

Profile 2: My Journey With The Jarai People

Jarai Costume Recovery

In July 1991, I went back to Chöseâ to work. I prepared some special clothes (the large pants look like skirt) because I knew the indigenous women wore skirts. For me, wearing this way of clothing was very appropriate while staying there. But, on the first day when I wore these cloths, Fr. Tín told me with the challenge: *You can leave your city but you cannot leave your clothes!* I felt hurt and thought inside *do you think that only you*



I get water

can! After lunch, I went to the market to buy 2 meters of blue weft and I sewed the indigenous dress for myself. Two weeks later, a simple old Jarai woman came to beg medicine. When she saw me wearing the indigenous skirt she touched my skirt and said: *Dra hiam, dra hiam!* (Beautiful girl) Even if my skirt was very simple but it was elegant. When I heard her voice I looked at her eyes, which became brighter even though behind it was a deep desolation of poverty and old age. I incidentally discovered the meaning of the indigenous dress like what I wore. And I could understand why Fr. Tín wanted me to follow their way of wearing clothes.

In the past, Jarai people planted cotton, made their cotton material and made their clothes by hand weaving. The background was black. The designs were red, white, yellow, green, sophisticated and harmonious. Making beautiful clothes is a pride for every woman in the community. In terms of the local traditional clothing men wore black loincloths with

designs. They were naked in the upper half. The loincloths for going to the forest were small and short. The loincloths used in festivals were large and long. In old-time, only high-ranking people (Pôtaos, village elderly, village heads and family heads) were allowed to wear long sleeve blouses with a red cloth in front. For ordinary people, they have long sleeve with buttons in front like Chinese clothes and "aban song" (a large piece of cloth used to cover the chest or used as a blanket). Jarai people in Bieãn-Hoà use white loincloths. Jarai women wear skirts, short sleeve blouses or long sleeve blouses with delicate designs. Each village has its own designs with various meanings

In 1991, most of Jarai people were trying to imitate Kinh people (the majority tribal people). The Jarai girls wore pants; only the old women still wore skirts. After I had experience with the old woman about dress, I thought that deep in their mind, their heart still took a fancy to their clothes. Therefore, I suggested to the Jarai who spread the "Good News" to wear their traditional costumes on the first day we celebrated Mass together. But some did not follow this idea because they were shy and did not want to be regarded as uncivilized and backward. Some intellectual Jarai married Kinh wife; they changed their names like Kinh names, spoke Kinh language, stayed in Kinh house's style and when they met Jarai people, they only spoke Kinh language as if they did not belong to Jarai tribe. In Vietnam, many Kinh people look down at the indigenous people therefore the indigenous people want to hide their origin in many ways. The townspeople told many terrible stories about the tribes such as they collected the head of people; they had incantations that made others get sick or die or to fall in love with them, etc. Therefore, in high school, my friends and I used to run away or hide ourselves when we saw the highland people on the streets. Siu Sai told me that when we went to Ho Chi Minh City in 1994,

some of the Kinh people were surprised because the Jarai people did not have the tails like in their stories.

On the Holy Family Day in the year 1992, Bishop Alexis Phaïm Vaên Loăc came to give the rite of Confirmation in Chöseâ. For the first time, there were about 2,000 Catholics including Jarai and Kinh persons. There were about 600 Jarai Christians at that time.

I invited some Jarai women who knew well their traditional dance. And we practiced traditional dance with traditional gongs. In addition, we encouraged the Jarai Catholics to wear their traditional costume. But there were few-traditional clothes in the community because they stopped wearing their costume for more than 17 years already. Therefore, I had to imitate their clothes and sold them at low prices. We also videotaped the mass and showed it to the Jarai people. This was the first time they could see themselves with their traditional costumes and traditional dances in the film therefore, all of them “*hlö tai-boâh*” were excited. They became more beautiful in their costumes and everyone agreed that Jarai costume is very elegant and made them becoming more photogenic.

Many Kinh people borrowed their costumes for a photograph or asked them to take pictures together with them. The Bishop, the priests and the guests also congratulated Jarai people for their music, dances and their costumes. Because of that, Jarai people felt happy and were proud of their culture. We encouraged them more by discussing about other people’s costumes in the world such as in Thailand, India, Japan, China, etc. who still keep on wearing their costumes on special times. After that event, I had a small project with only 400 USD capital to purchase cotton or wool material to supply for the Jarai people and sold at a lower price. They started to make their clothes by hand weaving again. Today, there are more than

thousands Jarai costumes in Chöseâ. And they weaved for me some traditional clothes also. Last summer, when I visited Plôi Tau Klah village, some Jarai women told me, *Don't wear the Kinh clothes which do not fit for you because you become more beautiful in our traditional costume!* After that, they gave me the traditional costume and they changed my clothes to go home at that time.

“Pôsat” (Graveyard) Festival

In 1993, the Nay's kin prayed for their ancestors in PlôiKly's graveyard. There were more than 20 villages which joined in this occasion because there were no “pôsat” festivals from 1975. The Kinh people also joined. The most profound were the old men.



“pôsat” festival

Some sat silently to remember their youth period. Some old women shed tears with joy. Others could not control themselves and told me: *I have thought that I could never listen to the sound made by gongs, I could never dance as in the past. I have never been as happy as today.* . The owner of the gongs told everybody proudly, *I am sure that one day the gong instrument will be revived. Therefore, even if someone will ask me to barter it for rice, I would rather be starving than selling it.* The most impressive sentence was, *Now I am willing to die because I am not afraid of being alone and losing my way when there is no sound made of the gong to lead my way and no one sings and dances around me when I die! Living like that is worth living!* This sentence made me feel the importance of the “Pôsat” festival to Jarai people. After that, they

organized “pôsat” festival yearly because they felt proud when other enjoyed with their music, dance and traditional costume.

