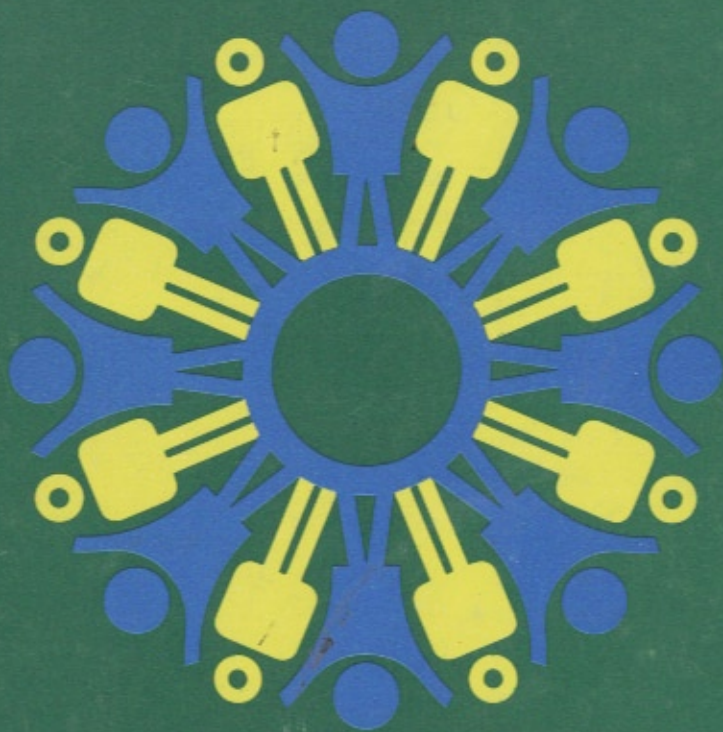


**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL  
PRACTICES  
IN MALAYSIAN SOCIETY**

(THIRD SERIES)





## **RUKUNEGARA**

(NATIONAL IDEOLOGY)

OUR NATION, MALAYSIA, being dedicated :

- to achieving a greater unity of all her peoples;
- to maintaining a democratic way of life;
- to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared;
- to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions;
- to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology;

WE, her peoples, pledge our united efforts to attain these ends guided by these principles:

**BELIEF IN GOD**

**LOYALTY TO KING AND COUNTRY**

**UPHOLDING THE CONSTITUTION**

**RULE OF LAW**

**GOOD BEHAVIOUR AND MORALITY**

## Adviser

Tan Sri Datuk Amar Temenggong Jugah ak. Barieng.  
P.M.N., D.A., P.N.B.S., P.D.K.,

## Panel of Authors

Y.B. Encik Arthur Mading

Y.B. Tuan Haji Abdul Latip bin Idris

Encik William Nais

Encik G. A. Yaman

Penghulu Baya Malang

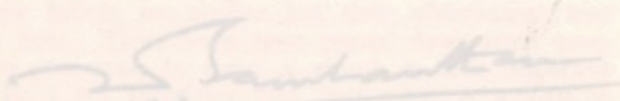
Assisted by officers of the Majlis Adat Istiadat,  
Sarawak and the Department of Information, Malaysia.

5. Knowledge of the cultural practices of the various ethnic groups would help promote better understanding among the people of our country.

6. I would like to thank and congratulate the editorial board for providing the material for this publication and the artist for his sketches.

God Bless.

Semoga Tuhan merestuinnya.



(Tun Y. T. Sambanthan)

30th September, 1976.

Adviser

Tan Sri Datuk Amar Temenggong Idris ibn Sultan  
P.M.N. D.A. P.N.B.S. P.D.K.

Panel of Authors

Y.B. Encik Arthur Mading

Y.B. Tuan Haji Abdul Rashid bin Yusoff

Encik William Kees

"We are dedicated to ensuring the existence and growth of a liberal society in which its members are free to practise and profess their own religions, customs and cultures consistent with the requirements of national unity."

to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions;

to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology;

**Rukunegara**

WE, her peoples, pledge our united efforts to attain these ends guided by these principles:

**BELIEF IN GOD**

**LOYALTY TO KING AND COUNTRY**

**UPHOLDING THE CONSTITUTION**

**RULE OF LAW**

**GOOD BEHAVIOUR AND MORALITY**



JABATAN PERPADUAN NEGARA  
JABATAN PERDANA MENTERI

FOREWORD

We are glad to present the third Booklet in our series on "Social and Cultural Practices in Malaysian Society."

2. Whilst they are not meant to be comprehensive the series will provide some useful information about the various practices amongst Malaysians.

3. The first two Booklets related to some of the Customs and Practices of the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Orang Asli, Eurasian and Thai ethnic groups of Malaysia.

4. This Booklet relates to the Ibans, Bidayuh, Malanau and Kayan or Kenyah ethnic groups of Malaysia.

5. Knowledge of the cultural practices of the various ethnic groups would help promote better understanding among the people in our country.

