

## Foreword

This publication of *Remaining Karen* is intended as a tribute to Ananda Rajah and his consummate skills as an ethnographer. It is also a tribute to his long-term engagement in the study of the Karen. *Remaining Karen* was Ananda Rajah's first focused study of the Sgaw Karen of Palokhi in northern Thailand, which he submitted in 1986 for this PhD in the Department of Anthropology in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University. It is a work of superlative ethnography set in an historical and regional context and as such retains its value to the present.

Throughout his academic career, Ananda would return again and again to the study of the Karen. Initially his focus was specific to the Sgaw Karen but increasingly he took up a concern with the issues of Karen refugees both in Thailand and Burma. At the time of his sudden, untimely death, Ananda was finishing a paper on the Karen naming system and preparing an edited volume on the refugee situation for which he had proposed the tentative title: *Karen refugees in the Thailand-Burma borderlands: Ethnic conflict, flight and cultural change*. Ananda's ethnographic investigations involved a continuing engagement with the Karen and his hesitation in publishing his thesis stemmed from a hope that he would, one day, be able to write an even more comprehensive account of Karen social life. His death has ended this possibility; hence, the need now to make publicly available the considerable work that he had already done on understanding the Karen.

Anthropological fieldwork invariably begins in some microcosm of a much larger community. In Ananda's case, as he makes clear, the Sgaw Karen settlement at Palokhi consisted of just twenty households. It was in the intimacy of this community that Ananda mastered his understanding of Karen ritual and social practice – the basis, as he argued, for a distinctive local Karen identity. His work centred on domestic organization and agricultural rituals from which he developed his notion of a 'procreative model' of social life and, in his final chapter, endeavoured to compare this conception with contrasting notions of origin and identity held by other Karen groups.

The acknowledgements in this work are themselves revealing. They chart Ananda's progress through the different stages of his doctoral research. He alludes to the contributions of his three supervisors. Clearly Gehan Wijeyewardene and Ted Chapman, both Thai specialists and scholars were crucial in their support of his research and formative in their advice to him. My task, as the supervisor with the least knowledge of Thailand, was one of continual interrogation, probing him to explain what needed to be made clear. No less important, however, was the community of fellow students with whom Ananda was in continual discussion while he was in Canberra and a similar community

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of close colleagues at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore where he eventually completed his thesis.

Ananda was the most affable of scholars who enjoyed the conviviality of good company and never tired of engaging conversation. He was able to derive a special personal and intellectual sustenance from this engagement. If there is one memory of Ananda that persists, it is of his love of the camaraderie of his friends and acquaintances. This virtue allowed him to seek out new acquaintances with whom to engage in a variety of different settings and made him an ideal fieldworker and a notable ethnographer.

James J. Fox