The First lesson

Fr. Tín had the big bottle of wine with a lot of baby mice inside. This is a good medicine to cure plague. He said, there were many people who died because of plague that attacked the community. Therefore, I opened a meeting to talk about plague with the Jarai youth. When I said, mice are dirty and pestiferous animals all the youth shouted loudly, =u djô ôâh ! hiam; jôman (not correct! Clean and delicious.) I stopped speaking because they were angry I did not understand what they said and why they became angry. After that, I told to Fr. Tín what happened in our meeting. He smiled and said, *They were angry because mice are their delicious food. And they felt hurt when you said their food is dirty!* I never eat mice therefore I could not guess before that happened.

And from this experience, I always discuss to the Jarai leaders or Fr. Tín every thing before I do them.

Low Value on Education

Fr. Tín invited me to train the Jarai catechists. Before I arrived there, I planned to give them training for three to six months but I could not follow my plan because most of the youths who underwent the training to become catechist did not finish even primary school while others have not gone to school. They had a very low value on education in the whole area. I was very surprised because almost all the indigenous children did not go to school. The parents said

Studying for what? Many people after long time spent for school, in the end they also worked in the farms as everyone. So it better is that we ask our children to work for the Kinh people who will pay them money or rice and clothes and we do not have to pay tuition for education.

Therefore, there were only few schools in some villages. They did not seriously study because they thought that it was useless. How to change this idea was a big question in my mind.

Learning the Jarai Language

First step, I integrated into the village to learn the Jarai language because language is the most important bridge in communication. I went around the different villages to make friends and learn Jarai language. The first Jarai proverb Ama Sim taught me, *Mluk kâo thâo ih!* (Ignorance belongs to me, intellect belongs to you!) Therefore in communication, the Jarai people always listen to and respect others' ideas. And from this view, they remind every one should be humble and learn from others.

We did not have Jarai dictionary so, I had to write down word by word on my book. The most difficult for me was, most of the Jarai people knew only how to speak but rare people knew how to write and they did not have the same in Jarai words. Fr. Tín and Ama Tet explained to me about the Jarai social structure through language. Even though they are Jarai people, they are divided into Jarai Plôi and Jarai Bon with Jarai Plôi as the predominant. That means the Jarai call village "Plôi" and others call village "Bon". Based on the intonation and the language of these two large groups, we can subdivide them into the following small groups:

Jarai Plôi:

- Jarai-Arap: In south west Kontum
- Jarai - Cobuan: in west Gialai, Chu Pah District and Ñöùc Cô District, Gia Lai
- Jarai - Hdrung: in Hdrung (Ham Rong), Pleiku, Ia-Nueng, Gialai
- Jarai: in Chöseâ, Gialai

Jarai Bon:

- Jarai - Cor: In the south of Ayun-Pa, Gialai
- Jarai - Hroai: in the east of Krong-Pa, Gialai
- Jarai - Mthur: in the southeast of Krong-Pa, Gialai
- Jarai - Trung: in the south of Ia-Hleo, Dak-Lak

First time I went to Plôi TaoRong, I did not learn any Jarai word and Amai Kro, the host did not understand my language. Unlucky for me at that night I got high fever, felt very thirsty and there were a lot of mosquitoes because we slept without mosquito net. But I did not know how to ask water and a hand fan. She was very worried that I might die therefore; she prayed and embraced me the whole night. First, I felt not comfortable because she has chest problem and inflamed very big. But after that, I thought that she loved me and I overcame my worry.

It was very marvelous when I could learn to sing Jarai songs and teach in Jarai language after only one month. The children named me “Chim Joâng”; a rackle bird since I learned how to speak as a rackle imitated the human speech.

After that, Fr. Tín and I recorded the catechist songs into the tapes and we sent them to the Jarai villagers who stayed far from us therefore they could learn how to sing by using the tapes.

“Power” Of Folk Song

I followed ama Tet and amí Tet to visit their aunt in Plôi Tau Cuc where there was no Catholics. Ama Tet told me *don't tell them you belong to the Kinh People whom they will not welcome here!*

When we entered the house of Mí Tet's aunt, ama Tet introduced me as a Jarai girl in PlôiKly. They were hesitant to believe because my skin is a little whiter and my voice also is different from theirs, even if ama Tet explained that I have studied for a long time in Hueá City. They still kept the distance from me. I was confused and did not know what to do.

Suddenly, I heard her grandson who was about two years old crying when he woke up. Immediately, I sung the Jarai lullaby *hia oâh! Anaê anaêm hia oâh!* (Don't cry, the baby don't cry!) (Refer to Appendix 3). All the people were surprised and looked at me. The child also stopped crying and looked at me.

After I had finished singing, they became very friendly with me and they said, *for long time already we do not hear this lullaby which is a very sweet song!* They killed a big goat to serve us. And while we were eating, we continued singing and discussing about Jarai folk songs.

Based on that experience, I used lullaby in Christmas tableau. Mary and Joseph sung lullaby to baby Jesus. This moved the *hlö tai-boâh* (impassion of the audiences). There were many people crying, even the Kinh people. The Jarai felt the Holy Family of Jesus was a Jarai family, which was poor and simple. And they could feel that God is very close to them.