6. I would like to thank and congratulate the editorial board for providing the material for this publication and the artist for his sketches.

God Bless.

Semoga Tuhan merestuinnya.

(Tun V. T. Sambanthan)

30hb September, 1976.



## FORWORD

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The first two booklets related to some of the Customs and Practices of the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Orang Asli and European ethnic groups of Malaysia.

### Note:

This booklet is an English translation of Resam Muihahah Kayan or Kenyah ethnic groups of Malaysia.  
**Masyarakat Malaysia Siri Ketiga with amendments.**

Knowledge of the cultural practices of the various ethnic groups would help promote better understanding among the people of our country.

I would like to thank and congratulate the editorial board for providing the material for this publication and the artist for his sketches.

God Bless

Senoga Tunan merestunya.

(Tun V. T. Sambanthan)

This booklet is the first of its kind for the State of Sarawak. It is short and concise for easy reading and understanding. It is not possible at the moment to cover all aspects, and all ethnic groups with their various socio-cultural practices. This is a start for the State to enable more work of this nature to be published, so as to promote understanding and greater goodwill among the people of Malaysia.

The Malaysians in Sarawak are not very well known to Malaysians in Peninsular Malaysia. There is, therefore, the need to explain the background of the groups described in this booklet. It is hoped that Malaysians of all walks of life, wherever they may be, will understand and respect each other's way of life.

Sarawak is divided into seven regions called Divisions. Thus we have the First Division to the Seventh Division.

All natives of Sarawak are settled groups except for a few hundred Penans in the deep jungle of the State.

## IBANS

The Ibans are found in all the Divisions. The total population is approximately 350,000 (almost the same as the Chinese, which is the largest). They are generally agriculturists. Many still plant padi on the hillsides in remote areas.

In some areas they call themselves Dayak, Balau and Undup. In Saribas, for example, they call themselves Dayak. The British called them Sea-Dayaks, to differentiate them from the Land Dayaks who are known locally as *Dayak Bidayuh*. These sub-groups, however, speak the same language except for a few words, which may have the opposite meaning e.g. *baka*, which means a *small* basket for the Saribas, is a *big* basket for Bintulu of Rumah Datuk Temenggong Abok ak. Jalin.

Their beliefs are similar but their observances may differ a little. These have been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth in their respective areas. It is not surprising then that what is written in this booklet may not be applicable in certain areas. For example, *Gawai Kenyalang* is the biggest festival of Batang Ai and the Seventh Division, and *Gawai Antu* is the most important for those living in Saribas and Kalaka Districts.

## LAND DAYAKS

## INTRODUCTION

The Land Dayaks are of one group and speak one language with slight dialectical differences. As a matter of fact when they speak in their own dialect, they can be understood by one another. They are generally found in the rural areas with some in the urban areas of the First Division. The total number of Land Dayaks based on the 1972 figure is 83,276 and the breakdown by district is as follows:—

(a) Serian District	—	32,060
(b) Kuching District	—	26,867
(c) Bau District	—	18,006
(d) Lundu District	—	6,343

There is a great deal of similarities in their traditions and customs. Some differences may be found between villages and districts due to poor communications in the past. With better communications being established they are closely attached to one another for mutual benefit.

Like the Ibans they are mainly agriculturists and some still plant padi on the hillsides.

A large majority of the educated Land Dayaks are Christians.

## MELANAU

This group is found mainly in the Third Division and the Bintulu District and in Miri and Niah in the Miri District of the Fourth Division. They number approximately 50,000. They are generally found in the coastal regions. They are mainly fishermen, sago planters and padi farmers.

Their traditions, customs and cultures are similar in many ways even though there are religious differences. A large number have embraced Islam and Christianity. Those who do not belong to any of these religions call themselves Melanau Liko. This sub-group strictly adheres to the observances of its original belief. The Melanau staple food in addition to rice is sago, which grows very well in the coastal regions.

## KAYAN/KENYAH VISITS

This group is found in the Belaga District of the Seventh Division, and the Baram District of the Fourth Division. They number about 30,000. Like the other groups, they may differ in their observances of their rituals. There are differences even from village to village within each sub-group.

of the longhouse must ask the people within, "Judi rumah kita?" ("Are there any prohibitions against us visiting?"). The visitor would then be answered, "Judi, niki" ("Come in!").

A majority of them are Christians.

