

Introduction To Origin Of Hmar Tribe

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Abstract: The Hmars belongs to the Mizo-Kuki-Chin group of the tribes. They speak the Hmar languages which, according to G.A. Grierson, belong to the Tibeto- Burman languages. They claimed that Manmasi was their ancestor and therefore called themselves as 'Manmasi Nau'(the children on offspring of Manmasi).

The origin of the Hmars can be traced through their traditional songs, countless poems and legends though it is difficult to specify the exact location of their origin. However, traces have been found in poems and legends that they crossed the mountain Himalayas. According to L.H. Songate their colonization or settlement in Shan states was marked by a period of thriving condition and life of ease.

Keywords: Hmar; Origin; Migration; Settlement; Sinlung; Lushai

I. INTRODUCTION

The Hmars are one of the numerous tribes who have been living in the states of Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Upper Burma and Chittagong Hill tracts of the present Bangladesh. Till a few centuries ago they were not the very well known people, because the published works dealing with the Hmars were very rare and limited. Like many other tribal group, the Hmars has no written historical records in the past. Their origin, history and culture can only be constructed with the help of their rich oral tradition, which have been handed down through words of mouth from generation to generation.

The word 'Hmars' literary means 'North' It is believed that they came to be known as 'Hmar' for they were living in the north of Lushai hills. If this is true, then 'Hmar' as a nomenclature, would be of a recent origin, another opinion holds that the term 'Hmar' is derived from the word 'Marh' or 'Mhar' that means tying of ones hair in a knot on the back. Tradition tells that the ancestors of the Hmars, Tukbemsawm tied his hair in a knot on his back, and since then, he and his progenies come to be known as the Hmars. Yet another opinion contends that the term 'Hmar' arises from the Chin language 'Mar'. Lt. Col J. Shakespher wrote that the chins called them Mar.

The Hmars were however, identified as 'Kukis' by the Vais (plain people). It is not clear why the people of the plains called them 'Kukis', but the Hmars had never identified or called themselves as kukis. They claimed that they are a distinct race different from it. J.W. Edgar, a civil officer who accompanied the british colume to Tipaimukh on 3rd April 1872 writes that the term 'kukis' was used by the Bengalis to refer to the hill people but none of the people wanted to be called by this term. He continued, "I have never found any trace of a common name for the tribe among them, although they seems to consider different families belong to the single group, which is certainly co existence with what we call the kuki tribe". Lt Col. G. Shakesphere in his book "The Lushai-kuki clans" put the Hmars under the common name of 'Old Kuki' and 'Khawtlang' to differentiate them from the Lushai and those currently known as Kukis. The reason why the Hmars were identified by this name was that the Hmars were too clannish and preferred to be identified by the name of their clans rather than by a common nomenclature. The earlier writers therefore could not find a common name for them, and seems to identify them as they demand appropriate.

Whatever the case is, it still not clear how the Hmars got their name. As Lal Dena, a Hmar historian, writes, "whatever may be the truth; this much is clear to us that the term Hmar

had not gained popularity when the Hmars first come into contact with the british”

II. ORIGIN

The origin of the Hmars can be traced through their traditional songs, countless poems and legends though it is difficult to specify the exact location of their origin. According to the Hmar traditions, the ancient home of the hmars is called ‘ Sinlung’ The word Sinlung is sometimes pronounced as Chhinlung. Sinlung means a great stone cave. The Hmars believed that they originated from the cave. The Hmars forefathers claimed that they are Manmasi. The descendants of Manmasi come out from Sinlung. The tradition and civilization of Sinlung had been handed down from generation to generation. The Hmar still sing the glories of Sinlung with rapt and reverent admiration. The traditional song is:

Kan siengna Sinlung ram hmingthang,
Ka na ram ka pa ram ngai.
Chawngil ang kokir their Changsien
Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai
The song can be translated as
My motherland famous *Sinlung*,
Home of my own ancestors
Could it be called like Chawngil
Home of my own ancestors

