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THE NGUREK***Philip Ngau Jalong****INTRODUCTION**

The Ngurek are a small sub group of the Kenyah people about whom very little has been written. Early writers such as Douglas (1911), Blust (1974) and Galvin (1973) referred to them as Murik but the people so referred to call themselves Ngurek. Some early government administrators considered the Ngurek as an intermediate group between the major groups of Kenyah and the Kayan. This short note seeks to offer a better perspective of the Ngurek in relation to their neighbours. However, much of the narrative is based on the experience of the Ngurek Lurah as they migrated from Apau Kayan to the Baram valley.

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THE NGUREK SUBGROUP

There are only two Ngurek longhouses in Sarawak namely, Long Semeyang (32 bilek and about 200 people) and Long Banyo (74 bilek and about 500 people). The majority of the Ngurek are in the Kalimantan area along the upper and middle stretches of Batang Kayan, the Mentarang, and the Upper Mahakam river.

The Ngurek are further divided into three small groups namely, Ngurek Lurah (Long Semeyang and Long Banyo), Ngurek Bahau (Long Payang and a few longhouses in Middle Batang Kayan and Mahakam), and Ngurek Pua (comprising a few longhouses in Upper Bahau and the Mentarang).

A fourth splinter group who speak the Ngurek dialect, perform the same cultural practices and regarded as Ngurek by other Kenyah groups are the Ngurek Berap in the Bahau river. This group consists of a few longhouses. They were the result of intermarriage between the Ngurek Bahau and a small

* The brief account on legend, migration, war and epidemic suffered by the Ngurek had been narrated to the author by his step-grand father Jalong Epi alias Abau Aning who passed away in 1984 at the age of about ninety three years, and by his uncle Wan Lian Api alias Oyau Wan who passed away in March, 1987 at the age of about 86 years. According to Jalong Epi at the time of *Lampu Pecah* i.e. the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883, the Ngurek were still in the Selaan.

Kenyah subgroup call the Berap. The Berap are closely related to the Lepo Ke. There is only one Berap longhouse in the Bahau, and another in the Mentarang.

At one time a Berap longhouse was sited next to a Ngurek longhouse. There were a lot of inter-marriage between the two groups. The Berap feared that their group was slowly being assimilated into the Ngurek. They cooked up a plan to stop this. A local herb was found to have the effect of reducing fertility. The Berap secretly mixed preparations of this herb into the food and drink of the unsuspecting Ngurek. Many Ngurek became *jalo* or childless. The net effect over the years was the decline in the population of the Ngurek. However, by then the Ngurek dialect and way of life had already been adopted by the Berap community. Thus, the Ngurek Berap became what they are today.

THE NGUREK AT APAU KAYAN

Long long ago somewhere at Long Belini in the Bahau valley at Apau Kayan the Ngurek were staying together in more than ten longhouses. The population was quite big. So numerous was their number that in the late afternoon when the ladies were cooking rice for the evening meal the whole of the Bahau valley was covered with smoke which obliterated the afternoon sun. In the morning after taking bath the water dripping from the hair of the numerous young girls could fill several *bungan ayam*, dug-out wooden containers for feeding pigs. They were very successful farmers and hunters with plenty of rice and meat to eat. They were the strongest people in the area, able to defend themselves against others, and made successful attacks on neighbouring tribes.

According to legend the Ngurek around that time were able to communicate with spirits of the dead, especially of their great warriors. Their leader at one time was one Uko Parah Leya. Even after he died his spirit was still among them guiding and protecting them.

It was around that time that the Ngurek acquired the art of cutting stone for coffins. Many of these coffins can still be found in Bahau valley. Some of them had been sealed properly in which the human remains are well kept till today.

THE SHARPENING STONE

The secret that enabled the Ngurek to defend themselves and were successful at attacking others was a sharpening stone, *bato-an* given to one Uko Aban Pandah by Uko Belawing Aya. Uko Aban Pandah received the stone in his dream. Uko Belawing Aya was a human being who had migrated body and soul to *Long Kendi*, the after world for immortal souls. When the Ngurek sharpened their *parang* and spears with the stone they could cut through shields and bones with ease. They could also last longer on the battle fields.

Long Kendi is a place which we might call heaven. In Long Kendi the people never get sick, grow old, or die. They do not have to work. Uko Belawing Aya left the humanly world for Long Kendi because, he was not happy with some of the Ngurek who did not perform their religious duty pro-