

In the SLORC-SPDC years, people in Sami experienced a bad political situation, local inflation, fluctuation of the prices of their farm products and exploitation by Zaydan wholesalers. On top of all this, they also faced a terrible natural disaster called the *mautam* crisis.

20. Day laborers in India earn 200 rupee per day. In the 1990s, the exchange rate was good: 30 kyats to one rupee, however, in the late ‘00s, the exchange rate dropped to 15 kyats per rupee. Consequently, many Khami laborers in India have returned home.

The term *mautam* means “the death of bamboo” and comes from the Mizo language spoken in northeastern India. It refers to a cyclical ecological phenomenon, occurring every 48 years, in which a particular species of bamboo (*Melocanna baccifera*) dies off after fruiting. Later, new growth emerges from the fruit seeds. As part of the cycle, black rats eat the bamboo fruits and then their population multiplies rapidly. When the bamboo fruits are gone, rats consume other vegetation in their path, devastating agricultural fields. This is what happened in the *mautam* crisis of 2008-2010, and it resulted in a widespread famine in the region. The crisis started in Mizoram in India in about 2007, spreading through Mizoram and Manipur, to the Bangladesh hill tracts and into Chin State in western Myanmar, affecting in particular the Hakha, Thantlang, Falam, Paletwa and Matupi townships which are covered with wild bamboo forests. Massive groups of rats moved through Chin State from one region to another from 2008 to about 2010. Then in 2010, with the growth of new bamboo plants, virtually all the rats disappeared.

One of my Khami informants, Mr. T, a 38-year old *taungya* rice farmer described what he experienced at that time (in 2008). He recalled:

A massive group of rats was moving from one mountain to another destroying the rice fields: it was as if the big armed forces were raiding the towns and killing the innocent peoples and destroying all their property. The rats left nothing in the field, not even the husk of the rice. The marching rat forces had a leader and they only passed through areas where the leader took them. The leader rat was much bigger than the followers: it was easy to distinguish him.

Mr. T. continued:

When the rat group raided a field, they moved straightforward eating what was in front of them. They did not scatter. Thus, some parts of the rice fields were left standing as the rats passed on. The next day, villagers came together to harvest what they could. Whatever they saved, they shared, regardless of who owned the field.

Mr. T also told me that before the crisis came to Chin State, there was some news about *mautam* from Mizoram in India. Some Sami elders who had experienced this phenomenon in 1960 warned villagers to save their seeds and grains. Those who trusted the elders saved their crops and after the event, they could share with other villagers. Also, in some Sami areas, certain farmers were not affected by the crisis: they were fortunate and the massive rat swarms passed over.

In the worst affected areas, social and religious-based organizations donated rice to try to avert famine, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Action Contre La Faim (ACF), the World Food Program (WFP), and the Zomi Baptist Convention (ZBC). However the *mautam* crisis affected a wide area and these INGOs could not provide support everywhere: people had to make due on their own. Fortunately, Khami were able to forage for elephant foot yam tubers. Yams are naturally astringent with an “itchy” taste, so the rats did not eat them. However, Khami treated the yams with ash-filtrated water to improve the flavor. Yams provided a buffer from the famine. For a brief time during the famine, yam tubers were also fetching a good price in the market. Khami people were able to sell yams and firewood to buy rice.

Mr. T pointed out that among Khami in the Sami area, there were no casualties as a result of the *mautam* crisis. They believed that God had saved them with the yam tubers when the crisis was at its peak. In addition, people had strong social customs, and those who were more fortunate shared what they had with those who were more needy. They helped each other to survive.

While there was social solidarity among Khami people during the crisis, this did not extend between Zaydan merchants and Khami. During the *mautam* crisis and afterward, individuals from the village-tracts where there was nothing left to eat or share had to borrow rice from the merchants. Then they had to repay at 50 percent interest in the following season. (For example, if someone borrowed 10 baskets of rice, he had to repay 15 baskets the next season.) Some farmers who could not repay their rice debts were reported to the police and threatened with arrest. Usually Khami people solved the problem by borrowing rice from someone else to repay their debt to Zaydan merchants.

Social solidarity was especially strong among Khami-Chin who lived in the same village-tract. Village tracts are comprised of three to five villages whose inhabitants have shared clan-affiliation and relatives. Khami-Chin also helped and shared food with non-Khami hill people if they lived in the same neighborhood or knew each other through church, as churches are made up of people from multiple ethnic groups.

8

NEW ECONOMIC REALITIES AND LIVELIHOODS

In this chapter, I will explain some of the important social and economic transformations that have occurred in the past few years in the Sami area. There have been multiple forces affecting the Khami people and their livelihoods. These include: ecological changes, the emergence of new markets for cash crops (specifically *gamone*) and new economic relations between different peoples in the area, especially between local Khami people and the Zaydan merchants. I will show how Khami people have been losing control over their means of subsistence. Some Khami people are also responding to the changes with creativity and enterprise and new livelihood strategies.

Impact of the *Mautam* Crisis

All of my informants emphasized that the *mautam* crisis was a critical turning point for the economy of the region. The crisis affected the local ecology and thus the livelihoods and coping strategies of the Khami and other ethnic groups in the area.

Regarding the ecological impact of *mautam*, Mr. T told me that every farmer complained that after the crisis, the fertility of soil was much lower than before. In normal *taungya* cultivation, no matter how much a farmer slashes and burns, the bamboo stumps remain in the soil, protecting the top layer of soil from erosion.

After *mautam*, however, even the stumps were gone. The soil became loose and dry, eroding easily when it rained. Moreover, because of the lack of the bamboo forest cover, the hillsides were warmer. The weeds grew in more thickly than before and so the rice and other cultivated plants got fewer nutrients. Rice, sesame and other plants became weaker and susceptible to serious pest attacks.