Conducting Music Class

The Jarai people enjoyed dancing and singing. I saw some babies who was about 1.5 years old dance in their mothers' backs when they heard the voice of Gongs. Some of Jarai men could play many kinds of musical instruments even if they did not know about



Practicing songs

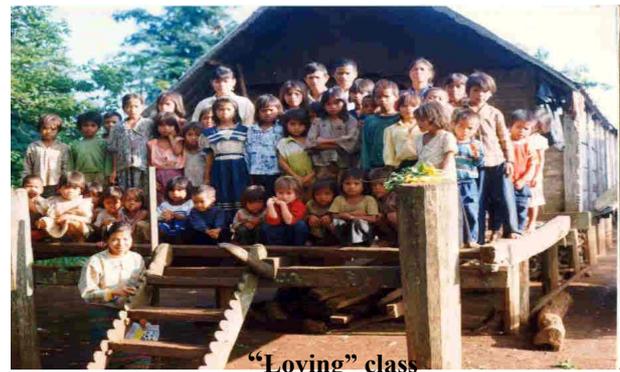
the theory on music. It was easier for me to learn their language through songs. Furthermore, based on my experiences, music made the people closer and become open. Therefore, first I opened a musical class. Fr. Tin was a musician therefore I asked him help when I needed. In the class with the Jarai youth, I was not only a teacher but also a student. Because we used Jarai language, there were many new words for me and I often asked them to translate. When I pronounced wrongly, I made them laugh and they help me to correct therefore the environment of our class was very friendly and lively. When I practiced the song “Nao Ta Nao Hrom, Ayong” (Lets go together, brother!) but I mispronounced *hrom* while singing and I pronounced it as “brom” (Lets caressing of couple, brother!). Until now, we still laughed when we sung this song. On rainy season, there were many white ants flying into our classroom and that was our snack. Those white ants were our delicious snacks if we fried them with oil.

Some of the youth said that I was clever because I could teach them in the Jarai language but I replied that they were more clever than me because some of them could speak the Kinh language (my mother's tongue) fluently. I discovered many students could memorize the songs very fast even if they did go to school. I told *your voice and your memory are better than mine. If you know how to read and write you can become good music instructor.* After that,

they wanted to learn how to read and write. Therefore, I opened the “loving class” project before training them catechism.

The Creation of the Loving Class

When I informed Fr. Tín about handling a “Loving Class” he stopped me and said, *It will not be successful. Before, I opened a “loving class” also but they only*



joined in some weeks. And now, we don't have finance for this class. I told him, They would not improve if their mind about education did not change. Let me try and discuss with some Jarai leaders to find out the way how to solve this problem.

I discussed with Wa Bem first and we agreed to discuss with the villagers about the educational problem. Wa Bem guided the meeting and I was the facilitator. After that, some Jarai teachers volunteered teaching even one of them was a Protestant. Others allowed using their houses for teaching. My group supported and produced the pens, books and oil lamps, and the community made furniture. All Jarai families had created time for attending classes at night. After that, when I visited some “loving class” I saw some children went to class without raincoats or without the sweaters even the weather was very cold. Amí Mi joked her son, Mit saying *I don't allow you to go to class any more*. But Mit, who was 10 years old then, believed that was true therefore, he hid his notebook under his clothes and ran to class without dinner. Now, Mit is studying in eighth grade. After one year, we tried to pay for teachers a little salary because they were poor too. But Amí Khuynh rejected to receive her salary. She told me “I

teach the children in my villages and that is my obligation. Why do you or Father have to pay me?"

In the end, we had 22 classes with 246 students including the Jarai children, the youth and even the adult in our area. Once Fr. Tin told me, *we don't have any money to pay for our teachers tomorrow!* I just kept quiet and prayed inside, *Father, now your turn to work!* and I went to continue training catechists' classes with 67 students. While I was teaching, Fr. Tin called me and said that there were two strangers who visited and asked us about college students that need assistance. I still thought about how to find money for tomorrow so I told the strangers with high voice *Why don't you talk about the primary students? Why don't you think about planting tree but you want to pick up fruit?* They asked me *now, what do you want?* and I said *one million to pay our teachers tomorrow!* and they gave me money. We forgot to ask who they were. In 1997, I met them again in Ho Chi Minh City, Br. Phöông, S.J and Br. Taân, S.J. They said, at that time they thought I was a Jarai girl and they did not understand why they gave me money easily like that!

In my group, we always had the same experiences. Before doing something, we pray and after that we tried to do with all our heart and the result, we leave it for God. We were never worried so much about money and we never lacked money!

Setting up a Formal School

In 1995, Wa Bem and some parents discussed about setting up school buildings in Plôi Hraùi-Dong for their children. More than half of the village participated in developing the work. A group of villagers went to the forest to take wood; a group of carpenters were in charge

of making tables and benches and building classrooms. After one year, when wood was enough, they asked the village head to ask the commune to provide tiles for the school roofs. Each household contributed one can of rice for the volunteers who worked. After two weeks, the school was completed. The villagers made two classrooms of planks and they tried to get the teachers. After some time the Department of Education officially accepted this school. The school records of the children were legalized and the teachers were sent there to teach. In 1996, the government built one new classroom and had the floor cemented. One year later, one more classroom was added.

New Educational Value

Until 2003, a lot of Jarai individuals changed their minds about education. One Chinese group visited some leprosy Jarai villages for charity. They told Fr. Tín, *They are very poor therefore we asked them what they need and we were very surprised when they answered that they expect that there is a school for their children.* In parishes, we always encourage and support Jarai students. In school year 2002-2003 we supported, through scholarships, more than 326 Jarai students from the eighth grade to college and vocational classes. In the beginning of the School Year we also granted gifts and money for all good Jarai students so they can spend it for their studies. The high school headmaster, Mr. Thoï said, *when the Jarai enter into the Church, a lot of their children go to school unlike before, we tried to pull them to go to class but we could not.* And Mr. AÜi, primary school headmaster told me, *Now, maybe there are not enough classrooms for the students. I am very surprised why and how the Jarai people changed*

their minds. Some Jarai parents suggested me to choose good teachers which they never concerned before.