The tradition of sinlung has been supported by many writers. Those who wrote about Mizo-Kuki-Chin tobes. Among the writers, L.H. Songate is one who supported the sinlung tradition in his book “Hmar Chanchin” (History of Hmar). According to him, Hmars ancestors were Manmasi. For him the Location of Sinlung is to be the present Jaiting or Sinlung in south west China. Hmar forefathers also claimed and suggested the ancestral home of the Hmar is somewhere in central Asia or china. Some of the settlers Sinlung home conjectured their subsequent nomadic life to have come of their inability to repel their enemies while they were in sinlung one of these poems significantly sings about their starting point of historical migration. The song goes like this:

Khaw Sinlung-ah,
Kawt siel ang ka gwng suok a;
Mi le rel to tam a li,
Hiemi hrai a.
The song can be translated as-
Out of city Sinlung,
I jumped out like a siel (mithem);
Innumerable were the ancestors;
With the children of men

From the above poem we can learn that they were pushed out by a stranger power on people (I jumped out like a siel). A siel or mithun jumps out of the fence only when closed or driven by a fierce force. Innumerable were the people they met as they jumped out. According to H.Songate there was a cruel king Shih-Haungti by name who built a great wall where the people were forced to build the stocked. During these days many of them were under captivity or house of detention. Excluding women and children. Most of them faced acute oppression and mal treatment in the construction of that great

wall or fortress. At the same time many of them lost their lives. Furthermore, when the king Haungti died in 212 B.C. the government of China fell down and the regime of Haungti collapsed. As a result many of the tribes secretly come out and escaped from the clutches of the king Huangti. In such a deplorable situation the descendants of manmasi (Hmar) too come out from Sinlung with other tribes’ escapists. This incident took place around 200 B.C.

III. MIGRATION

It is not possible to give the exact time and date of departure from Sinlung and the original route they followed is uncertain to this day. However, traces have been found in poems and legends that they crossed the mountain Himalayas. This tradition is supported by Hmar folk songs as:

“Jiena Kachin lei,
Ka pa leileng Himalawi”,
The song can be translated as,
My ancient soil,
The soil of my grand fathers Himalawi

R, Pudaite assert that the name of the Himalayas was originally given by the moving tribes such as Hmars, Lushais, Biates and Kukis. In the Hmar languages or turning away from a hill or mountain is called ‘Himalawi’. When the moving multitude of migrants came to the foot of the mountain, it was impossible to cross the mountains with womens and children. The Leaders or elders took counsel and said “Hi ei hma tlang hi chu lawi el ei tih” (let us circumvent or circumambulate this mountains before us). They turned south east ward and across the mountains on a lower altitude. They med the mountain Himalawi which means curmilinear motion turning away from mountains, and thus the present term Himalayas or Himalayas.

After turning eastward, they met a tribe known to them as Misimi who were ahead of them. They were friendly to them and they settled with them about a generation. After generation, the Hmars moved on eastward in search of new lands and territory. After a year of travel, they reached the riverbank of a large river where they stayed for many weeks, because they could not cross the river since they could not have enough food to eat, they lived on crabs for some weeks. They named the river Airawdung (Ai-crab, raw- burn, dung-valley) valley of roasting crabs or river of burning crab. It is believed that the Airawdung is the present Irrawady valley of Burma (now in Myanmar). After staying many weeks, they saw that one rabbit floating on the trunk of a tree on the river. From this incident, they learnt how to make a boat or raft. They made raft bamboos and floated across the river. This was the beginning of their invention of canoes. They encountered a strong tribal group across the river. They fought a fierce battle against them and later forced their way into the new territory. They as ‘Tai’ or ‘Shan’ knew the people they met

The Hmars migrated from Sinlung through Himalayas and reached the Shan state around 8th century A.D. According to L.H. Songate their entry into Shan was not with strong opposition and they finally fought their way into it. One of the poets put their encounter in song

Ka pa lamthak a thain dan

Sinlung lamtlak aw a thain dang,
Shan khoah thapo in vang,
Iuoichawgin harnilu a thlunea,
Thlamu sieknu kemin hrib
Fainghawngak hranlu bah kansal
The translation is as follows
My father's steps were indeed, distinctively good,
Sinlung steps were indeed, distinctively good,
Few are the good men in shan state
Where Iuoichang brought the enemy's head
You talked of tips with eagle's clans (meaning war)
And we hang the heads high with rope

From the above poetical narratives they fought formidable enemies and defeated them however the region and the land was attractive for their agricultural cultivation and eventually they settled there.