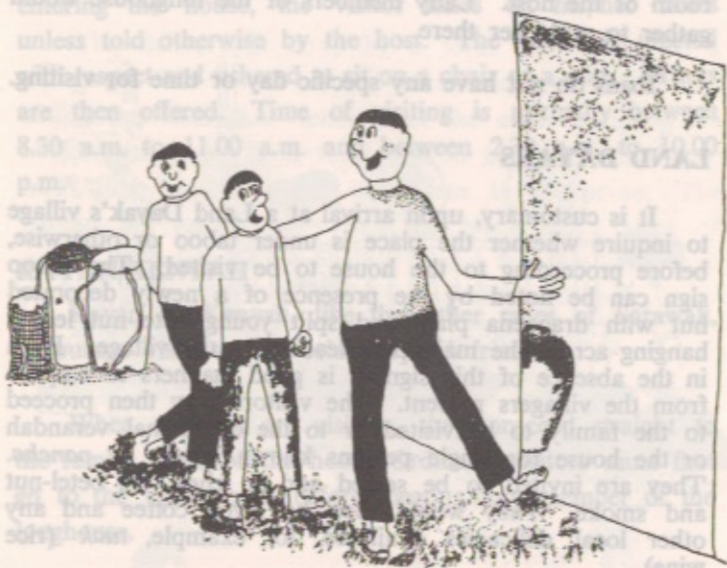


The visitor goes straight to the *ruai* (verandah) of the family visited. He takes off whatever he is carrying and places them at the appropriate place. He is invited to be seated and offered the betel-nut and *bakau enggar sarung insai* (smoking boxes).

## I. VISITS

### IBANS

Visiting relatives and friends are common and are encouraged. The ordinary visitor, upon his arrival at the doorsteps of the longhouse must ask the people within, "*Jadi rumah kita?*" ("Are there any prohibitions against us visiting?"). The visitor would then be answered, "*Jadi, niki meh!*" ("You are very welcome, come in!").



The visitor goes straight to the *ruai* (verandah) of the family visited. He takes off whatever he is carrying and places them at the appropriate place. He is invited to be seated and offered the betel-nut and *bakau enggau sarang insan* (smoking boxes).

He will then be asked whether he has taken his food and is invited for the meal.

When he indicates his intention to remain for the night, he will not be questioned as to the purpose of his visit. Later that evening, he will tell the people in the longhouse the purpose of his visit. They will talk until late into the night. The members of the longhouse are expected to gather with the visitor at the *ruai* (verandah) of the family visited. *Tuak* (rice wine) may be served during their *randau ruai* (conversation) and then followed by the performance of the the *ngajat* (traditional dance) to entertain the visitors.

A lady visitor, however, goes straight to the family room of the host. Lady members of the longhouse would gather to greet her there.

Ibans do not have any specific day or time for visiting.

## LAND DAYAKS

It is customary, upon arrival at a Land Dayak's village to inquire whether the place is under taboo or otherwise, before proceeding to the house to be visited. The taboo sign can be noted by the presence of a newly decorated hut with dracoena plant and split young betel-nut leaves hanging across the main path leading to the village. Even in the absence of this sign, it is good manners to enquire from the villagers present. The visitors may then proceed to the family to be visited or to the communal verandah or the house for single persons known locally as *pancha*. They are invited to be seated and to chew the betel-nut and smoke. They would then be given coffee and any other local delicacies available, for example, *tuak* (rice wine).

Food may be provided, depending on the time the visit is made. If the visitors stay for the night, beds will be provided for them in the appropriate place in the village.

In most Land Dayak villages, the *Panggah* or *Pancha* is the most important building, where the *Batu Guna* (whetstones) and human skulls are properly stored.

## MELANAU

In the Melanau community, irrespective of religion, visiting each other, among neighbours, relatives and friends are normal practices as in other races.

A visit to the home of a Melanau family is conducted in the same manner as visiting the home of a Malay family.

Upon reaching the house, it is usual for the visitor to call the name of anyone known living there. Before entering the house, the visitor takes off his/her shoes unless told otherwise by the host. The visitor is greeted with respect and ushered to sit on a chair or a mat. Drinks are then offered. Time of visiting is normally between 8.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and between 2.30 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.

## KAYAN/KENYAH

Kayan or Kenyah, like the other races of Sarawak, encourage visits among relatives and friends.

When relatives are visiting, they proceed straight to the family room of the host. Ordinary visitors must first go to the village-head before meeting any member of the longhouse.

Guests are entertained with food, local dances and games.

Prior to the visitors' departure the next morning, they are rubbed with soot by village ladies. This is to indicate the villagers' warm appreciation of the visit.

## II. CHILDBIRTH

### IBANS

During pregnancies, Iban parents are forbidden to do several things in order to bring about normal delivery of the child. A local midwife does the delivery, using ginger and *entemu* (a herb). The mother then sits next to a *bekindu* (fireplace) for a period of thirty days. The wood used for the fire must be of hard wood or any other type i.e. *kayu manding* or *kayu leban/empapa* or *kayu malam*.