Quality of Education

However, there is still a very big gap between the quality of education in the city and in the mountain. There is lack of school for the indigenous students. From one to three villages they have only first to third classes for primary students and no kindergarten. But most of the classrooms were in bad condition. No proper inspection because schools were far from the main center. Some teachers were lazy and they always asked students to help them to work in the farms.

The biggest problem was the teachers could not understand Jarai culture and Jarai language therefore there find difficulty in teaching. *Hoan, a high school student in Plôi Tao* told me that he expected to be a teacher because in his class, some teachers treated Jarai students very badly when they could not understand their lessons. In one grade class, the teacher showed the hen's picture and asked "what is this?" The students answered "mônuù". The teacher could not understand therefore she continued to ask, "what is mônuù?" The students answered, "This is mônuù". After that, the teacher had to ask a Jarai teacher the meaning of "mônuù?" Because she did not know the Jarai language and her students did not know "mônuù" which is called "con gaø" in Kinh language.

In the rainy season, the county roads are very muddy therefore it is very difficult for children go to school. School fees are free for ethnic students but they have to pay miscellaneous fees therefore, some of them stopped studying. Jarai students always stop

studying to help their families work particularly in the rice or cornfields. Further more, there was much corruption in the school in the mountains because the quality and values were destroyed. Their statement was *who don't know how to "eat" is not human*. Some indigenous students who graduated from college could not find job without money for bribing or have relationship with them. *"Everywhere has fixed price"*. In teaching method, before 1975, the old government allowed teaching indigenous languages and common language in primary school so the ethnic people could study easily. But after the war, ethnic students have to study only using the common language so they cannot understand well and it was very difficult to enter into college.

Catechist's Guidebook

About three months after I arrived in Plôikly, Fr. Tín and I started to prepare Jarai guidebook for catechist. Fr. Phaùn suggested us to base on "Jesus says to the Child" book, which was the French Gospel for the child. We arranged the content following these sequence: The "Good News" – Prayer base on the Good News – some main questions – the songs with dances and games. All things presented the topic of the "Good News" therefore the children easily remembered even if they were illiterate. In the beginning, only Fr. Tín and I worked but later we went to Cheoreo to work together with Ama Leon, Ama Sim, Jieâm and Fr. Phaùn who had an experience to prepare the Catechist guidebook for more than two years with Fr. Traàn Hôõu Thanh in Hoà Chí Minh City. And we thought, the Jarai would enjoy

with what they did. First time, I created the dance for the song but later the catechist groups created by themselves and we combined all the dances at the end of the class.

Training Catechists & Sharing the “Good News”

In Cheoreo Missionary Center, 80 kilometers far from PlôiKly, I went there once a week per month and I gave catechists’ training three days monthly. In PlôiKly Missionary Center,



Catechist class

we had catechist class on Sundays. I also taught directly to the children in some villages, where we did not have catechist classes yet. This was the best joyful period in my life. I walked to their villages, Plôi TaoKlah, Plôi Zang Neng, Plôi Tao }or, Plôi Tung Zao and Plôi Teng Nong, from 7 kilometers to 15 kilometers far from the center. The children always waited for me on the mountain paths with fire woods. One carried my bag and the others held my arms. They treated me like a child because I often fell down into the holes on the path especially during nighttime. Sometimes, while walking we stopped when we heard the sound “chik, chik” of the grasshoppers. Some of them would enter into the brakes to catch the grasshoppers and grilled it with fire wood. They shared the cooked grasshopper to me and said *Ih =ong môh? {u i] hang jôman* (Do you eat? It is very greasy and delicious.) We ate this food and sung while walking therefore we did not feel tired. During rainy season, I had to pass a large spring

to enter the village; but there was no bridge and they put a bamboo tree across the spring. Everyone could pass even the children who walked fast like the monkeys. But I had to creep because I easily fell down into the spring. Sometimes, I could not go back home because the paths were very wet and muddy so I could not walk.



Singing in Plôi Tao-rong

The Jarai people are very hospitable. There is a Jarai proverb saying that, *Yoañ rei, toai truh, Yang truh* (Kinh people come, visitors come, means gods come). Therefore, they always share any kind of food they have. In hard times, the villagers, even they do not have rice they still cooked whatever they had for the guest. I could understand, *the poor have very rich hearts*. They can share to others what they also need as the poor widow in the Gospel (Mt 12,38-44).

Once, I went to Plôi Djreâk to teach at 5 AM. I was surprised when I did not see any child there but some minutes later; all of them went back with a lot of mice. Their faces were bright, they explained,

last night, we went to the farm to trap mice and this morning we got them. Do you want to eat?

In harvest season, they will bring to me whatever they have - corn, pumpkin, jackfruit, etc. If I refused they would be sad.

We often worked at night after they had finished working in their farms or in the early morning at 5 AM before they go to school or helped their parents. The first time I gave dance training to the children in Plôi Taoklah, I planned to quit this dance because they could not dance after one day. But Ama Plep told me *Djôù yôh! Anaù Jarai mluk, =u hlôi hlôi kiang*

pôtoâ kô =ing môi oâh! (Correctly, the Jarai people are stupid therefore, nobody want to teach them!) This statement made me think to try more. I prayed to God *Father, please show me the way how to do it!* After that, I trained one by one. I sat down and sung the song; my hands guided their legs to follow the music. I asked them to keep my head to make sure that they will not fall down while we were dancing. In the evening, I went home and I could not believe when all the Children could dance very well morning of the following day. They said that they did not sleep and tried to practice the dance the whole night. The characteristics of Jarai people are like that. They forget every thing when they enjoyed dancing.