All the Khami farmers I spoke with grumbled about the chaos in the climate. They said that since *mautam*, there were higher temperatures in the summer and more rain in the rainy season. Sometimes, during the growing season, the rain is inadequate, and then there is unwanted rain at harvest time that destroys the harvested rice before it can be secured in storage. These chaotic conditions had a terrible impact on agriculture in the entire region, making it much more difficult to grow crops

One of my key informants, a Khami cash crop farmer whom I'll call "Mr. A." recalled that just one year before the *mautam* crisis, the upland rice yield was very high in almost every village in the area. At that time, there was also high demand for the crop: traders were selling Sami rice as far as Kyaukdaw in Rakhine State. In Rakhine, the dealers had over-exported rice to Bangladesh and consequently rice was in short supply there. Mr. A. told me how some enterprising Khami youths who had gained experience in the Phakant jade mines in Kachin came back and set up a small motorized rice mill in their village to mill rice for sale in Rakhine State. This was the first ever motorized rice mill in the Sami region. (Khami women traditionally milled rice by pounding with a wooden mortar and pestle.) However, the brief boom in local rice production did not last. One year later, the *mautam* crisis struck and afterward, because of diseases and other difficulties, rice yields declined dramatically. While hill farmers continued to grow *taungya* rice for home consumption, producing commercially was no longer feasible.

My informants pointed out that for decades upland farmers in the area supplied the rice consumed by government employees, shopkeepers and other non-farmers living in Sami proper. However, by 2010, local production had declined so much that

non-farmers in Sami proper and surrounding villages had to buy their rice from Kyaukdaw in Rakhine State.

Other crops were affected as well. After *mautam*, sesame was frequently attacked by insects and yields declined. Another problem with sesame is that it requires quite a lot of sunshine during winnowing. If there is a sudden rain, the grain can be destroyed. Moreover, the market for sesame was unstable: farmers could not be sure they would get a good price. Consequently, many people in the Sami area stopped growing it.

In the midst of the *mautam* crisis, as I mentioned, Khami people turned to foraging for wild yams. However, after the crisis passed, the price of yams went down. In addition, there were fewer wild yams each year. Yams can only be foraged during the rainy season: during the winter and summer months, the plants dry out and are difficult to find. Because of difficulties with foraging, some farmers started to cultivate elephant foot yam in small plots (not in their *taungya* plots). They had to seek out suitable plots with gravel soil. However, it takes three and a half years for elephant foot yams to mature enough for harvesting. Most people cannot wait so long as they need to take care of their daily food security.

For these reasons, Khami people have had to find new coping strategies to survive. While most households continue with *taungya* cultivation for home consumption, they are no longer self-sufficient as they once were. Only in remote areas is swidden (*taungya*) cultivation still successful enough to live on. In the Sami area, every household has had to find some combination of livelihood strategies to meet their daily needs, including new combinations of cash crops (both cultivated and foraged), and also wage labor, as I will discuss below.

Cash-cropping with *Gamone*

Fortunately for Khami and other people in the area, in the midst of all these difficulties, a new market opened up: *gamone*. *Gamone* (*Kaempferia galanga*) is a tuber that is valued in China for its medicinal properties. In the years following *mautam*, as the price of yams was declining, the price of *gamone* became higher and the

Khami people were able to survive by growing and selling it. (See Figures 7 and 8.)

Figure 7 Harvesting *gamone*



Figure 8 Transporting *gamone*



My informant, Mr. A., a successful Khami cash crop farmer, told me that *gamone* was introduced into the area in the early 2000s. *Gamone* is a native species in certain parts of Chin State but not in the Sami area. First, farmers in Matupi and Mindat Townships started growing *gamone* to sell to the Chinese market. Later, in about 2005, Sami got *gamone* seeds for the first time. In recent years, *gamone* has become the main cash crop of the Sami area. Khami farmers prefer to grow it instead of *taungya* rice, sesame, chilies and the other more difficult and less profitable crops. In addition, Zaydan merchants in Sami proper have established large commercial-scale *gamone* plantations. Even some government employees have started to grow *gamone* to earn extra income.

Gamone grows best on hillsides. The harvest yield varies depending on the quality of the soil and whether the grower uses natural or synthetic NPK (nitrogen-potassium-phosphorus) fertilizer. Most Khami people cannot afford to purchase fertilizer; however, the Zaydan growers usually use fertilizers. In addition to purchasing fertilizer, some growers also must purchase fresh seed *gamone* at the start of the growing season. Of course, at the beginning of the growing season, the price is higher.

Gamone is planted in April or May before the rainy season begins and harvested between January and March. The freshly harvested *gamone* tubers must be washed to remove the soil and mud. They are placed in a basket, rinsed in the deep creek water and cleaned by shaking the basket. Afterward the tubers are sliced thinly and dried in the sun, or, if it is cloudy or raining, they are dried with a fire.

Traders purchase the fresh *gamone* by the “mound” (equal to twenty-five “viss”).²¹ In 2013, one *mound* of *gamone* was worth 15,000 kyats and one viss of dried *gamone* was worth 3000 kyats. The middlemen are either ethnic Rakhine or ethnic Chin people who live in Kyaukdaw, and they sell the product on to Mandalay Chinese brokers.

21. Mound is a unit of weight only used in Rakhine State and in the Paletwa and Sami areas of Chin State in Myanmar. One mound is equal to five swae and one swae is equal to five viss. (Hence one mound is equal to 25 viss.) See Appendix 2 for more discussion of these measurements.

One smallholder farmer I interviewed in 2012 told me that, as an experiment, he grew upland rice and *gamone* in two separate, similarly sized plots of land in order to compare his income for the two crops. He learned that planting one acre of *taungya* rice yielded about 20 baskets of rice, which in 2013, was worth about 30,000 kyats. In contrast, planting one acre of *gamone* would yield about 40-60 *mounds* of fresh *gamone*, which he could sell for about 600,000 kyats. (Alternatively, he could dry it and sell it at 3000 kyats per viss, which was also about 600,000 kyats.) In other words, his income from the *gamone* was about 20 times higher than for rice. He said that was why many Khami farmers choose to grow more *gamone* and less rice. In his case, he decided to stop growing rice altogether and to secure daily rice for his household with the income from *gamone*.

Case Study: Mr. A's Experience

My informant, Mr. A., is one of the most successful growers in the Sami area. As a young man, he worked in the Phakant jade mines in Kachin state. He returned from Phakant with his wife, a Burmese woman. Mr. A does not do any *taungya* rice cultivation: only cash crops like *gamone* and elephant foot yam. In addition to their plantation, Mr. A and his wife run a shop out of their home in Anaung-wa ward. He told me about his experiences with various perennial cash crops as follows.