IV. SETTLEMENT

According to L.H. Songate their colonization or settlement in Shan states was marked by a period of thriving condition and life of ease. At the same time further than Sinlung. They learned better art of war and knew how to observe and celebrate religious festivals. They learned more of the usage of iron implements and making pipes (out of bass). Since the land was fertile, they had enough agricultural products to enjoy. The life of the people especially young man and young women were contentment and happiness. They spent and enjoyed a life of satisfaction. Their blissful life can be indicated through this traditional song:

“shan khus fiertei tha var inthang,
Naufain ngaknu lien inthang,
Lawm lwi insa, khawmual inshawi
The translation is as follows:
The spring water of Shan village, excels in purity
Children drawing like shining swords;
Damsels big and handsome
Making abode blissful and pleasant”.

From their poetical expression we can understand that they were successful in every way of their subsistence, especially in their cultivation, and fighting their foe. In order to show their successful life one of their poets wrote their reputation and splendour with the following verse.

Many of their great festivals were connected with their Shan state civilization Khuonglawm (spring festival), Lunglak (autumn festival), and Sessun (solemn celebration) all are connected with shan. So great was their success that one of their poets reminisced about their glory with following verse:

Shan khus thlangfu put ling tlang e,
I do thlunglu bakin salhi,
So sawnfa tnlak ku laini tha
Thal khatin lan ei de ning
The translation is as follows:
Sons of western Shan state look lovable,
But you sounded out only war,
With our abundant harvest and men of war
We will make you a spring time festival

The Hmars tribes established their settlement in Shan state (Part of China) for generation with a prosperous life.

Their prosperity was interpreted by a disastrous famine. Since the famine was so severe the whole tribe moved towards the north and northwest in search of food, new productive land and more fertile regions. One of the traditional songs sung by the Hmars in pensive mood and deep melancholy after their bitter experience in Shan tells us:

“Shan khuow tinpier a tla,
Lairaten do zo love;
Ropui se le sawmfang gil ang ko,
Kaia hruite sei gama,
Ei khaw sip khus lam ang zawng.”

The translation is as follows:
A great famine broke out in Shan village,
The poor being unable to outline (survive)
Every rule and every device made
Invoking (calling), rice intently,
Resorting to the stem (creeper) of yam for its tuber
Limping back to our village situated on top of a hill

After travelling for many days and months in great hardship, starvation, they finally entered the unoccupied fertile areas of Kolhai on Valley of Burma (now Myanmar). They established their settlement in the areas of Kabaw and chinwind valley of Burma. In connection to this migration story, m. Kipgen writes “They seem to have entered in Burma along one of the North eastern river valley and then turned towards the west into the upper reaches of the Chinwind River sometimes in the early centuries of Christian era. Furthermore, he says that during this period of migration, the dispersion took place from the main body.

According to L.H. Songate after arrival in the kawphai Khapat in the kabaw valley of Burma (Myanmar) they made their habitation in the valley. It was here they have (Rongpui) king Chawnmwang by name. The king Renpui selected three chiefs (Rengs) to govern his kingdom. Subsequently, Chawnmang empowered Lersia by name to rule over the southern part of the kingdom. The king to rule over the northern part of his country entrusted Fingthls. The last chief (reng) was authorized to reign the middle part of his empire. In memory of reminiscence of the reign of king Chawnmang one of the poets put in song as:

“Simah lersi, hmarah zingthb
Khawmalaiatu Luopui
Luoipui in lenbung a phun
Lhawthlang puolrangin tlan ile
The translation is as follows:
On the south is chief, Lersi
On the north, Chief Zingthlo;
At the centre, chief Luopui;
Luopui planted a banyan tree
The hornbill feed on its fruits

The Manmasi or the Hmar tribe habitation in Kawlphai lasted for about 200 years. According to Mizo historian, the exodus from Kawlphai Khampal (Burma) to Lushai Hills through Chin Hills has caused by a severe famine and due to the cruelty of the new chief of their village. Another reason might be the search of better land. The time and date of this departure is not recorded, but some historians believe and suggested that most probably it happened in the early centuries of Christian era.