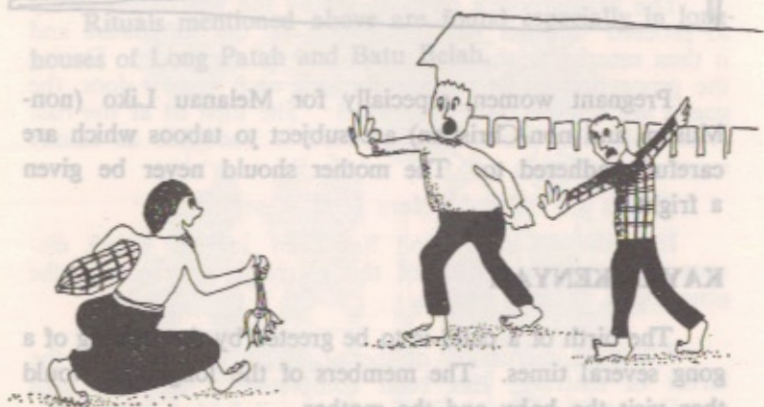
Like the Malays, visitors would say the opposite meaning to describe the baby, like "*Naka ga penyai anak tu deh, wai*" ("What a bad-looking baby").

The baby is named after one of the ancestors of the parents considered appropriate. Visiting by relatives and friends are encouraged.

At a later stage several ceremonies are performed. The child is taken out to the *tanju* (outer verandah) to look at the sun and to taste salt for the first time. A *sampi* (prayer) is said here for the good health of the child. The last ceremony is the *mari mandi* (bathing) of the child when it is about a month old, in the river, the common bathing place for the members of the longhouse. Prayers to God for His blessings to enable the baby to grow well into adulthood are offered. Details of the ceremonies differ from place to place.

### LAND DAYAKS

The delivery is done by a local midwife called a *pirinteng*. No visitor is allowed to see the mother and child other than close relatives of the same kampong for about four days. It is forbidden to bring wet clothings, fresh fish, bamboo shoots and ferns to the house. The parents are forbidden to visit the blacksmith's place of work. Pounding of rice would cease for that period to prevent the mother and child from being shocked.



## MELANAU

Whenever it is learnt that someone has given birth, neighbours and relatives usually pay a visit to see the newborn child. Whether the visitor brings a gift for the baby or not depends on the visitor himself.

It is the custom of the Melanau, irrespective of religion that the visitor should not compliment the baby by saying *cantik*, *gemuk*, *manis* (beautiful fat, sweet) or words to that effect. Normally they are expected to say the opposite.



Pregnant women, especially for Melanau Liko (non-Muslim and non-Christian) are subject to taboos which are carefully adhered to. The mother should never be given a fright.

## KAYAN/KENYAH

The birth of a child is to be greeted by the beating of a gong several times. The members of the longhouse would then visit the baby and the mother.

Ten days after birth, the baby is named. This is a very important occasion. Every family of the longhouse is informed of the impending occasion. They prepare food and rice-wine (*borak*) to celebrate it. Other longhouses are invited to attend the festival.

Guests and members of the longhouse would gather in the room and verandah where the new-born baby is kept. There is a lot of merry-making, dancing, drinking and eating.

The baby is carried by a relative to the verandah accompanied by three men and four women. One man carries a shield. This man asks a well-known personality in the crowd for a name, who normally gives the name of one of the baby's ancestors.

Ten days after this Naming Festival, the family makes an offering by slaughtering a pig, and prays for the well-being of the child. This is called *Hari Dayung*.

For the male babies, the last celebration is called *Hari Ubah*, in which another pig is slaughtered as offering.

Rituals mentioned above are found especially in longhouses of Long Patah and Batu Belah.

### III. MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

#### IBANS

Wedding or *Melah Pinang* is of special importance to the Iban. It is the occasion when a couple is declared man and wife. No certificate is required to legalise the marriage except that the *Melah Pinang* ceremony be witnessed by a Ketua Masyarakat (Community leader) and a few other elders.

The young man's parents, with the consent of the young man, either themselves, or through a go-between, would ask for the hand of a lady of their choice. When the proposal is accepted by both the parents and the girl, the couple will be engaged and the wedding day is set.

On the wedding day, the members of the bridegroom's longhouse and relatives go to the bride's longhouse accompanied with the beating of gongs and drums. Upon arrival at the doorsteps of the longhouse, they are met by a procession led by the elders accompanied with the beating of gongs and drums. Guns are fired several times. The leader of the bridegroom's party would be asked to thrust a spear through the throat of a pig tied-up at the foot of the steps to the longhouse.

The bridegroom's party is led by the welcoming group to proceed through the full length of the longhouse and it then returns to the *ruai* (verandah) of the bride. During the procession while passing through each family door, the guests are offered *tuak* (rice-wine). The men sit at the *ruai* (verandah) and the women proceed to the *bilik* or family room of the bride.

Drinks are offered before food is served.

Immediately after food has been served, elders discuss the appropriateness of the marriage, by reciting the genealogies of both parties.