Mr. A had grown *djenkol* bean for 20 years, since he was in high school. In 2012, he turned 40 years old. When I interviewed him in 2012, he was the owner of the largest plantation of *djenkol* bean in the region with over 100 *djenkol* trees. He told me that when he first started growing *djenkol*, it was not widely marketable. However, after the Yangon-Sittwe highway was completed in 1998, there was greater demand from Yangon and the price of *djenkol* bean began increasing every year. The highest price Mr. A got for *djenkol* was around 15 kyats per bean in 2007. However, around that time more people started planting *djenkol*, and with rising supply, the price declined. In 2012 when we spoke, the price of *djenkol* had declined to 3 to 5 kyats per bean.

After the *mautam* crisis, Mr. A.'s *djenkol* bean yield decreased. His plants seemed to have a disease that caused the leaves to look dry and dead. Together we looked around the village area and took pictures of the dry, dead *djenkol* trees. Mr. A said he would like to know the cause of this outbreak.

Mr. A. also grew fruit trees, including mangoes and jackfruit. However, the price for fruit was very low. Around 2007, when the *djenkol* bean market was good, Mr. A. chopped down his mango trees to plant more *djenkol* bean trees. Other farmers did this as well, he told me, which is why the supply of *djenkol* increased and the price declined. Regarding fruit trees, Mr. A. noted that pineapple growers also faced problems with mountain snails, leeches and snakes. He told me that many Khami in the Sami area, including himself, had stopped growing fruit commercially but only for home consumption.

Since about 2007, Mr. A. has also been growing *gamone*. In fact, he is probably the most successful *gamone* grower among Khami people in the Sami area. He started with about 50 mounds of *gamone* seed tubers, sowed onto about five acres of land. He also grows about 10 mounds of elephant foot yam on about two acres of land. Unlike some *gamone* growers, he never uses chemical fertilizers. He hires wage laborers to do the processing for him. When the price of the dried *gamone* and yam is low, he prefers to sell fresh, unprocessed *gamone* to the wholesalers to get a better price. Sometimes at harvest time, he sells part of his crop immediately to get his investment back, and then he has the rest of crop processed by laborers for later sale. Sometimes he also buys fresh crop from some other producer for processing. However, when I was talking with Mr. A., he also pointed out problems with diseases with this crop as well. Moreover, he told me he is concerned that the price is not stable, as it depends on the demand from China.

Around 2011, Mr. A. also started to grow elephant foot yam. Although cultivated yams take three and half years to mature, Mr. A. was willing to make this investment, because he believes that elephant foot yam will have a more stable price than *gamone*.

Like my other informants, Mr. A. emphasized that the *mautam* crisis was a critical event in the region. In general, Mr. A. viewed the crisis in a positive way. In his opinion, because of *mautam*, Khami people are now working harder than before. Everyone is trying to find alternative livelihood strategies. Mr. A. also speculated that the old practices of shifting cultivation might be coming to an end in the Sami region, as more hill farmers take up perennial crop cultivation. He himself does not do any *taungya* cultivation. (I will discuss this idea further in my concluding chapter.)

Wage Labor: Working for Zaydan Merchants

One of the main consequences of the *mautam* crisis was an increase in the number of hill people who came into Sami proper to find work as wage laborers. Zaydan merchants had been hiring Khami and other hill farmers to do various jobs since the early 1990s. However, after *mautam*, there were more people needing this kind of work. Also, as Zaydan merchants established commercial scale *gamone* plantations, there was more of this work to be done.

Many Khami smallholder farmers became wage laborers because they got in trouble with debt. During *mautam*, they borrowed rice or money from the Zaydan merchants and then some could not pay it back. As I already mentioned, Zaydan merchants loaned rice to farmers at 50 percent interest: the borrower was required to return the rice plus 50 percent the following season. They also loaned money with a 10 or 20 percent monthly interest. (The former rate was for borrowers with collateral and the latter rate for borrowers without collateral.²²) Khami people borrowed money to buy food or to pay for school fees. If a borrower did not repay the loan of rice or money, he or she faced arrest. In the Sami area, money and rice-lending disputes are some of the most common

22. Usually Khami people can only offer family heirloom textiles or gongs for their collateral. Many Khami have lost their precious heirlooms as a consequence of debt.

problems. The cases are usually mediated by the police. After *mautam* crisis passed, some borrowers were able to repay their debts and regain their normal lives. However, others had to convert to wage labor as their main livelihood. They have gotten stuck in a new social structure working for their Zaydan patrons. Khami laborers may also work for successful Khami growers, like Mr. A. whom I discussed above, but in most cases, the patrons are Zaydan merchants.

Most of the daily-wage jobs in Sami are on commercial-scale *gamone* and yam plantations. The jobs vary by the season. Laborers have to prepare the land before planting, and weed the fields when the crops are growing. After harvesting, laborers process the *gamone* (or yams): washing, slicing and drying the tubers, either in the sun or over a fire. Laborers are needed to pack up the dried goods and transfer them from the storehouse to the boat. In the Sami area (in 2012), the daily wage for this sort of labor ranged from 2000 to 3000 kyats (approx. \$2-3 USD) per day. Typically, men perform jobs in the fields while women work at slicing and drying the tubers. (See Figure 9)

Figure 9 Slicing the *gamone*



During the harvesting season of elephant foot yam and *gamone* processing, from October to April, there is large demand for daily laborers in Sami. In addition to local Khami people, ethnic Rakhine laborers come up to Sami to do these jobs. Some come just for the season and some stay the whole year. Around 2008 or 2009, some businessmen from Kyaukdaw established a seasonal wholesale center in Sami for processing fresh *gamone* and elephant foot yams during the harvesting season. They process and ship the tubers to Kyaukdaw for sale to the Chinese wholesale agents. Typically, Rakhine laborers take jobs at this center, but Khami and other Chin people may get jobs there as well. (See Figure 10.)