The first wave of migration includes khawbung, zote, biete, helte, Dangawn, Leiti, Lungtar. The Hmars, Biates, Rangkhoh, Chorais were known as old kukis in these days to the Begalis or foreigners. The Hmars were known as Khawtlang or westerners to the kukis or Khawbung and Lushaia in those days.

The above Khawtlang or western tribes are said to have first entered the present Mizoram through Chin Hills and another group entered Manipur through Mizoram. They settled in Champhai area and in different parts of Mizoram and made their village at different places of present Mizoram. Many of these villages are still in existence within the same name to this day. Example one of this are Zote, Khawbung, biate, Phaileng, Teidam, Mualcheng etc.

Due to various circumstances like oppression of the Lushai chiefs, the Hmars settled in Mizoram left Mizoram in several batches which resulted in their dispersion.

On studying the most authentic traditional stories by deducing the oral traditional records, the Mizos and hmar historian have suggested that the different ethnic groups of the same Mongoloid stock left Mizoram before 15th Century A.D. and continued their same nomadic life till they reached the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Arakan Hills and finally settled down there.

The second batch of the Hmars settled in Mizoram, Lushai Hill and Migrated to southern Manipur and established three villages successively Thiek, Singawl and Thangching from Thangching they migrated to suorgsang in the present Tamenglong district of Manipur.

The third batch left the Lushai Hills in a smaller stream. After crossing the Barak river they followed the vangai Range and settled in about a dozen villages on the western part of Manipur which falls now within the Tamenglong district.

The fourth batch who speaks the Hmar common language also left the Lushai Hills in the early part of the 18th century and enters the Cachar and North Cachar hills of Assam. Their migration and settlement was recorded by Alexander Mackerzie in his book (vide History of the Relation of Governemnt with the hill tribes of North Cachar eastern Frontier of Bengal) that Kookis entered Cachar in the year 1784. He also said that some 600 Old kukis of them were in Langting (Maibang area) in the year 1859. He also said that some Old kukis had already entered around 1770.

The next batch in larger stream came down towards Cachar from Lushai Hills and settled down on the hills and foothills and thereby established many villages in that place. This is mentioned by John Shakespear in his book "The Lushai-Kukis-Clans" that "The old kukis made their appearance in cachar about the end of the eighteenth 18th century. These old kukis includes Hmars, Biate, Hrangchul and other cognate clans who are known to us as Khawlang.

The sixth batch of the Hmar people also headed westward and passing through Cachar plains they reached Tripura or Rangram and they estalised their permanent settlement.

A small group of thiek family left Lushai Hills in the 18th century and produced north westward and settled among simte tribe in Thanlon area of Manipur.

At present, the Hmars are settled in the states of India-Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura. In Manipur the Hmars resides in the southern part especially in

the Churachandpur District and its adjoining areas. In Mizoram, they live mostly in the northern area, especially in the Aizawl District. In Assam, the Hmars live in the Cachar and North Cachar district (Dima Hasao). In Meghalaya, the Hmars live mostly in the Juwai District. In Tripura, the Hmars mostly live around Darchawi, a village in Mizoram-Tripura border.

V. CONCLUSION

Recapitulating, the main observations made in the proceeding pages and making in evaluation has unearthed many interesting facts about the Hmars. The tribe was just like a beep on the serene for many writers as the reader falls on bigger and larger tribes. But the study of the problem reveals that lay any other tribe; they have their own history and rich cultural heritage which are unique in many ways. The traditions are handed down from generation to generation and they are the sources of information for reconstruction the history and culture of the Hmar tribe.

In the examination of their legends, songs etc with regards to history of the origin, migration and settlement we come to know that they traced their origin from sinlung, their course of long migratory movement from that place and how they come to their present settlement.

The Hmars though living in different village have common features in their social, cultural, administrative system, economic and religious life. In the examination of the social system it has been found that their social system was based on lineage and clan system. Their society was patrilineal and so the descent is traced from father's side and property is therefore inherited by sons.

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