

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE TAI KHAMYANGS OF ASSAM

4.1 ORIGIN OF THE WORD TAI

The word Tai is associated with the speakers of Tai Kadai language family who are scattered from the Yunnan province of China to Malaya peninsula and up to the North Eastern part of India. There are different explanations regarding the meaning of the word Tai. According to Grierson, the Siamese pronounced the word Tai as Thai giving it the meaning of ‘free’ (Grierson, 1904). Gehan Wijeyewardene is of the view that the word Tai means ‘native’ or ‘inhabitant’. According to him, it was Prof. Xie Yuan Zhang’s hypothesis according to which the ‘original’ meaning of the word ‘Tai’ was ‘person’ and not ‘free’, as it is held to mean today (Gehan, 1990). Padmeshwar Gogoi suggests that the word Tai is derived from the Chinese word ‘Ta’ meaning great. Gait also suggested a similar meaning of the word (Gogoi, 1989). Michel Ferlus points that the word Tai may have evolved from the word *kari* meaning human being and provides a brief explanation of phonetic change from *kari* to *kali* - *kadai* - *dai/tai* (Ferlus, 2009). Whatever may be the original meaning of the word Tai but its speakers still designate themselves by this name except the Lao people. The word Tai is commonly used for the people of Tai language family. The word *Thai* refers to citizen of Thailand and more specifically the Siamese. Dai is the Pinyin spelling of the word Tai. The Tai’s of Myanmar call themselves Tai but the Burmese call them Shan. E.R. Leach suggests that the Burmese apply the term Shan fairly consistently to all the inhabitants of political Burma and of the Yunnan-Burma frontier

area who call themselves Tai. He further states that English geographical expressions Assam and Siam are related terms (Gogoi, 1989). According to some historians Central Asia was the original homeland of the Tais. Gradually they started residing on the banks of tributaries of Yangtze River. During that period the Tai people came into contact with the Chinese people.

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.2.1 Tai Migration

The origin of the Tai people is still a topic of academic discussion but depending on the views of different historians and academicians it can be assumed that Central Asia was the ancient home of the Tai people. The Tai people have rich culture and history. There are various explanations of scholars concerning the ancient home of the Tai people. For instance according to Prof. M. Terrien de Lacouperie, the cradle of the Shan race was in the Kiulung Mountain, north of Sichuan and south of Senshi, in China proper. They migrated to the south due to hard and extreme climatic conditions. According to Max Muller original seat of the Shans was Central China from where they migrated to south and settled along the rivers like Menam, Mekong, Irrawady and Brahmaputra (Gogoi, 1999). According to Grierson (1904) the habitat of the Tai-group of people extends from Assam in the West to Kwansi and Hainan in the East, from the interior of Yunnan in the north of southernmost extremity of Thailand in the South. Today, the theory put forward by Prof. M. Terrien de Lacouperie seems to be convincing and accepted by most of the scholars. Their history of migration is a long and incessant history of struggle. Sai Kam Mong points that the Tais used to live in the monsoon regions of Guangxi and Guizhou provinces before the expansion southwards of the Chinese empire in the second century B.C. (Mong, 2004). In due course of time they were driven towards the East by the Khmer and the Mons. They had to take refuge in the Eastern side of the Yunan province. Some historians are of the view that the Tais originally were from China. Whereas some scholars are also of the opinion that they originated in the present Thailand.

Whether it was from central China or Thailand, the Tais after migrating to Yunnan province for the first time gained their major political authority in the history when they established their 'Moung Mao Long' kingdom. It is believed that the Tais, particularly the Shan varieties of India, Myanmar and Yunnan province of China are the descendants of the population of this particular kingdom. Yet another confusion regarding the early Tai people revolves around the 'Nanchao' kingdom (650-1236 A.D) and whether Ai-Lao people of Nanchao mentioned in early Chinese annals were Tais. It is believed by some scholars that after Nanchao kingdom fell in the hands of Kublai Khan, the Tais migrated and established their respective kingdoms in Assam, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Xishuangbanna prefecture of China. This view is however challenged by many scholars (Yawnghe, 2010).