Figure 10 Temporary wholesale center



Case Study: Mrs. R's story

In 2012, I interviewed several Khami laborers working on *gamone* plantations to hear their stories. Among them was a 46-year old widow whom I will call "Mrs. R."

Previously, Mrs. R was doing upland rice cultivation (*taungya*) in Tatchaung Village. The village is southeast of Sami, one day's trek away. She got married when she was 17 years old. She told me she

and her husband worked hard in their *taungya* plots. If they planted four baskets of rice, it yielded about 150-200 baskets, which was sufficient for them for the year. She had her first child when she was 20, but this baby died of fever at 6 months. When she was 24 she had a son, and then 10 years later a daughter. In 2012, her son was 22 years old, and her daughter was 12. The son was in 8th grade and the daughter in 6th grade in school in Sami.

Mrs. R's husband died of a serious illness in his abdomen just before the *mautam* crisis occurred. At first, she told me, she was able to manage her household with her two children by herself. But after the *mautam* crisis, she could not manage in the village and had to move to Sami. Now she is working as a wage laborer under the Zaydan merchants. She earns 2000 kyats a day. She had about 50,000 kyats in debt because she borrowed money for her children's school expenses. Now her son has dropped out from school to work as wage labor: he also forages for seasonal elephant foot yam. Gradually, they are able to settle the cash-debts.

She also borrowed ten baskets of rice from her Zaydan boss without interest: she needed this for her family's survival. Now she is trying to find a plot of land for her son to grow *gamone*. However, it is difficult to find free land near Sami. She told me that if she finds a plot, she would borrow seed-*gamone* from someone else. She believes that only this plan will rescue her family from the rice-debt.

Other Livelihood Strategies and Coping Mechanisms

As Mr. A. noted, Khami and other hill people have had to find new livelihood strategies in recent years in order to survive. In fact, some people have been quite enterprising and creative.

For example, Khami people have gotten involved in the transportation business, ferrying local residents from Sami to the mouth of the Mi creek, where the creek joins the Kaladan River. Previously only Zaydan people had motorboats: Khami and other hill people just used rowboats. However, as I mentioned above, some Khami youth who were former laborers in the Phakhant jade mines, brought back a small Chinese engine in order to mill

rice in their village. During the *mautam* crisis, the engine was left in disuse. Although milling rice was no longer profitable after *mautam*, these young men had the idea to install engines on their boats and run transportation services. Previously, only Rakhine people ran boat transportation businesses. Now Khami people are starting to participate in this business, ferrying goods and passengers on the river.²³ However, they are not involved in manufacturing boats yet.

Whereas in previously in Sami, all the shopkeepers and traders were ethnic Rakhine people, in recent years, local people have established some small businesses as well. In 2012, in the Anaung-wa ward, there were about ten shops run by Khami and other Chin people. In addition to selling goods, a few of these shopkeepers also buy farm products, process the products and sell them on to wholesalers.

Khami pursue other trades like iron working. In Sami there are both Khami and ethnic Rakhine blacksmiths. Typically, Khami blacksmiths make agricultural tools such as jungle knives and *lai-paung* (a spade-like tool for sowing rice seed); while Rakhine blacksmiths make scissors, knives and other home utensils. All the peoples in the area—including Khami, Chin people from other townships, and Rakhine people—make and sell bamboo products, such as baskets and mats.

Khami farmers have also tried growing new crops for sale. As foraging for yam tubers has gotten more difficult each year and the price for *gamone* has been unstable, hill farmers have experimented with other options. Since 2010, some people have tried to grow turmeric and ginger. The first growers were successful: the spices sold well at about 3500 kyats (approximately \$3.5 USD) per viss. However, lately the market has been unstable largely because of communal conflict in Rakhine State (in 2012-13). The price went down to 500 kyats per viss. When I met with

23. Currently (in 2013), there are about ten small boats for hire. Most of them are owned by political parties: the Rakhine Development Party and the Union Solidarity and Development Party. Mostly, the small boats are hired by the *gamone* brokers.

farmers in 2012, some told me they were keeping their ginger and turmeric tubers in the earth without harvesting, waiting for the market to improve.

Some Khami forage for wild orchids that grow on big trees in the forest. They cut and dry the flowers, especially the long, yellow orchid stems. Drying is done over a charcoal fire. Then the dried orchid stems are packed and sold to local Zaydan wholesalers, who sell them to agents in Mandalay. The final destination is China. The price of dried orchid in Mandalay is 10,000 to 15,000 kyats per viss.²⁴

Khami may also take positions as government employees in Sami proper: as schoolteachers, health care staff or policemen. Native Khami-Chin people, Chin people from other townships in the state, and also Rakhines and Burmans, fill these positions. In addition, Khami can get positions as religious ministers. Today when talking with the young Khami men, many of them dream to be ministers for their church. To do this they must first pass 9th standard, and then attend a seminary school, in Hakha or Falam (in Chin State), in India, or in Yangon.

As I have already mentioned, out-migration is another key coping strategy for families struggling for their basic necessities. Young men leave the Sami area to go to the jade mines in Kachin state, or to Yangon. Some migrate to neighboring countries, such as Thailand and Malaysia, to work in factories or farms. Young men may work in the jade mines to save money for migration to a third country, as laborers have to pay about 500,000–1,000,000 kyats per head for transportation and broker fees to get to Thailand or Malaysia. Once in the third country, they send back remittances to family members who remain in the Sami area, or they try to save enough for their whole family to proceed to the new country.

24. One problem is that orchid foragers will often cut down the tall trees with their jungle knives and axes instead of climbing up to get the flower. This contributes to deforestation in the area.

Changing Patterns of Land Use

One of the most dramatic changes that has occurred in the Sami area in the past few decades has been the decline of the Khami people's traditional system of collective land ownership. In this section, I will explain how the shift toward land privatization has occurred. I will discuss the economic and social factors that have contributed to this transformation.