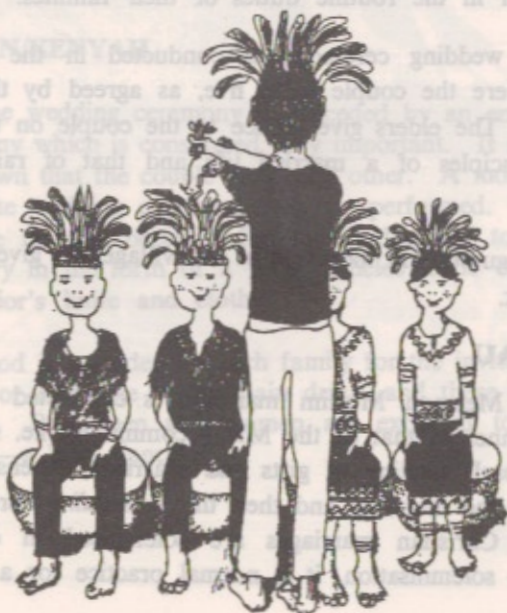
When all discussion of the problems pertaining to the terms of marriage has been completed, a lady of high standing would take a *selok* or a small basket, with some

betel-nuts inside to the *ruai* (verandah). A betel-nut would then be split according to the number of visits to be made by the couple to that family, either the bride's or the groom's family that they have decided not to stay with.

The bridegroom does not accompany the party if the bride is to live with him in his family. He does so if otherwise.

If the bridegroom accompanies the party, the *bersanding* (wedding) ceremony takes place in the girl's longhouse. If the girl is to live with his family, the *bersanding* takes place upon the arrival of the bride that night or the following day.

During the *bersanding* ceremony, the young man sits with a male companion, and the girl with a female companion on separate big gongs, side by side. Here, a *biau* (cockerel) is waved over them by an expert, who asks the blessings of God for a successful married life. He also announces that the couple are legally married in accordance with the *Adat Iban* (Iban custom).



The ceremony proper then ends, but drinking and merry-making continue.

### LAND DAYAKS

A go-between (*arang*) asks for the hand of the lady in marriage from her parents (The couple must have consented to each other first). When the parents consent, the *arang* would on the second visit take along a dowry in the form of a ring and a black sarong (*jamuh langking*). It is the *arang* who conveys messages between the two families.

The wedding ceremony usually takes place after a harvest, so as to ensure that there is no problem in providing food for the guests.

During the engagement period, the couple usually help each other in the routine duties of their families.

The wedding ceremony is conducted in the family house where the couple is to live, as agreed by the two families. The elders give advice to the couple on the general principles of a married life and that of raising a family.

The guests and members of the village are given food and drink.

### MELANAU

The Melanau Muslim marriage is conducted in the same manner as that of the Malay community i.e. making the proposal, sending of gifts and marriage expenses, solemnising the marriage and then the *bersanding* ceremony. Melanau Christian marriages are solemnised in church. After the solemnisation, it is normal practice for a recep-

tion to be held either at bride's or bridegroom's residence for relatives and friends. The *bersanding* is held during the reception and witnessed by all present.

Among the Melanau Liko, marriage is accorded similar importance and conducted in the same way as that of the Muslim community. The elders or the *Penghudu* would represent the bridegroom's family bringing marriage expenses to the bride's house and this would be received in an appropriate manner. The *adat* is then explained. This traditional Melanau *adat* is still adhered to even by those who have embraced Islam and Christianity. The *adat* depends on the status of the couple to be married. The marriage *adat* is *sembilan pikul*, *tujuh pikul* or *lima pikul* as stated in Melanau Laws of Mukah and Dalat.

Before the invited guests leave, the parents of the couple thank them for their attendance and for witnessing the marriage.

## KAYAN/KENYAH

The wedding ceremony is preceded by an engagement ceremony which is considered very important. It must first be known that the couple love each other. A month or so later the wedding ceremony may be performed. It is the practice on this occasion for the bridegroom to provide a dowry in the form of a gong, articles made of copper, a warrior's knife and clothes.

Food is provided by each family for the invited guests. *Borak* or rice-wine is the main drink, and there is merry-making. Both men and women are expected to do the *ngajat* — a local dance.