According to Jarai culture, the villagers will sleep in the same house with the guest. Because of that, the girls and the children always slept with me when I stayed in their villages. Sometimes, we could not breathe or move because the floor was too small for all of us. Even I could not sleep but I felt very happy because of their love. One day, we prayed for one dead person and we stayed there from the afternoon till morning of the following day. I felt very tired and found one place outside the house to sleep at around 3 AM already. When I woke up I knew that I slept under the chicken house and guano fell down over me. I wondered why I did not smell anything and I slept very well!

We had no watches, no calendars. We followed the sun and the two seasons. We learned to dance and sing under the moon in the garden because we didn't have electric lights. When there was a full moon, we enjoyed many activities until the morning. We had dinner together anytime we want sometimes at nine o'clock; sometimes at eleven or one time already in the morning! The main food is rice and the subsidiary food is corn. We often had simple kind of food such as salt and chili but I tasted it very delicious and I could eat a lot of rice. The daily foods were vegetables leaves, tubers, salt, chili, cassava leaves and bitter *datura*. Buffaloes, cows, pigs and

chickens are used for worshipping Yang or in special parties. A special food is sticky rice baked in a bamboo tube and baked chicken. First time when they gave me the yellow ants to eat with salt, ants bit my mouth and it swelled right after that. I shouted and cried while everyone laughed loudly. They were surprised of my clumsiness and my face looked funny. During starvation time, they had to eat tubers, corn and porridge for rice but some people still die of starvation.

My weakness

The government did not allow us to share about the “Good News.” And because we did proclaim the “Good News” some catechists were put in jail already. Therefore, I had to sleep outside the parish house when I went to Cheoreo to help the catechists monthly in their activities. Once, I slept in Ama Leon’s house. At night, the dogs barked loudly in front of his house. I was worried so much therefore, I prayed, *Father; You should protect me because I will deny You if You let the police catch me. You created me and You know, I am very weak.* The whole night I could not sleep and hoped the morning would come faster. In the morning, Ama Leon explained to me that the courting couples often sit down under the trees in front of his house therefore, the dogs barked loudly that evening.

God knows my weakness. Therefore, he always protected me out of the hands of the police. Two times, police checked Plôi Kly Missionary Center at night but at that time, I went out for work and slept in the villages. And when I went back to gathering data for my thesis, the major police of Gialai province called my friend, doctor Vinh to ask about me after only one day I left Jarai community to go back Manila. Until now, I did not meet any trouble with the police.

My gift

In the first time I entered the Jarai village for work, Fr. Tin told me, *Don't bring anything. You should eat whatever the villagers give you.* I replied, *I am worried to disturb them because in the hard season, they lack rice.* Fr. Tin asked me, *How much do you eat? Why don't you become a poor person with them? Why don't you give them a chance to give food to you as the host or the rich? Or can you bring food for all the villagers?* Now, I can understand more. If I always bring gift to them, they may be happy because of my gift not because of my presence. And if I cannot send gift to every one, they will be jealous with others. Therefore, that was a good way to keep balance in my relationship with the villagers.

Based on my experiences on how the Jarai welcomed me, I think, the Jarai people want me to listen to them. They want to share what happens in their daily life to me. Sometimes, we laughed together and sometimes, we cried together. Listening with all my heart is a good gift, which I bring to them.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Mt 7,7)

From childhood, my parish priest and my mother used to teach me how to “talk” with Jesus, Mom Mary, Saint Joseph and other Saints everyday. Therefore, I always talked with them about what happens anytime and anywhere like a child talking to her father. I believe that He feels happy and He always accepts whatever I ask if it is really useful for my life because He loves me more than my parents (Mt 7, 7-11).

Before entering into any village, I always thanked God who granted me a good family with enough things. And I prayed for the people in that village because they lacked many things. During rainy season, sometimes, I could not bring with me my raincoat because of my laziness or because it was heavy. I informed God *Father, don't make the rain visit today because I did not bring my raincoat.* Or on the roads, God used the wind to blow the rain showering in front of me. So, I did not get wet even if the road was wet because I talked to Him like this *Father, You know that I did not know how to take medicine and if I got sick, You have to replace me for my work!* And almost all of the Jarai catechists and Fr. Tín have the same experiences with me in this case.

Once, Ama Tet and I went to An-Kheâ about 150 kilometers far from my office by motorcycle. Half way, in Maêng-Yang gorge, our motorcycle stopped working and one stranger drove me to find a machinist. But later, the machinist could not meet Ama Tet and I did not know where he was. I cried and I was worried so much because that was the first time we went there and we did not know anything in this area. I prayed, *Father help me to find him!* After praying, I heard a voice asking me *Little girl, why are you going alone on the street at this time?* I looked back and I saw a young man with his car. I told him about my situation and he said, *I will go to An-Kheâ too. I will help you to find him.* And he drove me to find Ama Tet and invited me for a dinner also.

I have many similar experiences like that during the time I was working there. Before, I could not realize God's presence even I always prayed to Him because He stays in the Church and in Heaven. But now, I pray with my Father, God and I can realize He is always with me

anywhere and anytime. Fr. Phaùn told us, *God is always present on location! The problem is we can see Him or not.*

Yaê H' Pip, old woman in PlôiKly village told us: *I herded the oxen which ran fast and I cannot follow them because I am old already. I prayed to God "Father! I am tired. I cannot go anymore. Please! Stop them so I have time to relax. But don't allow them to go anywhere because I cannot gather them again!* And the oxen stopped walking and they ate grass there.