First, it is useful to review the history. In pre-colonial times, as I have mentioned, Khami chieftains (known in Burmese as *taung-min* or "hill-kings"), controlled large territories and managed the land use for the people. These chieftains retained their authority during the British era under the colonial system of indirect rule. Later, after Burma's independence in 1948, the power of local chieftains ended. At that time, land became the collective property of the inhabitants in the village-tract. Under this system no individual or family owned a field or plot of land permanently.²⁵ The plots rotated among the farmers in the village tract, and there were rules to ensure that plots of land were not over-cultivated but allowed to lay fallow for several years to regain soil fertility. Until the 1980s, fields were left fallow for about 7 or 8 years. Then, the fallowing period was shortened to about four years because of rising population pressures on the available land.

25. A plot is approximately an acre. Because the area is formed with uneven hills, abstract measurement of land is not possible. Rather, the Khami people determined the size of a plot according to the rice input. They estimate that two to three baskets of paddy are used to sow a one-acre plot of land.

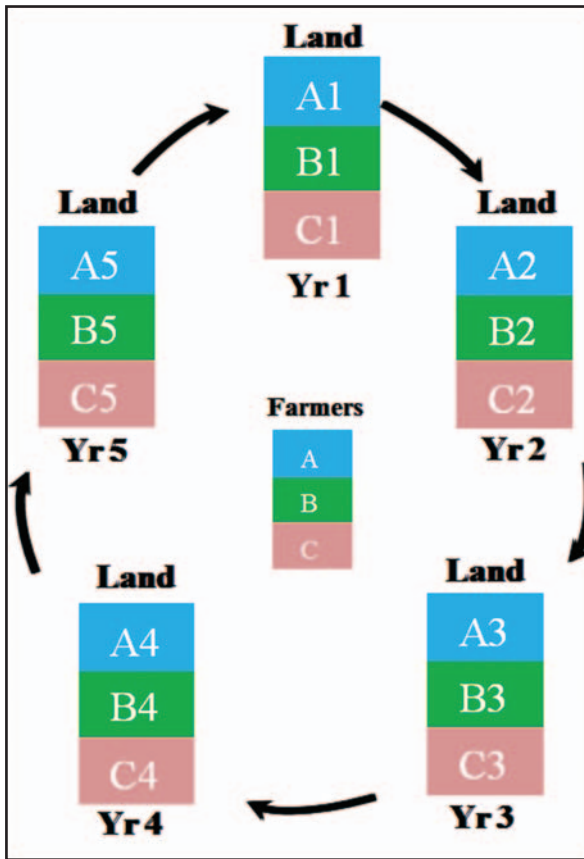
Figure 11 Burning *taungya* plots



Every year before the cultivation season, village elders met together and made decisions about who would farm which plots of land. In some Sami areas, the village headman had responsibility to allocate the land. (Figure 11.)

As part of this system, a farmer could use a particular plot of land only twice. For instance, a farmer (A) uses a plot of land (A1) for one year, and then leaves it for a four-year fallowing period. In the following years, he would plant his rice or other crops in plots (A2), (A3), (A4) and (A5). Then, he could use the (A1) plot again. Likewise, the other farmers (B) and (C) would use other plots (B1-5 and C1-5) over the course of about five years, before beginning the cycle again. (See Figure 12.) After a second round, a farmer could not use those particular plots ever again. In fact, in olden times, Khami believed that a farmer who used a plot of land more than two times would face misfortune such as a sudden death from disease or accident. This sense of taboo protected the system of collective land ownership.

Figure 12 Traditional land rotation



The existence of this system is evidence that there was sufficient land in Sami region for the people to live on. The population did not exceed the land's carrying capacity. However, in recent years, the Sami village tract has become more crowded with people moving in from surrounding areas. Unfortunately, with new settlers from different places, including diverse Chin and non-Chin groups, the traditional customs are no longer respected. At this time (2013), no farmer can reserve his farmland for a second rotation. One of my key informants said that in the present days the customs of collective land use are still functioning only among the farmers in remote areas. They are fading in Sami area.

As the traditions of collective ownership have been breaking down, there is also more private land ownership. My key informant on the topic of land use, Mr. T., a 38-year old Khami *taungya* rice farmer, explained to me that since the introduction of cash-crops in the colonial era, Khami people in the Sami region have actually practiced three different types of land use in the region. These are: (1) collective ownership for swidden cultivation (*taungya*) for rice and for seasonal cash crops such as sesame and chili; (2) private land ownership for perennial cash crops such as; mango, jackfruit and *djenkol* bean; and (3) private land ownership of alluvial deposit land along the bank of the streams to grow tobacco or ground nut for sale (not for household use).

According to Khami custom, if a farmer grew a perennial cash crop like mango, jackfruit and *djenkol* bean, it was understood that it was his land as long as the trees were alive and bearing fruit. These plots of private garden land were not far from the village and often right next to the owner's house. As I explained in previous chapters, fruit trees were grown mostly in the 1970s and 1980s, but afterwards the market prices declined and many Khami stopped production.

Likewise, Khami recognized that the land along streams and creeks is good for growing tobacco, groundnut and vegetables. This land is available after the rainy season when the current slows down and soil is deposited on the banks. All of my informants noted that these alluvial deposit lands have owners in nearby villages. These owners are allowed hire or sell the land to someone else. Of course, these are very small garden plots. Although they are very productive, the capacity is small compared to *taungya* farmland.

For decades, Khami have lived together with the understanding that if a person planted a big tree on a plot of land, he was allowed to own that land while his trees are productive. Unfortunately, in recent years, this system has been used by outsiders, such as migrant wholesalers from Kyaukdaw, to acquire land for *gamone* production. Since 2010, they have started to plant big trees as perennial crops in order to claim ownership of free farmland. Then in reality they grow *gamone*.

With rising demand for *gamone* in China since 2010, many newcomers want to produce it on a commercial scale. In various ways, these newcomers have been taking over free farmlands. In order to use the land repeatedly every year and to get higher yields of *gamone*, they apply chemical fertilizer on their plantations. In this way, the migrant merchants have become wealthier. Meanwhile, especially since the *mautam* crisis, the native Khami have been giving up their lands and their means of self-subsistence. As I have discussed, many have become wage-laborers: they provide cheap labor on the wealthy migrant merchants' *gamone* plantations.

Not only are Khami people in the Sami area losing their means of self-subsistence, but also it is likely that with the increasing use of chemical fertilizers, the land is being depleted so that nobody can use it for long term anymore.