Although there were some kingdoms established by the Tais in the early historical periods of which the Chinese sources mention about, Sai Kam Mong (2004) argues that Tais of Myanmar could remember only glory of ancient 'Moung Mao Long' kingdom. The Tais don't have written record of their early history, their script evolved from the Mon script commencing from about sixth century A.D. The Tais of Myanmar as well as India have still preserved the history of Moung Mao Long kingdom in the form of manuscripts, folklores and folksongs. According to Tai chronicles of Myanmar and India and other historical works of early and contemporary scholars Tais have established their kingdom called 'Moung Mao Long' in the sixth or seventh century C.E. The meaning of 'Moung Mao Long' kingdom is 'the great Mao country' as it was situated in the basin of Nam Mao River or Shweli River. It included parts of present day Shan state, then Northern Shan state (presently the Kachin state) which touches the boundary of Mishmi hills (Arunachal Pradesh) and parts of Dehong area of Yunnan province of China. According to sources, the kingdom remained prosperous until the rise of Burmese king Anawratha in the tenth century A.D. Ney Elias (from Mong 2004) asserts that Moung Mao Long kingdom had twelve administrative divisions of which Mounkong or Magaung, Moung Yang, Moung Mit were part of it which are found in the Tai Khamyang history. According to Sai Kam Mong (2004) the capital of Moung Mao Long shifted from place to place, but most of them were located near the Nam Mao River. According to the Hsenwi Chronicles, one of the capitals was 'Moung Ri Moung Ram', twelve kilometers to the east of Moung Mao Long. The Ahom chronicles also mentioned this place while other Tais of India including Tai

Khamyang call it ‘Moung Hi Moung Ham’. This capital according to Hsenwi chronicles was founded by Hkun Lai who is believed to be descended from heaven and similar history could be found among Tais of India. Historians and scholars believe that during the period of Moung Mao Long the Tais were influenced by some form of Buddhism though not the Burmese form of Theravada Buddhism which the Tai Khamyangs as well as other Tais of India and Myanmar practice today.

The migration of Tais to Myanmar is not of recent times. Many Shan scholars including Sai Kam Mong assert that Tais were already settled in central Myanmar before the Pagan kingdom (849-1297 C.E) was founded. It can be assumed that their migration to different parts of Myanmar took place during the time of Moung Mao Long kingdom when different administrative centers were established. Thus the Tais of India still recall their early homes under the principality of Mounkong. Thus according to their regions, Tais were called by their respective names such as ‘Tai Khun’ of eastern Shan state, ‘Tai Long’ of the proper Shan state, Tai Mao of Shweli river in China-Myanmar border, Tai Khamti of Khamti Long and Tai Khamyangs of Khamjang under the principality of Mounkong etcetera. Many scholars are of the view that the Tai Ahoms of Brahmaputra valley also descended of these Tai speakers of Moung Mao Long kingdom.

4.2.2 History of the Tai Khamyangs of Assam

4.2.2.1 Origin of the word ‘Nora’

The Tai Khamyangs are also referred to as Nora in many historical records. It is therefore imperative to know the meaning of the word Nora. Before the Burmese king Alaungpaya annexed the Tai kingdoms of North Burma in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Tais inhabited Patkai’s *Nongkheu Nong Nokjang* under Mounkong province. An agreement was signed between Ahom king Sudangpha and the king of Mounkong Surungpha in 1401 A.D according to which Nongkheu Nong Nokjang area went under Mounkong kingdom and Patkai was fixed as boundary between the two kingdoms (Gait, 2003).It could thus be said that up to the sixties of the thirteenth century, the Tai Khamyangs used to live in the ‘Nongkheu Nong Nokjang’ area according to the agreement made between the Ahoms and the ruler of Mounkong.

The Tai Khamyangs during their stay in Nongkheu Nong Nokjang had established two villages. One village was in a hilly area and other was in the lowland near a water body. The highland village came to be known as *Man Noi* (Man-Village, Noi-Hill) or hilly village and the village near the water body (lowland) came to be known as Man Nam (Man-Village, Nam-Water) meaning the village near water. Thus due to their habitation the people of the same community were divided into two i.e. *Man Nam* and *Man Noi* (*Tai Khamyang Buranji*, 2004).

