



INTER COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND ETHNIC MOVEMENT OF THE KHARAMS IN MANIPUR: AN ETHNO-HISTORICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The Kharams are the indigenous people of Manipur with the settlement mainly in the Senapati District. They have been good inter-community relations with a number of ethnic groups or communities such as the Meiteis, the Aimol, the Chiru, the Koirang, the Rongmei and the Purum from the historical time. Because of the many affinities in the language and culture of the Kharams with that of the those groups, they have been living together sharing and enjoying their respective cultures and traditions with inter-marriage.

KEYWORDS: Kharams, Inter Community, Relation, Inter-Marriage, Affinity.

INTRODUCTION

The Kharams,¹ one of the natives of Manipur belong to Tibeto-Burman family of the Mogolian race.² They are recognized as scheduled tribe by the Government of India only in the year 2003.³ During the first half of 19th century, Chandrakriti Singh the then king of Manipur recognized the Kharam tribe by issuing a royal decree.⁴ The population of this tribe is found in Senapati District particularly in four villages, namely *Kharam Pallen*, *Tampak Kharam*, *Tuisa Phai* and *Laikot Phai*, located on the hill slopes except one. The population of the tribe is about three thousand according to 2011 census. The present article attempts to look into the inter-community relations and ethnic movement in the historical perspective.

Like other tribes of Manipur, the Kharams also trace their origin to a cave. It is in conformity with their folk song sung by female singers locally called *Lapi* group during their annual festival in October, which says: "Look, here we came out from this cave. Our life in this world is enjoyable than in the cave." According to their tradition, there was a tiger at the entrance of the cave, which killed and ate whoever came out of it. One day a man disguising himself as tiger came out of the cave. On seeing him friendly gesture, the tiger remained silent and left the spot. Thus, man emerged out of the cave. It is believed that the said cave is located somewhere near the *Makhel*, about ten kilometers away from *Oklong* village, Senapati District, Manipur.⁵

After emerged out of the cave, the tradition further relates that they settled on the west of *Makhel* at *Makuilongdi*, a big village and in course of time their population increased as many as 7777(seven thousand seven hundred only).⁶ From there, they migrated to southwards following the course of the *Gowai* River and settled at *Gokkoklong*, Tamenglong District along with other tribes like *Rongmei*, *Aimol*, *Chiru* etc. As differences cropped up with the *Rongmei*, they parted from there and migrated southwards and finally settled at *Khudungsaitakboi*, which is believed to be located near the border of *Lushai* hills, present Churachandpur District.⁷ Now, they are found inhabiting



mainly in Senapati District. These people are also found scattered in different villages like *Laikot*, *Charoi Chagotlong*, *Sempangjar*, *Lowangsengol*, *Senam Kom*, *Wakanphai*, *Natok Kabui*, *Gaipuinam*, *Langol Tarung*, *Theiyong* etc. Of these *Laikot*, a *Kom* village, the *Kharam* forms a major population.

Another theory suggests that they along with other groups of Tibeto-Burman family came from south west China. As the *Kharams* are "Tibeto-Burman, they must have lived with other groups of the same family in South West China about 1000 B.C and migrated to their present habitat"⁸ through various routes in batches and at different periods.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The present study has adopted ethno-historical approach. The data are based on available primary and secondary sources like *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, *Ningthourol Lambuba* and *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba*, field works including interviews and other published works relating to the subject concerned.

INTER COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The *Kharam* tribe of Manipur has good inter-community relations with a number of neighboring tribes and non-tribal peoples.⁹ They are the *Aimol*, the *Chiru*, the *Koireng*, the *Rongmei* and the *Purum*. They have similar language and culture with these tribes as result of which some of them live among the *Koms* and followed their customs and traditions for more than one decade and some still practicing their traditions. Inter-marriage within these tribes is permitted. In addition to this, they took the help of the *Purums* to gain the political acceptance in the mainstream Indian population.