9

DREAMS OF DEVELOPMENT IN SAMI

In this short chapter I will discuss some other social issues facing Sami inhabitants, and other social transformations that are underway to provide a larger picture of conditions in the Sami area. At this time, many people in Sami are dreaming of development and improving their social and economic lives.

Political and Economic Reforms since 2010

After a general election in Myanmar in 2010, a new government comprised of mostly recently retired military officers was sworn in to govern the country. The new civilianized government has been struggling to reform the national economy and improve the fundamental rights of people. It has also embarked on poverty alleviation and rural development programs.

For the Khami people in Sami region, there have been several positive changes. In 2010, the military outpost in Sami was taken down. In addition a peace agreement was signed between the Chin National Front (CNF) and the Myanmar *Tatmadaw*. Since 2010, there has been no more *corvee* labor in the region. This is a welcome development for poor farmers and villagers, as farmers can now spend more time in their fields.

Another important change is that, on 31 August 2012, the Sami village-tract acquired “sub-township” status. People from Sami region have felt for years that Paletwa Township officers

marginalized them. These local authorities always recruited their relatives for the vacant government employee posts in Sami region, and these individuals frequently would not even stay in Sami region in person, but only collected a salary. Consequently, many people in the region were happy to have the village tract upgraded to a new status and many were involved in contributing money to pay for their negotiators to travel Hakha in northern Chin state.

With the new “sub-township” status it is expected that there will be additional conveniences for people in Sami, such as access to banking. Also, having more government employees in Sami will bring more money into the community to improve the economy. People also hope there will be more job opportunities for young people.

A new road from Matupi to Paletwa is under construction (in 2013), and another road is also being built from Kyaukdaw to Paletwa. If these roads function well, Sami will become a new junction town. As I have mentioned, until now, the only access to Sami has been by boat. Moreover, transportation via the Mi creek is difficult from November to May because of lower water levels. As one of my informants, a senior school teacher pointed out: people in the Sami region hope that good transportation in the region will their access to the markets to sell their farm products.

Accessing Education

For decades, the central government has had a very low budget for education, which has had a bad impact on remote rural areas like Sami. Families in these rural areas have to spend too much money on compulsory school fees and many cannot afford it.

For example, parents of middle school and high-school age children have to spend 5,000 to 10,000 kyats for each pupil. This includes a compulsory contribution for school maintenance and for textbooks and writing supplies. For each school child, a family must spend some 2,000 to 5,000 kyats per month. Families of children who have to travel from remote areas to attend high school in Sami spend even more than the others. Unless these families are very successful in their cash crop cultivation, they

cannot afford these costs on top of purchasing rice and other basic needs. For these reasons, school dropout rates are very high. Students may not go to middle school or high school. If they do continue to high school, it is likely they will not pass the matriculation exam. I learned that among the 130-150 high school students in Sami only two to four students pass matriculation examination each year.

Dropout rates for girls are especially high. Most parents think that girls only need to be prepared to be a good housewife. Parents want their daughters to help in the farms and household duties before they get married. Many drop out after they finish primary level. In recent years, parents have more gained awareness of the importance of education, including the importance of education for girls,²⁶ but dropout rates remain high because of the problems of household economy.

One of my key informants told me a sad story of a girl who was the eldest daughter in a poor family. Because of the bad economy after *mautam* crisis, the parents could not afford her school expenses. She was asked to drop out while she was at 7th standard and let her two younger siblings go to school. She was very eager to resume her study and tried hard in farm work, growing rice and *gamone* as well. Eventually she realized that the income could never be enough for her to resume school. Then she suffered depression and finally she got mental illness.

With the upgrading of Sami to “sub-township” status, people hope that the government will establish a matriculation examination center for high school students. With an examination center in town, perhaps more young will take the exam to graduate from high school. There may also be more government sector jobs for young people.

26. As I mentioned earlier, the Baptist Church in Sami has raised awareness about the importance of girls' education, largely because of the work of one female pastor. But many parents cannot afford to send their girls to high school because of the household economy.

Health Care

Currently (2013), people in Sami receive very limited health-care services from the government. There is one government health center and one station hospital; however, these centers have been under-staffed for many years. Higher-level government employees such as doctors and nurses are frequently absent from their stations. There are only lower level staffs such as health-care assistants and midwives. Sometimes midwives are involved in government sponsored vaccination programs, in addition to their work delivering babies.

As Khami people were isolated for years, many do not have much health care knowledge and many will not have anything to do with health care centers. Even among those who have some health education, they often do not take care of their own health unless they suffer terrible illness or disease. The problem is related to poverty. Only those who have enough income from cash cropping can spend money when they are sick.

International NGOs and Local Development

Since about 2009, international NGOs have been permitted to do development projects in the Sami area to improve local infrastructure and sanitation. In 2011, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) upgraded the mile-long main road in Sami from gravel to concrete and built a wooden footbridge between the Anaung-wa and Zaydan quarters. The IRC also provided concrete water tanks to each household, so people can store their rainwater in the rainy season. (Otherwise, people must fetch water from the creek, or from a street tap shared by some 20 households.) People in Sami properly contributed their labor and some raw materials to support these projects. Currently, UNICEF is providing a water filtration pot to every household so that people can drink clean water, and the UNDP is providing water closets for toilets.

Of course, the government is supposed to be responsible for providing social services and improving local infrastructure. One Khami social leader I spoke with observed that these INGOs have replaced the government in the responsibilities, especially in improving local water supply and sanitation.

The Impact of Christian Churches

Without question, Christianity is a very important social force in the area. As I mentioned in chapter 6, Christian missionaries came into the area beginning in the 1980s. The Mara Evangelical Church (MEC) came first and was followed by groups from many other denominations. Since the 1980s, many Khami-Chin have converted to Christianity, and this has ended many aspects of Khami traditional culture. Today almost all Chin communities carry out their vital social events, such as weddings and funerals within their respective religious organizations.

Currently Sami has over twenty different denominations of Christianity. The reason is that every church with a presence in Chin state tries to establish itself in an area where the population is dense. Since the migration into Sami has risen dramatically during the last 20 years, churches have moved in.