It is mention worthy that according to many historians Nongkheu Nong Nokjang is not a single place. They are two different places i.e. Nongkheu and Nong Nokjang. Nong Nokjang is a place surrounded by water. Some historians refer to it as a river. The origin of the water body is 'Doi Kao Rang'. A tributary of the Nongkheu water body came to be known as Nong Nokjang Lake. Presently it is known as the 'Lake of No Return' (Myanmar). Due to the presence of water in that place the whole year it attracted wild life and especially birds like crane. Hence the Tai Khamyang people living in that area named that place Nong Nokjang meaning Nong-Bil in Assamese (Lake), Nokjang, Bogoli in Assamese (Crane). The watery body was near the entry point of the Mounkong kingdom and the people had to cross the huge water body while entering Mounkong. Hence the Ahoms used to call that place *Na La* or watery area. It is assumed that in due course of time the term 'Na La' got corrupted to Nora. Therefore the people residing in that area are referred to as Nora in the Buranjis (Ahom historical records) and some other chronicles and sometimes the Mounkong kingdom is referred to as Nora desh or Nora country. According to Padmeshwar Naobaisha Phukan's *Ahom Buranji* the Mounkong kingdom is referred to as *Noradesh* and its inhabitants are known as Nora. (Gohain, 2012). Kiriti Chandra Borboruah who came from Mounkong kingdom or Nora Desh was referred to as *Jalambotou* or Nokoli Ahom or duplicate Ahom according to the *Sokori Feti Buranji*. The Tai Khamyangs were referred to as Noras up to the fifth and sixth decade of the twentieth century even in the official documents. It is believed that the Khamyangs of Man Nam (Man-Village, Nam-Water) village were the first to enter Assam and settle in Titabor's Khorikotia area (in the present day Jorhat district) during the period of Ahom king Gaurinath Singha. Since they came from man Nam village or village near a water body they were named as Pani Nora (Gogoi, 2013).

According to Gierson (1904) Nora is the name by which Muankang Shans are known to Ahoms. Frequent references are made under that name in the Ahom chronicles. He states that the people known as Khamjangs or Khamyangs are a section of that race, who formerly resided in the Patkai range. Grierson further reaffirms that people who resided in Patkai's Paddesh and referred to as Noras by the Ahom Buranjis and other chronicles are the Khamjangs or Khamyang people.

4.2.3 Background

The early history of the Tais of Assam is shrouded in mystery. The chronicles and historical records suggest a legendary beginning of the Tais. According to various Tai chronicles including Ahom Buranji, the ancient kings of Tais are Khunlung and Khunlai. King of heaven Lenglon ordered his son Thenkham to go to earth and establish a kingdom. Thenkham was however not willing to come to earth. So Lenglon decided to send his sons Khunlung and Khunlai to earth. According to the orders of Lenglon the elder brother Khunlung will rule the earth and Khunlai would act as his advisor. Mythology suggests that Khunlung and Khunlai came to Earth with the help of a golden ladder and landed in Mounghi Moungham. Khunlung and Khunlai established a beautiful city at Mounghhe - Moungham. However some quarrel ensued between the two brothers and Khunlung decided to move towards west of Mounghhe - Moungham and established a kingdom at Se-Lan (Gait, 2003). It has been called as a legend by many historians and scholars but some scholars do believe that Khunlung and Khunlai established and ruled Moungh Mao Long kingdom and its capital Moungh Hi Moungh Ham which still exists in Yunnan province of China. Selan in present day is a small modern village in the Yunnan province. At the time of Moungh Mao Long, the eldest son of Khunlai named Ai-Khunlung, laid the foundation of Mounghkong in 608 C.E (Gogoi, 1989). Sai Kam Mong (2004) said that Shan chronicles also asserts that Tai rule in Mounghkong began with Khunlung, the other brother who had been said to have descended from heaven.

According to another version prevalent among the Tai Khamyang people, a king and a queen of a particular kingdom had no issues except a blind daughter. The king was in a dilemma as to who would be the next king. He was also worried about the wellbeing of his daughter. Someone suggested him to prepare a boat and leave her daughter in the river

along with food and other necessary items .The idea was that some magician or doctor will find the princess and cure her, the king did accordingly. When Lenglon came to know about the plight of the blind daughter of King he came to her rescue. He came to Earth and rescued the princess and started living with her. In the morning he took the form of a tiger and at night he took the form of a handsome man. In due course of time the couple gave birth to three sons named Suchatpha, Sukhanpha and Sukapha (*Tai Khamyang Buranji*, 2004).