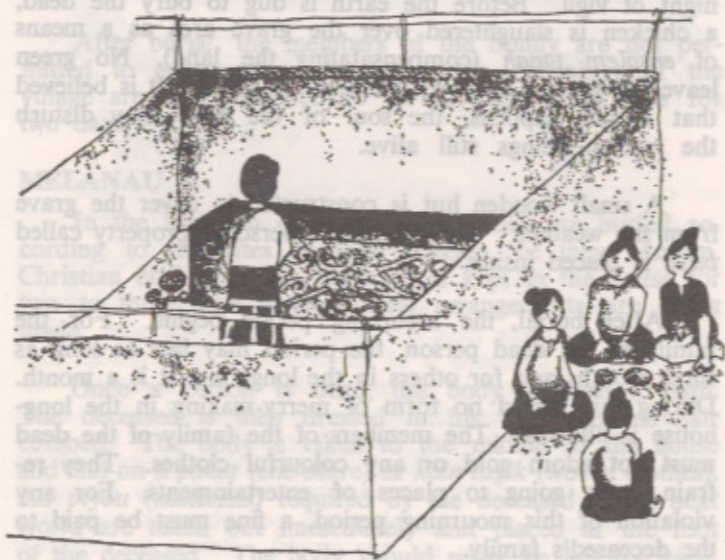


## IV. DEATH

### IBANS

The Ibans treat a deceased person with great respect and honour. All relatives and friends are expected to attend the funeral.

As soon as the person breathes his last, the mouth and the eyes are properly closed by one of the relatives. He is bathed, properly combed and dressed in his best. The two main entrances to the longhouse is barred with two *alu* (wooden pestle used for the pounding of padi) to prevent the spirits of the dead taking the deceased soul back to the longhouse. The body is taken out to the middle of the *ruai* (verandah) inside a *sapat* (enclosure) of *pua kumbu* (woven clothes). All the *baya* (materials) to be taken by the deceased to the next world for his use are taken out immediately. The body must never be left by itself. Several ladies keep vigil around the enclosure.



A lady expert sings *sabak* (verses of invocation) in which she imagines taking the soul of the deceased to the realm of Paradise so that he does not meet any mishap on his journey. She sings the *sabak* (verses) until the coffin leaves the longhouse before the break of dawn. The expert is paid a token sum of money and given various articles necessary to strengthen her soul against any mishap in life.

On the night before the day of burial, the elders discuss the length of the mourning period and other taboos.

When the body is placed in the coffin it is given food. The plate used is broken, and then thrown to the ground through the floor of the longhouse.

The coffin is usually made locally by local carpenters. It should be properly made of the best quality timber and usually carved with *ukir* (local designs).

Not all the guests and members of the longhouses go for the burial. The number is never limited, but in most cases a large number of the guests return home after a night of vigil. Before the earth is dug to bury the dead, a chicken is slaughtered over the grave area as a means of *ensalem tanah* (compensating the land). No green leaves or grass is allowed to enter the grave. It is believed that if this happens, the soul of the dead may disturb the human beings still alive.

A small wooden hut is constructed to cover the grave from the weather. The deceased's personal property called *baya* is placed inside.

After burial, the mourning period begins. For the family of the dead person, the period may last as long as three months and for others in the longhouse it is a month. During this period no form of merry-making in the longhouse is allowed. The members of the family of the dead must not adorn gold or any colourful clothes. They refrain from going to places of entertainments. For any violation of this mourning period, a fine must be paid to the deceased's family.

To mark an end of mourning, a respected elder is invited to perform the *ngetas ulit*. This ceremony is usually done either early in the morning or late in the evening.

At a later stage the ceremony of *besarara bunga* (separation of the living from the dead) would be held. This is to enable the soul of the dead to live in peace away from the souls of the living. A *manang* (priest) would sing throughout the night asking the help of the supernatural to separate the soul of the dead from the living. The final separation, it is believed, is attained by performing the *Gawai Antu* (Festival of the Dead).

## LAND DAYAKS

Upon hearing of a death, relatives and friends would gather at the deceased's premises. The women sing a sad song called *mpesan* — meaning the last spoken words with the dead.

The body is bathed, oiled, wrapped with a new white calico cloth and laid on a mat. The burial takes place when all the relatives have arrived.

After burial, the members of the family are not permitted to go anywhere for four days. Members of the village are not permitted to go to their padi fields for two days.

## MELANAU

In the Melanau community, the dead are buried according to the rites of their religion, be they Muslim, Christian or Liko. The deceased is kept in the house for two to three days while funeral arrangements are being made.

Once a person is dead, the body is given a bath. The deceased is then dressed in his best and his hair combed. The body is taken to the middle of the house and laid on a *pakat* (enclosure) or *kain lugik* (woven clothes). All *piyou* (materials) required by the deceased in the next world are taken out immediately and placed at the foot of the deceased. The body should never be left by itself.

The children and grandchildren of the deceased should keep the vigil around the enclosure. The body will be put in a coffin in the dawn of the morning before the day of burial. A male or female expert sings *mu-eh* (verses of invocation) in which he imagines leading the soul of the deceased to his ancestors so that he does not meet any mishap on his journey. The verses are sung until the coffin leaves the house for interment. The expert is given an amas of gold, a piece of *sarong*, a spear and a fowl as a token to protect him from any mishap.