Some churches are comprised of members who share the same dialect (that is, from the same Chin sub-group). For instance, Mara and Matupi people have their own churches in Sami. The Mara usually belong to the MEC, while ethnic Matupi-Chin are members of the Baptist church. When migrants settle in a new place, they need a strong social organization such as a church where people speak the same mother tongue.

My informants noted that Christian churches play a crucial role helping poor Khami families in the region manage their social and economic challenges. Especially in the new “revivalist” churches that emphasize emotional worship, there is emphasis on taking care of parishioners who suffer from terrible poverty or illness. Individuals who are suffering and struggling for livelihood can also forget about their hardships by getting involved in the worship activities.

Churches also support education indirectly. Some have dormitories in their church compounds where students from remote areas can stay. Students work hard at their studies under the guidance of church ministers.

Many of the big churches have “fellowship” groups (i.e. men’s fellowship, women’s fellowship, and youth fellowship) where

people come together for meetings and activities. For example, youth fellowship groups grow *gamone* to raise funds for their activities. Every Sunday, people get together to worship and share their experiences, including news and information from their native townships. In these various ways, Christian churches play an important role helping people to overcome hard times, and they build unity in the community.

10

RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES

In this paper, I have elaborated on the changing livelihood strategies of the Khami Chin people in the Sami area as they have undergone political, economic, ecological and cultural changes. I have showed how Khami people in the Sami area have responded to various hardships in the past, and how they continue to adapt to and cope with problems today. At the present time, many Khami are giving up their traditional means of subsistence and facing new challenges and hardships.

Since about the middle of the 18th c., Khami Chin people have lived in the Sami area, practicing *taungya* (shifting) cultivation and subsisting with the natural resources that provided for their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Cultural life included elaborate festivals and feasts. As the people were prosperous, they could afford these elaborate events. Inter-tribal warfare occurred frequently, and there were strong ties between allied clans. Khami communities were united in doing farming and protecting their territories.

In the colonial period under indirect British rule, Khami were left largely on their own. Khami chieftains retained their positions, and the people continued their *taungya* cultivation and foraged peacefully as if having their own sovereignty. However, in the colonial period, Khami people were also introduced to cash crop farming, specifically cotton and tobacco. They had their initial experiences of selling their cash crops and buying basic household needs from the Chittagong traders who settled in Sami. Cash crop farming had drastic effects on Khami livelihoods and culture over time.

After Burma regained independence in 1948, a number of changes occurred in the Sami area. The *taungya* land formerly managed by the *taung-min* (chieftains) started to be owned by the village-tract community collectively. At that time, the *taungya* rice as well as cash crops could still support the local people's basic requirements. The Khami people changed their cash crops from time to time according to the market demands. In the socialist era (1962-1988), Khami people still did not have much contact with the outside world. Only a few young people were able to go to university and get jobs as government employees in the towns.

In the late 1980s, diverse denominations of Christian churches introduced different Christian doctrines in the Sami area and a number of Khami people converted to Christianity. Afterwards, people started to become more engaged in secular affairs as well. Parents were working to build a better life for their children's future. They tried to generate more income from their cash crops in order to send their children to school: many parents dreamed that their children would have careers other than farming. Life started to change quite a lot for Khami people.

Ever since traders arrived to this area, first from Chittagong (Bangladesh) and later Rakhine people from Myauktaung and Kyaukdaw area, division of labor in the Sami area has fallen along ethnic lines. From the colonial period through the socialist era, the distinct communities lived together fairly well and were economically interdependent. However, over time the tensions increased as the migrant traders used their economic dominance to exploit the local people. In the period of military rule (1988-2010), tensions between these distinct populations were made worse by official policies and practices that favored the Zaydan people.

Through most of their history, people in the Sami area were largely left alone. Sami was "off the map" from the perspective of Rangoon. But after 1990, the central state began to assert itself more forcefully. In addition, there was an increasing influence of the global market, especially the Chinese market. Since the 1990s, Khami people no longer feel that they rule over themselves. Also, increasingly, the Khami are no longer self-sufficient.

Indeed, the period of military rule from 1988 to 2010 brought many transformations. Khami people had to contend with: high inflation, fluctuating prices for cash crops, the influx of cheap products from China which displaced local production of goods, increasing exploitation by middlemen, forced labor by local military forces, climate change and natural disasters, and other hardships. These multiple forces working together have obliged Khami Chin to try new livelihood strategies, including turning to wage labor or migrating out of the area to the jade mines of Phakhant, to Yangon, or to other countries in the region.

Reviewing this history, one can observe several patterns. One pattern is the impact of cash crop farming on traditional *taungya* subsistence agriculture. Already in the colonial era, officials observed that some Khami people were no longer putting as much time and energy into their rice production, preferring instead to grow more lucrative tobacco and cotton. Of course, at that time, cash crops have provided only supplemental income and *taungya* was the main source of subsistence. Over time, cash cropping had a powerful impact on the local economy. Currently, we can observe the impact of *gamone* production on the region. More and more land is being taken over to grow *gamone*, and many former subsistence farmers are being drawn into the business, either growing their own *gamone* on small plots, or working as wage laborers for commercial growers.

The rising importance of the cash crop *gamone* and also elephant yams spotlights an important transformation that has occurred in this once very isolated area. Sami has become progressively more integrated into global market forces. However, the Khami growers and foragers are not the main beneficiaries of this new trade. Rather, the middlemen and capitalist growers earn the greater share of the profits. As small-scale farmers or wage-laborers, the local Khami people are joining the global market in a low position. They are also vulnerable to the unstable market for the products they grow.

Another pattern we can observe is environmental degradation. The land around Sami has always been rich and fertile; however, through the decades, there has been increasing pressure on the

land's carrying capacity. Rising population in the area around Sami has meant that soil is overworked. In traditional *taungya* cultivation, plots of land were left fallow for seven years, but that time has decreased to two or three years. With commercial *gamone* production, it is now more common to use chemical fertilizers, which also depletes the soil. In addition, beginning in the 1990s, the expanding timber industry, which was controlled exclusively by central authorities, led to rapid deforestation of hillsides, impacting the local climate. In 2008, the *mautam* crisis hit with devastating effects for local farm production.