When the three sons were very young, Lenglon had to leave for heaven leaving them and their mother on earth. When these sons grew up, they started asking their mother questions about their father and their ancestors. At this the princess suggested them to move towards East and wrought havoc on the people of the country they reach first. At this the sepoys of the king would arrest them and bring them in front of the king. When the king would ask them about their identity she asked them to show him a ring which she gave them. The boys did accordingly and by travelling towards east they reached their grandfather's kingdom and did what their mother suggested them to do. The sepoys of the king arrested them and brought them in front of him. When the brothers showed the king the ring, he realized that the boys were his own grandson.

He became happy and offered them a sword called *Mit*, a drum or *Kong* and a crane or *Yang* respectively. In due course of time these three brothers established the Mounghmit or the country of sword, Mounghkong or the country of drum and Mounghyang or the country of crane. In Tai language, the word '*Su*' means tiger. Since Lenglon came to Earth in the form of a tiger his successors i.e. all members of the royal family used the word *Su* in front of their name (E.g. Sukapha). (*Tai Khamyang Buranji*, 2004). Sai Kam Mong (2004) points out that the history of Moungh Mit also begins with same legend however there are some differences in the names of rulers.

According to another version and as mentioned earlier Khunlung became the ruler of 'Mounghi Moungham' and Khunlai established the kingdom of Se-Lan. Khunlai's kingdom (Mounghhe Moungham) was attacked by the Kachins. When the elder brother Khunlai came to know about it, he came to his brother's rescue. The joint army was finally able to defeat the Kachins. However, when Khunlai was busy in fighting with the Kachins,

his kingdom was attacked and annexed by the Chinese. Khunlung was unable to recover his territories from the Chinese and took refuge near the Irrawaddy River (Burma) and established a new kingdom known as Mounghko. After ruling over Mounghko for some time Khunlai died. Since Khunlai's son Taujeptetfa died without an heir, Khunsuk from Khunlung dynasty became the new ruler of Mounghwan (Tai Khamyang Buranji, 2004). In the meantime a Tai ruler named 'Fu Sang Khang' (also pronounced as Fu Chang Khang) alias Chao Changnyeu, a scion of the 'Mong Ri Mong Ram' line of Hkun Long became the ruler of a Tai kingdom named Mounghmit. According to Gogoi (1999) Fu Sang Khang married the daughter of Chao Tai Pong of Hsen Se and was made the Chao - Hpa of Mounghmit Klingdao in 1202 or 1204 A.D. He had three sons by the name of Sukapha, Suchatpha and Sukhampha. Fu Sang Khang's youngest son Sukapha founded the Ahom dynasty which ruled over Assam for six hundred years. Ney Elias suggests that Moungh Mit was established by Fu Sang Kang who belonged to Moungh Mao Long kingdom's ruling family. Fu Sang Kang's reign is believed to have started in 1203 A.D. and he established Moungh Mit in 1276 A.D. Than Tun however is of the view that Fu Sang Kang belong to Kengtung, a Tai province of eastern Myanmar, and established Moungh Mit in 1279 A.D. (Mong,2004) . It is to be mentioned here that there is some difference with regards to Sukapha's elder brother. While the Tai Khamyang Buranji refers to Sukanpha as the elder brother of Sukapha, Kasi Nath Tamuli Phukan's *Assam Buranji* (1906) suggests that Sukanpha was the son of the maternal uncle of Sukapha named Pa Meo Pong .Since the research work is being done on the Tai Khamyangs of Assam, the researcher has given the Tai Khamyang point of view depending on the Tai Khamyang Buranji (2004) and oral traditions.

4.2.4 Tai Khamyang Migration to Assam

After the death of King Fu Sang Khang, his eldest son Sujatpha ascended the throne of Mounghmit. After his sudden death Sukanpha ascended the throne and made his brother Sukapha the heir apparent. Sukanpha sent Sukapha to the east to recover the lost territories from the Chinese. Sukapha was defeated by the mighty Chinese and returned back to his kingdom. But he was not allowed to enter the gate of his kingdom as Sukanpha had doubts that Sukapha may have made some kind of arrangement with the enemy as he spent a lot of time fighting the enemy. Feeling sad, dejected and insulted by the behavior of

his brother Sukapha along with three thousand foot soldiers, thirty horsemen and few officials decided to leave his kingdom crossed the Patkai and carved out a new kingdom for himself which he did after laying down the foundation of the mighty Ahom kingdom in 1228 A.D. The Ahoms ruled over Assam for over six hundred years. It is to be mentioned here that there are different views of scholars and *Buranjis* regarding the coming of Sukapha to Assam. The above mentioned theory is based on the *Tai Khamyang Buranji*.