The *Kharams* and the *Aimol*

The *Kharam* speak a dialect similar to that of the *Aimols*. They understand each others' language. Thus, they mixed with the *Aimols* at different stages of migration. Till today the *Kharams* have a good relation with the *Aimols* but inter-marriage between them does not take place.

The *Kharams* and the *Chirus*

The *Kharams* have a similar culture with that of the *Chirus* and lived together prosperously at *Gokoklong*. They have a good relation with this tribe also. This relationship leads to the formation of the the *Kom Ren Union*, a configuration of the *Aimols*, the *Chirus*, the *Koms* and the *Purums*.¹⁰ The *Kharams* were also a member of it at one time and some section of this population are still continues it.

The *Kharams* and the *Koirengs*

The *Kharams* have a good inter-community relation with the *Koirengs* since the time when they settled at *Khudungseitaakboi*. They lived there together with other tribes like the *Aimols*, the *Chirus*, the *Koms*, the *Rongmeis* and the *Purums*.¹¹ Till today they are living together as neighbouring villages. For example, the *Kharam Pallen*, the oldest *Kharam* village still exists with the oldest *Koireng* village called the *Longa Koireng* (now known as the *Maha Koireng*) village. Both of them enjoyed and shared everything as a member of the *Kom Ren Union*. It is also necessary to remember that the *Kharams* never joined the union as a permanent member but it frequently joint in and out. There are some cases of inter-marriage between these two tribes.

The *Kharam* and the *Koms*

As stated above, the *Kharams* have a closed inter-community relation with the *Kom* tribe. They are always associating with this tribe from the time immemorial and it continues till today. In the year 1932, Mr. S Neisinphun,¹² a *Kharam* man from the *Kharam Pallen* married the daughter of the then chief of the *Laikot Kom* village. He stayed there permanently after his spousal. He was followed by his own brother Mr. S.Neisisong in 1946. In the early part of 1966, a land dispute between the *Kharam Pallen* and their neighbouring villages was taken place. At the same time they were oppressed by the *Naga* insurgents. Many

Kharams, due to the fear of the oppression, fled from their original village in 1966 and 1967. Thus ten Kharam families migrated to the Laikot Kom village and there start the co-existence of these two ethnic groups. Here the Kharam speak their tongue whereas the Koms speak their own dialect. Then in 1977 they bought some portion of the Laikot village land and there a new Kharam village, called the Phaizol was founded in 1979 according to the Kharam custom. It is interesting to note that many Kharam families (twenty-two families) are still living in the Laikot Kom village and practising their own customs and traditions independently.

Similarly the Kharams of Tuisenphai also the migrants from the Kharam Pallen village. They at first took shelter at the Theiyong Kom village in 1965. The first settler was Mr. S. Longkhasel.¹³ He married a Kom lady and stayed there. He was followed by a number of Kharam families. In this way the two tribes lived together for a number of years. Unlike the case of the Kharams of the Laikot village, the Kharams of the Theiyong village followed the Kom customs and traditions. After nine years of their co-existence, the co-villager Kharams bought a small portion of land from the Theiyong village chief and established the present Tuisenphai village in 1975. In this case also some Kharam families still attached to the original Theiyong village. Thus, the Kharams have a close inter-community relationship and there are a number of evidences of inter-marriage between these two tribes.

The Kharams and the Kabuis/Rongmeis

The Kharams lived together with the Kabuis/Rongmeis at Gokoklong.¹⁴ The Kharams were very prosperous while staying at this village. There they performed many festivals including the *Inhong* feast-of-merit. At that time the Kabuis/Rongmeis demanded the merit-seeker to kill thirty buffaloes. In addition to this, the Kabuis/Rongmeis asked the Kharams to observe a collective village *genna* called *ser*. The Kharams do not accepted the proposal. After that *Inhong* feast-of-merit, the two ethnic groups parted from there and the Kharams moved southwards and settled at Khudungseitaakboi. Then in the year 1954, three Kharam families embraced Christianity under the influence of the Christian Rongmeis.¹⁵ They were followed by many families in the village. These families joined the Rongmei Naga Baptist Association and it is still continuing. Thus, the Kharam tribe has a good relation with the Rongmei tribe too.