Food is served to those who come to the house of the deceased. The *pangkalan* or the doorway is decorated with red and white flags following the Melanau adat, called *pikul*. If the deceased is of the *sembilan pikul* group, nine flags will be hoisted at the *pangkalan* or the doorway. Similarly seven or five flags will be hoisted if he is from *tujuh pikul* or *lima pikul* group respectively. A few days after the deceased has been buried, cock-fighting will be held in the house. This is to honour and pacify the spirit of the deceased. During this event, refreshments and cakes like *ketupat*, *kuih jala*, etc. are served. Before the relatives and friends leave, they would be given parcels of cakes representing gifts from the deceased.

## KAYAN/KENYAH

Upon the death of an individual, a gong is beaten to recall the members of the longhouse who are working in their farms or gardens. They are expected to return immediately.

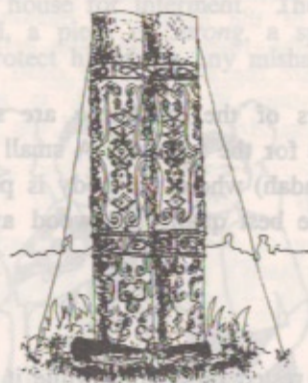
The members of the longhouse are sub-divided into groups to prepare for the funeral. A small stage is erected in the *ruai* (verandah) where the body is placed. A coffin is made from the best quality of wood available, usually belian wood.

The body is rested on a gong while it is bathed. The deceased is dressed in his best. Later, the body is laid on a mat covered with a new piece of cloth. A gong is sounded to herald the taking of the body to the stage in the verandah (*ruai*)

The body is put inside the coffin and placed again on the stage. It is to remain there for a period of eight (8) days. No members of the longhouse is expected to leave for elsewhere at this time.

At the end of the eight day, the coffin is taken from one end of the longhouse to the other end eight times before it is taken through a new prepared ladder to the ground.

The children and grandchildren of the deceased should attend the vigil around the enclosure. The body is placed in a coffin in the dawn of the morning the day of the funeral. Upon the death of an individual, a group is formed to recall the members of the longhouse who are invited to their farms or gardens. They are expected to return to the village on his journey. The vessels are suspended from the coffin leaves the house for placement. The expert is given an amulet of gold, a pearl, a spear and a bow and a talisman to protect the body.



The members of the longhouse are divided into groups to prepare for the funeral. A small stage is erected in the main (vekadab) area. A coffin is placed on the stage. The body is made from the best available wood.

The body is placed on the stage. The deceased is dressed in his best. Later, the body is laid on a mat covered with a new piece of cloth. A song is sounded to herald the taking of the body to the stage in the main house.

The body is buried in the common graveyard of the longhouse.

After the burial, the members of the longhouse and friends gather together in the family-room of the deceased for the farewell meal.

The period of mourning is a month. No new clothes can be worn. During this period, merry-making is forbidden. To mark the end of the period, the ceremony of *Hari Ubah* is held with a lot of merry-making and wearing of colourful and new clothes.

## V. RELIGIOUS PRACTICES & FESTIVE OCCASIONS

### IBANS

Festivals for the Ibans are periods of worship in which requests are made to God (*Petara*). The observance of each festival differs. The only non-religious festival is the Gawai Dayak which is celebrated on the 1st of June every year, which is something new to the Ibans. It has been created by the educated few to compensate for the Joss of the many other festivals. Hence, this festival is celebrated as a mixture of the other festivals.

In this booklet we can only describe the most common and popular ones.

#### (a) Gawai Batu (Whetstone Festival)

Before the observance of any other festival in a new longhouse, the Whetstone Festival must first be celebrated. This festival is to bless the Whetstone, which is placed on every individual family farm for the coming season. Prayers are especially made to *Sempulang*, the padi God, for a bountiful harvest. This Whetstone, is kept carefully at the end of every season, for it is the object that is blessed by the God for a successful year. Usually this festival is held after a year of poor harvest.

The celebration described below is greatly simplified for easy reading and understanding.

First, a man would go from door to door collecting any form of food for the Spirit of Extravagance (*Antu Rua*). The whole foodstuff would then be thrown away as a means of pacifying that spirit and of blessing the members of the longhouse with more rice.

Secondly, offering is made on the area to be farmed to cleanse it from all forms of diseases and pests.

Thirdly, procession in the middle part of the verandah to welcome the good gods and spirits to the festival (*ngalu Petara*).

Fourthly, welcoming the padi-god, *Sempulang Gana*, with the chanting of *mengap* (verses) requesting His blessing.

Fifthly, the killing of a pig and the reading of its liver by experts to forecast whether the coming season would be successful or otherwise.

Lastly, the taking of the whetstone to the farmland in the morning.

With a good harvest, the longhouse may plan to hold the *Gawai Kenyalang/Gawai Burong* (Bird's Festival), the *Gawai Antu* (Festival of the Dead) and other festivals.