The youngest of Amí Tit was 5 years old. Once, he followed his parents to their farm by their cart. On the road, they saw the dark cloud - the sign of the heavy rain. The baby folded his hands and prayed *Jesus! Please save me out of the rain, from the very cold weather. Allow us to arrive to our farm first!* After that, the dark cloud moved to other directions and they were not caught by the rain. Amí Tit asked her son *Why do you know how to pray like that?* The kid answered *You taught me and I always see our family praying together!*" Before, Amí Tit's family used to quarrel with their neighbors and she quarreled also with her husband. After they joined into prayer course, they changed. They became friendly with others and they are already ready to serve everyone.

Now, we asked them to write down "the Acts of every village" which will tell about the changes in their life. There are many wonderful things in all the Jarai villages. Their vices are changed. The relationship in the family and in the villages became better. The level and quality of education improves and also the economy has developed.

Fr. Lôïï told me, *When I visit the houses of the Jarai Catholics, I saw their life has improved like their sanitation, education, openness and their economy developed, etc. They also changed their outdated customs and superstitions.*

Camping And Sport

During New Year, the youth and I who were about more than one hundred people often went for camping for three days in the forest. We had contest in singing, dancing, swimming, traditional games etc. We were playing and learning about our culture again.



Camping in Jarai Ni

No wonder, we are part of nature. We always see the sunrise on the yellow rice field in the crop season. We often

heard the sound of the chirping birds in the green mountain. We also took a bath in the crystal clear water of the mighty waterfall in the forest. For instance, we celebrate because it rains, because rain gives water. And we felt happy because the sun shines bright; we can dry corn and rice, etc. We do not have the same concept of time as modern people. I appreciated happiness has nothing to do with money and assets. These are particularly unforgettable moments.

On this time, I could easily identify potential youths who can be leaders. After that I trained them to guide their groups. Therefore, they could organize the camping and other work by themselves during the time I was absent for my studies.

I encouraged and opened “Sport race” including football, volleyball, high jump, long jump in Chöseâ for all the Kinh and Jarai youth. Even the non-Catholics and the Protestants also joined. But unluckily, the police stopped us in the final cup of football.

Learning to work

When I went around Jarai villages, I met a Kinh vendor and she told me that she could buy land and bicycle after only six months for selling there. I found out that it is because she

sold every thing with high price and she bought Jarai products at very low price. Therefore, I suggested the Jarai villagers to open a store when we held our meeting. But all of them gaspingly looked at me and kept quiet. After that, Wa Bem told me *Can you show me one Jarai businessman?* Others asked me, *Why do the Kinh people not feel shy when they sell something for their relatives or neighbors?* I really did not know how to answer their questions because we had very different minds, different cultures. Ama Hai told me his experience in trade. He opened a small shop to sell pepper, salt, dried fish, notebook, etc. but just some month he lost the capital because his relatives or neighbors got and did not pay.

I tried to analyze the use of trade but they kept quiet and at the end Wa Ben told me the following story,

Prior to 1975, in the Jarai villages, Jarai people did not grow fruit trees and they allowed the animal to run freely. Then, Mr. Ama Mi, a government Major living in Plei-Djrek, Nhon-Hoa Commune, Chuse District was a Jarai director who worked for "Minority Community Development" program of the government. He was very kind. He wanted the Jarai villagers to develop so he made them grow fruit trees (custard apples, mangoes and jackfruit...). He encouraged them to raise animals in sheds and pigsties. He punished those who set their animals free by asking them to use their hands to scoop up the excrements of their animals in case they discharged it on the roads.

At that time, Jarai executed the order but they resented because they felt they were coerced to implement what they were told and they were ashamed when they were punished. Therefore, in 1975, when the revolution took Gia-Lai, even though the new government allowed him to retire, when he was on the way home, the Jarai people arrested and killed him in Phu Thien."

And Wa Bem advised me, *You must be patient. We can not do whatever we think that is good or right if the people are not aware of that.*

The Orphan project

Table 3: **Orphan Children**

No	Commune	Village	No. of orphans	No. of caring families
1	Nhon Hoa (14 orphans)	1. Chroh Bo I	10	4
		2. Thong A	4	2
2	Ia Hru (20 orphans)	3. Dang Neng	4	2
		4. Tung Dao	6	2
		5. Luh Ngo	3	1
		6. Tung Mo A	8	2
3	Dun (3 orphans)	7. Tao Rong	3	1
4	H'Bong (5 orphans)	8. Tonung	1	1
		9. Kueng	4	1
5	Ia Lop	10. Jing	1	1
		11. Prāl	8	3
		12. Thir	5	2
		13. Mai	3	1
Total	6 communes	13 villages	60 children	23 families

In 1993, I joined a burial of a mother in Plôi Tung N̄ao. She died after she delivered her child. During the burial, the baby was only 1 week old and no one wanted to take care of him. According to Jarai culture, they planned to feed the baby with alcohol until the baby becomes drunk and then they will bury the baby alive with her mother. I was surprised and asked them *why?* They explained, *We don't have milk to feed the baby and if we had cows' milk, we also did not know how to cook!* This was true because many children died of diarrhea if they

were fed with cows' milk. Other people said that baby's cry would make the mother's soul stay in this world and it could not travel to the other world of the dead.

I asked Ama Tet if we could stop them or not and Ama Tet said that we could. And he suggested me to send the baby to an orphanage. I asked him, *If you were this baby, what do you think when you grow up there without any relatives?* He said, *It is not good way!* I ask him, *In Jarai community, the relatives of the dead mother will always take care of the orphaned children. If we support them to buy cows' milk, will they take care of this baby or not?* Ama Tet was happy and said, *I will ask them. I think they will be happy also when we help them.*

We visited the grandmother of the baby and her son. They were happy and agreed to care of the baby if we supported them the cow's milk. I guided them the way to prepare cow's milk.