The Kharams and the Purums

The Kharams were wiped out from the list of the Scheduled Tribes of Manipur when the Government of India amended the Constitution of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes List (Modification) Order 1956, Part: X, Manipur. Then this tribe joined the Purums to avail of some facility from the Government by identifying themselves as Purum in their school and office records. In the year 1971, the Kharams and the Purums decided to form a common social organization under the banner of the Purum Kharam Youth Organization.¹⁶ These two ethnic groups share certain affinity in language and culture. In 1987 the Kharams ultimately felt the necessity to stand on their own feet without leaning on the shoulders of other tribes and it leads to formation an organization of their own tribe called the Kharam Tribe Organization.¹⁷ In this way the Kharams lived happily with the Purums for a number of years. Inter-marriage between them is also permitted. Thus they have a relation with the Purum tribe.

Ethnic Movement

According to the historical records like the *Ningthourol Lambuba*, *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* and *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the Kharams were known by their village names (e.g. *Kharam Achiba's* village) and they were defeated by several kings of the Meitei and the Moirang principality. For instance, *Shonglen Lanthaba* (1054-1083) invaded *Ningoang Kharam* village and destroyed it and *Chingkhuh Telheiba* (1083-1138) the successor of *Shonglen Lanthaba* also defeated the *Kharam Tushen*.¹⁸ *Yoiremba* (1263-1313) invaded and conquered the Kharams of *Saichungleng*.¹⁹ Then *Sana Hongpa* (1381- 1432) defeated the *Mande Kharams*.²⁰

The different villages invaded and defeated by the Meitei kings. The *Kharam Tushuk* by *Chingkhong Lemngaingamba* (1515-1523);²¹ The *Kharam Tombi* by *Keinou Chalamba* (1545-1562);²² the *Kharam Tushuk* again defeated jointly by *Charairongba* (1697-1709)²³ and *Khokkhei Lonyanba* (1697-1713); the *Kharam Langte* by *Nungnang Telheiba* (1743-1767)²⁴ and so on. During the time of king Khagemba, the Kharams were tortured by other tribes and consequently they were given protection by the king of Manipur.²⁵

In their history of origin and migration it is clearly shown that they resettled at the *Kharam Pallen* during the reign of king Chandrakriti (1864) as they faced extinction and some of them became slaves to other tribes. Since then they became the subjects of the Meitei kings.²⁶ They did not join the First World War as no one was recruited as labour or sepoy by the then Meitei king. In the meantime the Kuki Rebellion broke out in 1917 due to further recruitment of excess labour.²⁷ During this period the Kharams suffered a lot from the attacks of the Kukis. At that time there were only thirty households in the *Kharam Pallen* village. Out of these thirty households they killed forty individuals including thirty females. Moreover, another seven individuals consisting of four children and three females were taken as war captives.

As soon as the war was over, the war captives were brought home (except a child). Each captive was brought back. Thus a mother and a child were brought from *Moyulon* village on payment of two gongs. The same payment was also made for two boys from *Loibol* village and another mother and her child from *Henglep Loingaiya* village respectively. The seventh individual (who was a boy of six years old) was lost and no one could trace his whereabouts.

Each Kharam family received Rs.400 (four hundred) per house as compensation for their lost houses in the First World War and Rs.300 (three hundred) per head for the deceased individuals during the war.²⁸ The compensation thus they received could not recover their loss in that war. All the times they were the losers. It is recorded in their folk songs.