#### (b) *Gawai Kenyalang/Gawai Burong* (The Bird's Festival)

In this celebration, the prayer is made to the God of the Brave (or the Brave God) called *Aki Lang Sengalang Burong* the eldest brother of *Sempulang Gana*. (There are seven gods and *Sempulang Gana* is the seventh). The God of the Brave has in his possession all the charms necessary to combat enemies in the battlefield. It is the belief that all Iban warriors who lead successful war expeditions have his blessing.

This celebration is performed for three reasons:—

- (a) before a war expedition;
- (b) because of a dream in which a warrior is requested to do so by the god;
- (c) after a successful season or journey abroad.

The celebration is performed in the *Tanju* (outer part of longhouse). The participants are men who are known to be brave and have achieved great success in life. They sit around the *tiang ranyai* (ranyai pole) where they eat half-cooked meat, drinking the blood of pigs and chickens with rice wine. The God of the Brave is perceived to be doing this daily.

In this festival the prayers are requests for the blessing of the God of the Brave for the complete annihilation of all enemies and hindrances.

(c) **Gawai Antu (The Festival of the Dead)**

This festival is to commemorate the final parting of the dead from the living. It is celebrated at the convenience of the longhouse, usually during lay-off periods and after several good seasons.

There are three main stages. Firstly, the weaving stage (*Ngayam*). The guests invited relatives and weaving experts. Secondly, the *beban*, the period of preparing for the construction of a beautifully carved small wooden house, usually of belian wood. Finally, the festival itself. The period stretches for about a month from the first to the final stage.

The invited guests are met with the sound of gongs and drums. Eating and drinking last for the whole day and night. The *lemambang* (priests) *nimang jalang* (sing) throughout the night carrying a bowl of rice-wine each. When they finally end their singing before the break of dawn, the honour of partaking in the drinking of the rice-wine is offered to a selected few. These men are usually those who have proved themselves successful in the battle-field, or are descendants of famous men, or persons who have been told in their dreams that they have been endowed with supernatural powers. This drink is called the *ngirup jalong*.

Early in the morning before going to the graveyard and erecting the *sungkup* (small wooden house decorated with the materials woven by the ladies, drinking from the *ngirup buluh* (bamboo) takes place. The drinkers must be well-known personalities.

The festival ends with the erection of the small wooden house in each family graveyard.

#### (d) Gawai Dayak

This is the occasion during which other races are expected to visit the homes of the Ibans. This new festival is celebrated in a similar manner as other known festivals in urban areas.

#### LAND DAYAKS

Like the Ibans, Kayan/Kenyahs, the Land Dayaks celebrate many festivals as a form of worship. However, the best known is *Gawai Sawa*, which is celebrated annually after harvest as a form of thanksgiving and requesting for a bountiful and successful new season. It is usually celebrated sometime in April. The time of celebration is agreed by the village elders at the initiation of the *Tua Kampong* (Village Headman).

Each kampong celebrates this festival at its own convenience. Other villagers are invited to join in the celebration of the festival.

The highlight of the celebration begins when the priests/priestesses start to recite their prayers called *matik* and *nabur* (male priest) and *barih* (priestesses).



Food and drinks of all kinds are prepared for the guests. The food and drink are blessed by the priests sprinkling water by means of *tumbih-birawan* beads. Prayers are also recited.

After food and drinks are served merry-making begins. Traditional dances and songs are performed by experts. This lasts until late the following day.

There is no taboo in connection with this festival.

A day or two after the merry-making has ended the village head would discuss with the village elders the next season's farming area.

## MELANAU

Melanau Muslims adhere to the teachings of Islam in all aspects of life, as the Christians do to the teachings of the Bible. The festival celebrated by these two groups are similar to other races who embrace the same religion.

The Melanaus, irrespective of religion celebrate an annual festival called *Kaul* held sometime between February and March. In this festival the Muslim, Christian and Liko perform their respective prayers for the well-being of the people and the nation. The celebration starts from 8.00 a.m. and ends by midday. Normally, in conjunction with the *Kaul*, regatta, land sports, seni silat and the selection of the 'Kaul Queen' are held. The *Kaul*, a traditional celebration of the Melanaus' is the occasion when the young and old join together in fun, and one dresses in gay clothes, with boats gaily decorated with banners and buntings of comical drawings.

## KAYAN/KENYAH

Kayan/Kenyah traditionally believe that God send messages through certain animals, birds and dreams.

## Dau Tepoko

This is the new year festival of the Kayans. This festival marks the end of the season (harvesting). All forms of food and drinks are provided to ensure a great deal of merry-making and fun. It is during this festival that prayers are made for another successful season and at the same time to thank God (*Lake Tenangan*) for his kindness and bountiful gifts. This festival lasts for two or three days.

During this festival no non-members of the longhouse are permitted to make any visit.

There are other festivals like *Mamat* which is the initiation ceremony and the *Pusau Anak* which is the *Naming Ceremony* (for boys and girls).