After that, I told Madam Raymond Jouan, a Frenchwoman leader of "Hoät Luà" agency to open an "Orphan" project for orphaned babies. In this way, we can support the family who adopted with 50,000 VN dong (4 USD) a month which was donated by some benefactors to enable the orphans to go to school and they can have some rice or milk if the orphans are still drinking milk. On festivals or on the Vietnamese New Year, the benefactors also give new clothes to the orphans. My friend, doctor Vinh who joined our team, took care of the orphans' health, free of charge. We also asked the village's leaders to reconcile the conflicts that were happening between the children and the adopted families. In our meeting, we discussed with the Jarai people about the orphan babies to stop killing and how to help them. We planted pepper and sold it in order to get finance for this project also.

We will continue helping the orphans until they reach 16 years old. We found that the orphans under the care of the community develop normally - materially and physically. They are loved and supported in all aspects by their relatives in the families and their neighbors or fellow villagers. Therefore, they are living happily with their friends of the same age. This way is cheaper and better you raising them in an orphanage. One orphan baby in Tung Moâ was named by my name “Ly”.

At the time, we had been supporting 60 orphans under 10 years of age (22 females and 38 males) who were being raised in 23 families of their relatives in 5 communes and 13 villages in Chöseâ District.

The Jarai Father Role and Responsibility

After burying alive the child subsequent to the death of the mother, I also found the role and responsibility of the father in the Jarai family. According to tradition, the father is "toai" (visitor) or “AmiÊ ta, ama araêng” (Mother is our mother and father is an outsider). Only the mother is the real blood, therefore the relationship between the father and the child is very weak. The father cannot teach the children by scolding or beating them because the maternal family will punish him. The Jarai custom maintains that if the children beat their father, they will be punished (because the father is an outsider) but in the case that the children beat their mother this can be forgotten because the mother is the related blood. Up to the present time, children bear the family name of the mother and they belong to the maternal lineage. Therefore, if the mother dies, the maternal family will take the responsibility to take care of her children. The father has the right to go to his late wife's house to visit his children and to remarry the

sisters of his wife. It is rare to see a father stay as a widower to take care of his children in Jarai community.

Therefore, some fathers didn't have sense of responsibility in their respective families. They were drinking or lazily working. I met an old drinker who lay down on the street after his wife died. Even their children did not expel him from the family but he could not remain as before. He felt alone in his house. Most of the widowers must get married to find a new family.

Even though the husband does not have ownership, he has some rights in regulating the society and the village/s. Men can play the roles of village heads and judges. If women want to protect their family interests, they must speak through their official speakers who are their husbands, their sons-in-law, their brothers or their cousins.

In 1999, we had discussed about this problem with the Jarai people. Everyone agreed that they should change the custom in Jarai related to family. The rights, responsibility between husband and wife should be balance and relationship between father and children should be as close as mother and children. Father could teach the children and children should obey their father. The husband should shoulder the duties with his wife to build a good family. They still agree that a childbearing mother's surname is correct because mother carries the children in her womb and bears the pain at childbirth.

Others Projects

In beginning, PlôiKly team followed the Vietnamese proverb, *Have food, have faith*. It means enough rice, enough clothes, high education which will bring love, equality, peace



and the Jarai people could seek and believe in God. The Jarai people were very poor therefore, Plôikly team tried to support them through some economic development programs such as providing skills training, planting coffee and cashew, credit and saving money, raising oxen, pig, etc. but almost all of the programs failed.

Once Fr. Tín lent them fund for growing coffee or pepper because we saw that they had water and fertile land. They were pleased to receive money and started to grow. But they did not pull weeds and trim the branches. Some did not even water the plants. They answered us naturally after those failures: "You should not ask the ethnic peoples do the same things as Kinh people do, we never can.

After those failures, we understood that they did not see the benefit of their work and not believe in their capacities and they were not aware of those things. That was *Fr. Tín's need*, not the *Jarai people's need*.

Changes Occurring in the Jarai Community

Until Plôikly team discovered their culture and use inculturation through cultural recovery and development work, the Jarai people became God's people with many brothers and sisters who really love them in many ways.

Before, the Jarai people were very shy. The Jarai people could hardly speak in front of others. Only the leaders of the community could. When the youth joined in our meeting they hid themselves in the garden or on the street and looked at our meeting room. I had to pull their hands one by one and asked them to enter our room. During lunchtime also, they would not eat if we did not serve them carefully. The children easily cried when I asked them to dance better, etc. But now, they became courageous and confident. They can share and dance freely in front of others.

They would never forgive or forget if someone did something wrong or bad to them. Their proverb is *Coû treân moã cao tôùi ngöic cuõng khoâng queân ñöôic* or *Hil tôl djei, tôlang chaou tôl môda =u wor oâh!* (Grasses on my tomb are high to your chest, I will not forgive you.) In Plôi Thir, the father killed his children when they made him angry. But after becoming Catholics now, they could forgive and forget other's mistakes. Ama Xöôi in Plôi Tung Ñao told me, *I will hew him by my scimitar because he sold my land. But I remembered Jesus who taught us to forgive therefore I did not!* In family life before, the husband and wife and their relatives would keep other mistakes to punish each other, specially when the husband or wife died. But now, they easily forgive others.