During the Second World War too they were affected by the British army.²⁹ At first, the Japanese soldiers took shelter near the *Kharam Pallen* village and the villagers on the request of the soldiers supply their ration daily. On hearing this news, a troop of British army planned to attack the Japanese counterpart. On receiving some clues of this secret plan of the British army, the Kharam guides of *Kharam Pallen* informed the Japanese soldiers to vacate the camp for their safety. As directed by their guides, the soldiers abandoned the camp for *Longmai (Noneh)*. On the same day, the British army consisting of one hundred soldiers attacked the abandoned Japanese camp and destroyed them. Five days later the same British army approached to the *Kharam Pallen* village and forced them to send eight Kharam people along with them up to *Noney* where the Japanese soldiers took shelter.

On reaching the targeted spot, the British army broke an open fire and killed five Japanese soldiers. After half an hour's encounter, the latter came forward and fight with their swords and killed sixty British sepoys on the spot. In the encounter two Kharam guides were also lost their lives. At last, the remaining forty British soldiers returned to their base camp at *Letlong* and the six Kharam guides to their respective homes.

Some days later, about three hundred British army came to the *Kharam Pallen* village. They encamped there in three groups. One group took shelter at the residence of Mr. Huirireit, another group resides at the residential area of Mr. Khalosong while the third group camped at the dancing ground of the village called the *Lamtol*. They stayed there for more than one month. Thus they left the village when the Japanese war was over. After the independence of India, in the year 1949 an association of twenty two tribes was formed under the banner of Kulmi National Union and Mr. Teba Kilong, the then Forest Minister, government of Manipur, was its president.³⁰ He submitted a memorandum to the Dewan of Manipur appealing for the recognition of these twenty two tribes like the Aimol, the Baite, the Changsan, the Gangte, the Hanghal, the Hlangum, the Kom, the Lengthang, the Lunkim, the Manlun Manchang, the Maring, the Mate, the Moyon, the Paite, the Purum, the Suam Dounge, the Simte, the Tarao, the Vaiphei and the Zou. But they were not recognized as the Scheduled Tribe, the Kharams sought the help of other tribes. In the year 1971, they had connected with the Purums and decided to form a common platform under the banner of the *Purum Kharam Youth Organization*.³¹ It is an effort of the Kharams to assert themselves as a

recognized tribe. Although sharing certain affinity with the Purum tribe in language and culture, they ultimately felt the necessity of standing on their own feet without leaning to others. Thus after seventeen years of their affiliation to the Purum, the Kharams residing in different five villages join hands and form the *Kharam Tribe Organization* in the year 1987. This organization was formed with a view to address their grievances to the Government of Manipur as well as to the Union Government of India.

After the Kuki Rebellion, the Kharams took shelter at the *Khumbong* refugee camp on the request of the then king. They were paid two basketfuls of silver coins to settle there (*Khumbong*) and each family received five hundred silver coins. For more than half of a decade they settled at *Khumbong*. Then some families returned to their original village, the Kharam Pallen while some of them (fifteen families) settled at the present village the Kharam Tampak. Today there are only eight families.

The Kharams who established the *Phaizol* village were from the *Kharam Pallen* village. At first a Kharam man called *S. Neisinhun* married a Kom lady and settled there in the year 1932. That Kom lady was the daughter of the then *Khullakpa* of the Laikot village. In the later part of 1940s the two brothers of Mr. *S. Neisinhun* followed him and settled there. The next wave of migration took place in the year 1966 and 1967.³²

In the year 1977, the Kharams purchased a new village land from the Laikot Kom village and in 1979 they laid the foundation stone. There they also performed the usual Kharam rituals. In the same year they settled in this new village. They have given the name of this village as the *Phaizol*. It has an area of four square kilometres. Similarly the Kharams who established the *Tuisenphai* village were also the Kharams of the *Kharam Pallen* village. In 1965 a Kharam man called Mr. *S. Longkhasel* married a Kom lady and settled there. He was followed by another two families of Mr. *S. Longkhaphun* and Mr. *S. Longkhongam* in the year 1966. These three Kharams went to the *Theiyong Kom* village chief and requested him and his councilors to permit them to live together there. The three Kharams offer a pot of rice-beer to the village council. The *Theiyong Kom* village council accepted their request on the condition that they (the Kharams) should follow the Kom tradition. Thus each party accepted the decision and settled there together up to the last part of 1975.