As far as the history of the Tai Khamyang people is concerned, their migration in Assam can be traced back to the period of Sukapha. According to the *Buranjis*, the Khamyangs are the first among the Man-Tais (Tais who came from Myanmar) who had advent to Assam. But initially they did not come to Assam for permanent settlement. Sources suggest that after Chaolung Sukapha's departure from Mounng Mao (A province of Mounngmit Kingdom), its king Chaolung (Chao- Lord, Lung-Great) Sukhanpha (Sukapha's brother) realized his mistake and dispatched a group of the Khamyangs to Assam to find Sukapha's whereabouts. At that time, the Tai Khamyangs used to reside near the Mounngmit and Mounngkong kingdom at a place known as Khamjang. After crossing the Patkai hills the Khamyangs met Sukapha in 1236 AD and explained their purpose of coming. Sukapha requested them to settle on the border to maintain cordial relation between the two kingdoms. Hence, from then on the Khamyangs began to live on the foothills of the Patkai range.

The *Tai Khamyang Buranji* also suggests that after Sukapha left his kingdom, the elder brother realized his mistake and sent a group of people to Assam to bring him back. He sent many missions consisting of the Tai Aitons, Tai Phakey and Tai Turungs. But all the missions were unsuccessful. Finally he sent a group consisting of nine people belonging to nine clans and a huge army in search of his brother. At that time, the Tai Khamyangs used to reside near the Mounngmit and Mounngkong kingdom at a place known as Khamjang. In Tai language *Kham* means Gold and *Jang* means to have, meaning a place having gold. In Tai language *Ya* is sometimes pronounced as *Ja*. It is said that Sukapha had spent two years in Khamjang before coming to Assam. That is the main reason because of which the King sent the Khamyangs in search of Sukhapha. It is to be mentioned that at that time the king Sukhanpha provided autonomy to some states. The Khamjang area was governed by a council of nine members known as Kau Hai (Kau - Nine, Hai - Governing

Council). The nine officers who came to Assam were members of Thaumung, Chowhai, Panyok, Chawlu, Chowlik, Wailung, Tunkhang, Chowsong and Phalek clans. The main leader of this group was Chowhai clan's Hailikhi. On their way to Assam, the group crossed many difficult terrains and came into conflict with the Nagas. Though the Nagas outnumbered the Khamyangs, the Khamyangs due to their superior military strategy were able to defeat the Nagas. However an unfortunate event occurred during their campaign against the Hansa Nagas. The leader Hailakhi was engaged in merry making and drinking being corrupted by the Nagas. He paid no heed to his assistants to annex Hansa. Having no other alternative, his assistants Tok Panyok and Phekhangmoi returned back and informed King Sukanpha about it. Sukanpha was disappointed hearing this news and decided to send another mission with Khunhang and Khunsang as commander in chief and his brother in law Pu Khun Keu as the leader and ordered them to attack Hansa Nagas. The team along with Tok Panyok and Phengkheumoi proceeded towards Hansa and defeated the Nagas. Hailakhi was dismissed.

After this, the leader Pu Khun Keu divided his army into two and sent them in search of Sukapha. The first group arrived at Makum after reaching the Tipong Hill. The second group also reached Makum after a few days. The place was given the name Makum by the Tai Khamyangs meaning *Ma* (come), *Kum* (to meet). During that time Sukapha had established his temporary capital at Abhaypur. The Tai Khamyangs led by Pu Khun Keu Mung finally met Sukapha after nine years of Sukapha leaving Mounmit (1236-37 A.D approximately). He was very happy to know about his brother and motherland. After staying for a few days in Abhaypur, the Tai Khamyangs decided to return back to their kingdom after seeking Sukapha's permission. Sukapha advised them to settle at the borders in between the two kingdoms and sent his regards to his elder brother. The Tai Khamyangs decided to settle in Patkai's Nongkeu Nong Nokjang, a place they saw while coming to Assam. In Tai, meaning of Nongkeu Nong Nokjang is *Nong*-Lake, *Kheu*-Green, meaning Green water lake, *Nokjang*-(Crane) meaning lake where crane is found (*Tai Khamyang Buranji, 2004*).