So what will the future hold for the Khami people? At the present time, Khami people in the Sami area are working harder than ever before. Everyone is trying to find alternative livelihood strategies. The successful Khami *gamone* grower I mentioned, Mr. A., suggested that perhaps the old practices of shifting cultivation are coming to an end in the Sami area, as more hill farmers take up perennial crop cultivation. If one looks at the Khami people in the Sami area, one can imagine that these traditional subsistence farmers will finally lose their traditional lifestyle. However, it is important to note that just two or three days trek into the hills from Sami, Khami people continue to practice *taungya* as they always have, along with foraging for yams for sale. At the present time, traditional *taungya* cultivation still provides protection for Khami farmers who must contend with unstable markets for cash crops.

Since 2010, with the installation of a new civilian government, Myanmar has been booming in development. After years of self-imposed isolation and internationally imposed sanctions, Myanmar has been opening to the world. However, at this time a small handful of corporations that have links with the top leaders of the former military administration receive huge benefits for exploiting the natural resources. Moreover, general commodity prices are increasing higher every year. In order to transform to a developed country, the government should be the duty bearer for building infrastructure, providing decent education and public health care. But in reality the government has failed in their duties for the last half century. Poor governance has resulted in poor infra-structure, education and public health care for entire nation.

The country is running its poor economy through low technology, unqualified human resources, and an unhealthy work force in the grassroots. Those people are hopeless to escape from such a hard life. The new civilian government is now struggling to overcome that bad situation.

Currently, the economy in Sami seems to be growing, but this is only benefitting the rich who can act as middlemen between the poor farmers and the big traders. Meanwhile, as commodity prices increase, smallholder agriculturalists must try to generate more income. It seems no matter how hard the Khami people work to earn cash, they are just able to meet their basic biological needs. In many ways, the situation for Khami Chin people is similar to poor smallholder farmers throughout the entire nation. At the present time, it seems the Khami people in Sami area remain caught in constraints that they cannot escape by themselves.

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About the Author

Kyin Lam Mang belongs to the Siyin clan of ethnic Chin from northern Chin state. He earned his first degree of Bachelor in Veterinary Science in 1982. He was involved in private tutoring and worked as a general practitioner in Hakha, the capital city of Chin State for about six years. He served as chairman of the Chin State Cooperative Federation in Hakha for 10 years from 1988 to 1998. At that time, he had to travel around the entire Chin State to support local industries such as coffee, sericulture, traditional textiles and wholesale trading (e.g. in sesame and a variety of beans). He organized artisans and set up a production cooperative in 1994. The cooperative is now producing Chin textiles in northern Rakhine and southwestern Chin State to generate income for the Chin women artisans there, while maintaining traditional weaving skills.

Kyin Lam Mang joined the postgraduate diploma program in anthropology at Yangon University from 2004 through 2015. Afterwards, he continued his studies in anthropology and earned his Master of Research (Anthropology) in 2009. He is now conducting research on the cultures of the 53 sub-groups of Chin in Myanmar and some other Chin groups in India and Bangladesh based on their textile varieties.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Cropping Calendar in Sami

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Paddy	chopping	chopping	burning	burning growing		weeding		weeding	harvesting	harvesting	harvesting	store
Gamone	harvesting slicing drying	harvesting slicing drying	harvesting slicing drying	harvesting slicing drying	growing	cleaning						
Yam					foraging slicing drying	foraging slicing drying				foraging slicing drying	foraging slicing drying	foraging slicing drying
Chili					growing			harvesting				
Sesame						growing	growing			harvesting	harvesting	harvesting
Tobacco											growing	
Tumeric					growing							harvesting
Mango				harvesting	harvesting	harvesting						blossom
Djenkol bean								harvesting	harvesting			blossom

Remarks: Some farmers start to grow yam tuber now, but it needs to wait for three years for harvest.

Appendix 2: Measurement Unit for Volume

1 basket = 52 cups (of condensed milk container)

1 thaik = 4 cups

N.B.

- *This basket is used for measuring rice, sesame, chili*
- *The traders use 2 different capacity of basket for purchasing and selling*

Purchasing for rice = 52 cups-basket

Selling for rice = 48 cups-basket

Purchasing for sesame = 60 cups-basket

Selling for sesame = 52 cups-basket

Purchasing for chili = 70 cups-basket

Selling for chili = 52 cups-basket

Measurement Unit for Weight

1 mound = 25 viss / for purchasing 1 mound = 30 viss

1 swae = 5 viss / for purchasing 1 swae = 7 viss

5 swae = 1 mound

1 thaih = 40 ticals

100 tical = 1 viss

1 viss = 1.63293 = 3.6 lb

1 lb = 2.2 kg

N.B.

- *Mound (armif:) and swae (qGJ) is used for pricing of fresh yam/gamone/ginger/turmeric*
- *Viss is used for for pricing of dried yam/gamone/ginger/turmeric*

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES:

The Khami Chin People of Southern Chin State and Their Adaptive Livelihood Strategies

In this fifth volume of the Understanding Myanmar's Development series, anthropologist Kyin Lam Mang—himself an ethnic Chin—has conducted an extended case study of the Khami Chin people of the Sami area of Myanmar's southwestern Chin State. In the past, largely left alone by the central Burmese state, the Khami Chin made their livelihoods practicing *taungya* (shifting) subsistence cultivation and using the natural resources of the area that provided food, clothing and shelter. The modern era—beginning with British colonization—has wrought drastic cultural, economic, and environmental changes on the Khami Chin way of life. Kyin Lam Mang takes a holistic look at how political and economic policies and administrative mismanagement of the last three decades, compounded by ecological degradation and a natural disaster called the *mautam* crisis in 2010, have resulted in grinding poverty and a host of transformations to the community's cultural practice, livelihood, and well-being.

The Understanding Myanmar's Development series is an exploration of the transformation taking place in Myanmar on multiple levels: social, economic, and political. In this series, RCSD hopes to realize the dual goals of both building up the body of knowledge on Myanmar and strengthening the research capacity of Burmese scholars in their study of development policy and practice. This volume is just one piece of the puzzle of development practice, as felt by the people and communities of Myanmar.



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