

I AM PROUD OF BEING A MYANMAR

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Khin Maung Htwe

To be honest I do not have an exceptional “biography” that I can write about. I had to be honest to confess that I had not done anything to deserve praise. I can only say that Htwe Oo Myanmar had become more popular in these years and that is the only accomplishment I can take pride in. My aim is to present to the world not only Myanmar marionette theatre but also the other aspects of Myanmar culture.



My native is a small village called Laung gyi, in Padigone sub-township of Thegone township, Pyay district in the Bago Region. I am the youngest of 5 siblings. My older brothers had all moved to Yangon when I came of age so my parents also moved to Yangon when I was about to attend the 1st grade. I attended the North Okkalapa Basic Education High School from the 1st to matriculation standard and passed the Matriculation Examinations with 3 distinctions. The marks I attained in the exams made me eligible to apply to the Medical Institute and I so wanted to become a medical doctor. However, both my parents were quite old by that time. My father was suffering the consequences of heavy work in the fields during his prime and now was infirm. So it left only my mother to support me if I attend the Medical Institute. She will have to support me the whole 7 years while I study there. So I had to decide. My parents said nothing to influence me and I decided to abandon my plans to become a medical doctor on my own.

Just at that moment in time when I matriculated, a new system of regional colleges was introduced in our country. So I applied to attend the Regional College No(2) at Hlaing township. As my aim was to continue my studies at the Yangon Institute of Technology and become an engineer I specialized in mathematics. My thinking was that the costs to attend the Yangon Institute of Technology would be much less expensive than attending the Medical Institute. Later I joined the Yangon Institute of Technology and on my 3rd year at the Institute sat for the entrance examinations for the Marine Institute. I passed the entrance examinations and joined the one year basic mercantile marine course. Later I joined the Myanmar Five Star Line as a cadet. After 4 years of seas service I sat for the 2nd Mate qualifying examinations and stayed with Myanmar Five Star Line until 1992 as a merchant marine officer.

Then from 1992 I worked as a merchant marine officer at a foreign owned shipping company but resigned in 2002 to resume my interests in Myanmar culture. I resigned without any blemishes to my record as a merchant marine officer. I resigned with the sole ambition of dedicating my life to promote Myanmar culture. To be honest my wife and I had discussed what career moves we should do after resigning from the merchant marine. We had not decided firmly what we should do however. Being a merchant marine officer I had been to many foreign ports. There I saw many theatres and entertainment places where both locals and foreigners can enjoy their culture. I confess I loved dances and other entertainments since I was young and this was my hidden ambition. Later in 2002 my wife and I were in Thailand as tourists. We visited many entertainment venues at Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Phuket and Ayudhya..

That started me on a train of thoughts: could we not start the same kind of entertainment in our country? There are no such places in our country save for some minor performances arranged by hotels and restaurants for their guests. My idea was to establish such places where people can enjoy cultural performances but I do not have that kind of financial resources.

After resigning from my old job I bought a small Hi Ace micro bus. With this micro bus I take the tourists around Myanmar. Let's say it was my first step into the tourism business. I also studied how others organize

such cultural performances. I tried to gain as much knowledge as possible about the tourism industry. It took me 3 years from 2002 to 2005.

Slowly I became friends with the tourist guides and other tour companies. I began to get an understanding of what the visitors would like to watch when they visit Myanmar, what is needed etc. So I organized Htwe Oo Myanmar Marionette Theatre in 2006. I combined my name Khin Maung Htwe with my wife's name Tin Tin Oo to name my troupe as Htwe Oo.

I have no connection with the Myanmar marionette theatre at all before this venture. My sole conviction to start this was based on my love of Myanmar culture and desire to promote it to the world. When I started this business I approached many who are already in this line of business for cooperation. There were some who do not welcome me and there were those who offered to work together. Another group was the people who thought that being an ex-merchant marine officer I have money to spare and were looking for ways to fleece me. Actually I had been fleeced in many instances.

Since its establishment in 2006 till date I had lost a lot of money. I withstood all these difficulties. I lost all my savings in the very 1st year. In the 2nd year I had to sell my car to finance the troupe. But as both of us were resolute to continue our ambition we persevered. The result of that is now we have a core group of talented Myanmar marionette artistes in our family. When we emptied our pockets to make our dreams come true these people had also stood by us through thick and thin, they did not also care for money and together we fought against all odds. They are my real comrades.

One person who really helped me in my first struggling years was the Myanmar orchestra leader Academy award winner Sein Muttar from Mandalay. He not only help us in any way he could but also encouraged us. He is one exemplary person that I should mention here. As I already have contacts within the tourism industry we were lucky to make our dreams come true.

However, I must admit that I am not really successful yet. I became well known because of my team. We need to show the world not only Myanmar marionette theatre but also other genres too. We have national theatre buildings in our country but we do use them. What is needed is that these must be used to present Myanmar cultural performances regularly. As everybody knows, most of the international tourists want to taste the food then to enjoy the culture of the host country they are visiting. We are proud of the fact that we have our own culture and language but we still lack the actions to present our culture to the world. If tourism industry booms in Myanmar these cultural performances will become pre-requisites. Now what is happening is, the visitors have the desire to see Myanmar cultural performance, they also have the time but nowhere to go and watch!



I love my country and I am proud to be a Myanmar. There is nothing to be ashamed of being poor because we are lagging behind in development. We should never be ashamed to declare ourselves as Myanmar people. So we need to show the world our high standards of our culture and traditions through the medium of these performances. I dream of one day to stage my performances at the National Theatre. I am also trying very hard to expand my performances to reach more people.