Earlier they settled in the foothills of Nongkeu Nong Nokjang. As population increased, they settled in the nearby areas. Those who lived in the hilly areas came to be known as Man Noi (Man-Village, Noi-Hills) and those who settled near the lake, came to

be known as Man Nam (Man-Village, Nam-Water). Nongkheu Nong Nokjang's geographical location has great significance. Before the name Patkai was given to it, it was known as 'Doi Kau Rong' in Tai language (Doi-Hills, Kau -Nine, and Rang -Meeting point) meaning meeting point of nine Hills. A stream of water used to flow through the nine hills which fell in the plains and took the shape of a big lake. Presently it is known as 'Nonkheu' lake or 'Lake of no return' (Myanmar). The water of the stream went Far East upto Hukong valley and Namrup in the west. Since Nongkheu's water used the flow through that area, it made a great portion of land wet for almost twelve months a year. The wetlands attracted aquatic animals, birds especially crane which came there in search of fish. That is the reason because of which the Khamyangs named that place Nong Nokjang.

It is to be mentioned here that at that time Patkai was the boundary between Mounkong and Assam. Since it was a wetland (as mentioned above) that place came to be known as 'Na-La' (Na- Land, La-Wet). In due course of time the word Na-La got corrupted and came to be known as Nora. The province of Mounkong kingdom came to be known as Na La or Nora kingdom and the people who came from Na La are mentioned as Nora in the Ahom Buranjis. The Khamyangs during their stay at Nongkheu Nong Nokjang, the Khamyangs established two villages - Man Nam and Man Noi. It is mentioned in the Buranjis that there were about two hundred families living in the villages. The Tai Khamyangs lived in that area for three hundred years. During this time they came in constant conflict with the Singpho (Kachin) tribe. However after constant fighting, a truce was reached between the royal families (*Tai Khamyang Buranji, 2004*).

Butler (1847) has mentioned about the dwelling place of the The Tai Khamyangs. According to him The Khamyang tribe or clan of the Shans living in Assam were settled in the days of Moankong and Ahom independence of Nongyang, at a point in the Lee-Pet-Kai mountains which marked the ancient boundary between Moankong and from whence the waters of Nongyang rose and passed to the east in Hookong and those of the Namroop to the north into Assam. The tribe originally consisted of about two hundred families. They had charge of the door or pass over the Patkai and in the language of the Shans were called Mon Nam and Mon Noi respectively in illusion to those dwelt on the river Nongyang and those who dwelt higher up on the mountain.

According to Rajkumar (2008) the Noras (Khamyangs) started coming to Assam from the thirteenth century onwards. About one thousand Noras entered Assam after Sukhampha married a Nora princess in 1576 A.D. But they got assimilated with the Ahoms and could not be distinguished as a separate community as they were engaged in different *Khels* by the Ahom rulers. After living five centuries at Patkai foothills, the Khamyangs had to migrate permanently to Assam. It is assumed that due to natural calamities and conflict with the Singphos, the two hundred Khamyang families left Nongkheu Nong Nokjang and reached a place near the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It has been said that the land was very fertile and the Khamyangs were engaged in agriculture there. That is why the Tai Khamyangs named the place as Khamyang Na or Paddy fields of the Khamyangs. They stayed in the valley for about one hundred years. Unfortunately, the Khamyangs had to leave Khamjang Na too. An unfortunate event occurred during the Sangken festival when a Singpho youth died in mysterious circumstances. The Singphos held Khamyangs responsible for it and planned to attack Khamjang Na. During the time of such distress, the Khamyangs were given shelter by the Khamtis who were living in 'Namchoom' (Tengapani) and MOUNG TEULA (SADIYA). They first reached Namchoom in 1780 AD and then reached MOUNG TEULA (SADIYA). They settled there and engaged in agriculture and stayed there for some years. It is to be noted that the Khamtis already settled down in Tengapani in 1751 A.D. who were permitted by the Ahom authority (Singh, 2013). Following the Khamtis the Tai Khamyangs and then other Tai groups such as Tai Phakey, Tai Aiton and other Tais also crossed the Patkai ranges and they arranged to settle in the vicinity of SADIYA (Gogoi, 1989). The migration continued and the Khamyang Shan groups permanently started settling in Assam around the early nineteenth century (Terweil, 1980). However Bhimkanta Boruah is of the opinion that the Tai Khamyangs along with the other Tai groups like the Tai Khamtis, Tai Phake, Tai Turung and Tai Aiton entered Assam towards the end of the eighteenth century due to frequent attacks of the Burmese king Alamphra and his successors. (Saikia, 2012). Whether it was because of the frequent attacks of the Singphos or the Burmese, it becomes evident that they started migrating to Assam towards the end of the eighteenth century AD.