One day the Kharams expressed their desire to live separately. After a prolonged discussion, the *Theiyong Kom* village council permitted the Kharams to settle in separate area. For that the Kharams paid Rs.15000/- as the cost price of the new village land. In addition to this they also feasted the *Theiyong* villagers with the meat of a cow and a pot of rice-beer. Then, all the Kharams except two families staying in the *Theiyong Kom* village shifted to their new village *Tuisenphai*. There too they performed all the necessary Kharam rituals.

In this way the only one Kharam village called the *Kharam Pallen* has got three off shoots viz. the *Tampak Kharam*, the *Phaizol* and the *Tuisenphai* in the year 1924, 1932 and 1965. Thus the Kharams have been living under the banner of different tribes. They are the Koms, the Purums and the Rongmeis. Moreover, some Kharams (twenty two families) are still living in the *Laikot Kom* village.

Thus, all the Kharams living in these five villages filed a joint petition for the first time in the month of July 1990 to the governor of Manipur. It was followed by the chiefs of the five Kharam villages including *Laikot* village, where the Kharam form the major population. It was a memorandum submitted to the minister of welfare, Govt. of Manipur, dated the 18th July, 1990 to recognize them as a full-fledged Scheduled tribe of Manipur. It was followed by another petition made on 26th October, 1992 appealing the same issue of recognition. The Kharams faced many problems for their existence. At last they won the race; on the 8th of 2003, the Kharam became the full fledged tribe of Manipur under the constitution of India. Now, they get all the facilities of a scheduled tribe of Manipur.

CONCLUSION

The Kharams, one of the least populous tribes Manipur are found inhabiting in four villages, *Senapati District* with a population of three thousands souls. They had good inter-community relations with a number of neighboring tribes like the *Aimols*, the *Chirus*, the *Koirengs*, the *Rongmeis* and the *Purums* and the *Meiteis*

of the valley. They have similar language and culture with these tribes. The Koms followed their customs and traditions for more than one decade and some still observing their traditions. Inter-marriage within these tribes is permitted. Due to conflict with the neighboring tribes in different period of times they moved to different places for safety. In the course of their movement they came in contact with the Meitei Kings who gave protection and resettled them in their original villages. The Kharams like other tribes had to face many problems for existence and finally in the year 2003, they got the recognition as full fledged scheduled tribe of Manipur.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- ³ The Gazette of India Extraordinary Part II, Section I; The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Order(Amendment) Act 2002, The 2nd Schedule, Part X, Manipur 2003, p. 6 (See Annexure-XIV).
- ⁴ L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1989, p. 35.
- ⁵ Personal interview with R. Reikholin(65) of Kharam Pallen, Senapati District, Manipur
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- ⁹ Mutum Bokul, Life and culture of the Kharam in the *journal of Anthropological Society of Manipur*, Vol-2, Imphal, 1995, p. 55-56; also see L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, op.cit, p. 32.
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- ¹³ Ibid, p. 10.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p. 32.
- ¹⁵ Rajesh Salam, op.cit, p. 34.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, p. 35.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, p. 34.
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- ²⁰ Ibid, pp. 53-55.
- ²¹ O. Bhogeshwor, *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba*, Ahanba Sharuk, Imphal, 1967, p. 242.
- ²² Ibid, pp. 262-263.
- ²³ Ibid, pp. 337 - 338.
- ²⁴ O. Bhogeshwor, op.cit, 1988, pp, 99-100, 226-227.
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- ²⁶ L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, op.cit, p. 358.
- ²⁷ Gina Shangkhram, op.cit, p. 51.
- ²⁸ Ibid, p. 53.
- ²⁹ Ibid, pp. 55-56.
- ³⁰ Rajesh Salam, op.cit, p. 37.
- ³¹ As Reported by Mr. R. Thentinger and Mr. R. Umsosan, President Kharam Tribe Union.
- ³² Gina Shankham, op.cit, p. 13.