Mr. Saùu Ñòn, a Kinh person and a president of the executive council in Phuù Quang parish said, *The Jarai Catholics changed a lot in their lives. They stopped practicing their superstitious beliefs such as burying the dead on the same tomb and worship-cure. They stopped drinking wine. In family, they know how to respect each other and love each other very clearly. In the society, they also love and unite with other race(s) such as the Kinh people like us.*

Mr. Nay Thai, Jarai lieutenant police of Gialai province said, *The Jarai Catholics have good way of life. They send their children to school and they did not practice superstitious beliefs. They love and help others. And he also said, Father Tín work correctly. He recovered and developed Jarai culture such as our music, costume, festivals, etc. If he did not help the Jarai people who lost our culture already, Jarai maybe vanishing.*

Mr. Nguyeãn Ngoïc Kim, Secretary of Communist Party in Ia Phang commune, said

The Jarai who changed a lot of things followed the Catholic Church. They stopped their superstitious beliefs, out of date customs, drinking, gambling, quarreling and conflict with government. If Father Tín did not teach them, all the Jarai followed the leftist group to against with government already. The Jarai Catholics know how to protect Jarai culture. They are different with the uprooted Protestants. Father Tín is a perfect priest because he joins into social works also. He is very useful for Jarai society.

Motivation of my Work

Ama Tet and others always told me, *Don't get married! If not you do not have time for our community...* But I was joking, *I like but I can not get married because I am an orphan girl here. I don't have the engagement gifts to find a husband!* Because in Jarai culture, in love, when the couples are trying to understand each other, either men or women can play their active roles, but later, women will arrange match makers coming to the men's families. If the men's families agree, the two parties will start the engagement ceremonies. The marriage ceremony will come six months or two years after the engagement. "Trun Sang" is worshipped to see the groom off to the bride's house with men's possessions such as loincloth, shirts, arches, arrows and knives depending on his capacity. The marriage ceremony is organized at the bride's house and all the expenses are borne by the bride's family. The ceremony includes worshipping the house god (Yang Sang) and worshipping for the luck of the groom's family. The bride's family will offer dowry to the groom's family which usually contains bowls, plates, mats and clothes. There is also a marriage worshipping for the young couple

There were many Jarai women who believe my joking, therefore, they immediately said, *Don't worry! We are your mothers here so we will weave costumes for you to offer to your husband's family!* I am really thankful of their love. Some naughty men joked, *Before your father fell in love with the Jarai girl and gave you birth. He brought you to Hueá City therefore*

you do not belong to the Kinh people but you belong to Jarai tribe. When my family asked me to go America, Ama Hieàn told me, *Do not go there because if you go there, you have only a small family, but you have a big family here; our community is your family therefore you can go and stay anywhere as you want!* And I have also that feeling; in Jarai community, I was born again because they took care of me and taught me how to speak, how to walk, how to eat and how to do, etc.

Last year, when I went back to the Jarai community, Mr. Dit, one orphaned child in my project stopped me on the street and he cried and said, *If you stayed home, I would not stop studying and run out of my adopted parent's house. I quarreled with my adopted father therefore I felt very sad but you were not here to share!* I also cried. Some old women told me, *When will you go back here? I miss you so much. I may be dead before you come back here!* or some of the youth said, *I got married early because you are not here therefore there were no new activities for us. We felt sad etc.*

During the time I went out of the community for studies, especially when I wanted to quit my studies because of my limited English, the Jarai community and the Plôi Kly team were the power that helped me to overcome my shortcomings. *How can I explain to the Jarai students if I stopped learning?* this question made me become stronger. And the eyes, which are full of trust and love of the Jarai children, always followed me in my dreams because they also dreamed about me. In ASI, I enjoyed dancing and singing with Jarai costume and music because I hoped that, through me, my professors and my friends would love and understand more about Jarai tribe.

I informed my family before that I do not want to go abroad and I would work there for a long time. Only my oldest brother agreed because he said that I was 28 years old and mature enough to choose the way for my life. But my parents did not agree. They were worried that the mountain was not a good place for my health because when I was born, my one hand and my leg could not move. I had been cured for two years. Nobody, even my doctor could believe that I can recover like other normal children. Therefore, my mother always cried during the time I had been working in the mountain. However, I enjoyed my job and I believed that my family would understand and accept my decision later. And I was correct. About four years after I joined in PlôiKly team my family understood and supported me.

My Feeling Now

Last summer, when I went back to Jarai community for gathering my data, I saw many changes in their villages. I felt very happy. I thanked God because He showed us the ways to go. Father Tín and I did not learn about community development before. We just tried to seek the guiding voice of God on the real needs of the Jarai community and based on their culture. We tried the best what we could do even if we lacked many things. For myself, I just opened my heart to follow the suggestions of the Jarai people, especially the “Tha Plôi” (leaders). Before, we sometimes felt sad and disappointed because we could not see our results immediately. And I lightened my team by this statement *Planting tree spends 10 years, planting people needs 100 years.*

The life of Jarai people always connect with other people, with the natural environment and with God. Therefore our self-empowerment will not be separated from others because the

others' love developed our self-esteem and made us change. And the self-empowerment is not separated from faith in God. But it is the basis of God's power to make ourselves self-empowered. We could only search total Human Development if we put our faith completely in our work. Therefore, even someone mocked at me and said, "No science" when I mixed social work and pastoral work in my research. But **inside my being a Christian community worker it is always accompanied with my being a missionary. And inside my being a missionary it is always mixed with my being a community worker** also. In this sense, the situation of my co-researchers made me experience doing pastoral and social work together although my primary reason of coming to the community was to do catechism. Given the fact of my capacity to work with the community as a community worker I was sent to study social work in the Philippines to enhance my inner gift of doing community and pastoral work. Harnessing my innate potential gives hope to the team and to the Jarai people that a better services can be offered to them in bringing real transformation, development and empowerment. Given this opportunity is a great challenge for me also to meet the expectation of my people and I hope that after finishing my studies I will bring honor for myself, for my people and for God.