The Tai Khamyangs wanted to meet the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha and let him know about their plight and grievances. The Khamtis advised the Khamyangs not to enter the Ahom kingdom as Assam was witnessing a political and religious turmoil due to

Moamoriya rebellion. But the Khamyangs did not pay much heed to the Khamti advice and entered the Ahom kingdom and reached the Ahom capital Rangpur in 1784 AD. But they could not meet the Ahom king as he was busy suppressing the Moamoriya rebellion. Unable to meet the King Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795A.D), they approached Purnananda Burhagohain, who failed to give them any assurance regarding their settlement as the Ahom kingdom was going through turmoil due to Moamoriya rebellion. Being unable to get any royal assistance, they started their journey ahead from Rangpur. They stayed for some time in Namphuk (Nam-Water, Phuk- White) and then for some time at Lukhurakhan. The third Moamoriya rebellion was at its peak and unable to find a stable and suitable place for them, the Khamyangs decided to return back to Sadiya. On their way back to Sadiya, they reached Jaipur where they stayed for four years before finally reaching Sadiya. After the Moamoriya rebellion was suppressed by Captain Welsh, Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795 A.D.) was again seated to the Ahom throne. He shifted his capital from Rangpur to Jorhat .Peace prevailed in the Ahom kingdom after his accession. As this news reached the Khamyangs, they arrived at the capital to meet the Ahom ruler. Gaurinath Singha gave them land grant (Dholi khat) near the Dholi River in the present day Jorhat district. Edward Gait (2003) mentions that the Noras were employed as astronomers and writers by the Ahom rulers.

The land grant given by Gaurinath Singha to the Khamyangs near the Dholi river was suitable for tea cultivation .The head of the Assam Tea Company, Robert Bruce wanted to grasp that land from the hands of the Khamyangs by any means, the Khamyangs after residing for fifty years near the Dholi river moved South West and established a new village near the Bandorsolia Tea Estate. In the meantime, two more groups of Khamyangs arrived in Assam and started living with them. They named the village ‘Borgaon’. According to oral traditions, they could not stay for long in Borgaon due to the outbreak of Cholera as many of them succumbed to the disease. They abandoned the village and set it on fire to kill the germ of the disease. That is the reason that till date Borgaon is known as ‘Bor Era Gaon’ or ‘Big abandoned village’. The Khamyangs established another village towards the South of Borgaon .That village came to be known as ‘Pani Nora Gaon’ as the Khamyangs were known to the local people as ‘Man Nam’ (Man-Village, Nam-Water).However they did not stayed in the village for too long either. In search of suitable

land, the Khamyangs established some new villages such as the Na- Shyam village, Baliyan village and Betbari village (*Tai Khamyang Buranji, 2004*).

At present, the Tai Khamyangs are located only in only a few villages in four districts of Assam. Initially, they established villages in Na Shyam Gaon, Baliyan Shyam Gaon and Betbari Shyam Gaon in Jorhat districts. As the population increased, they established the Disangpani village in 1836 A.D., Chalapather Shyam Gaon in 1868 A.D. in Charaideo district (erstwhile Sivasagar district) and 1 No. Rajapukhuri village in 1919 A.D. in Golaghat district. Moreover, some Khamyangs living in Sadiya crossed the Brahmaputra river and stayed near Dibrugarh in places like Jokai, Khanikar etcetera for about eighty years when they finally established a village in Margheritha's Pawoimukh in 1922 A.D. Presently that village is situated in Tinsukia district. The Khamyangs also settled in Changlang and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh, where they established quite a number of villages. Prominent among them are, Na Nam I, Na Nam II, Kaisu, Deubil, Hofai, 1 No Jona, 4 No. Jona, Nongtau Khamyang, Nongtau Wingseng etcetera. in Namsai district and Somboi, Giding, Namleng, Dirak Pathar village in Changlang district. They are also settled in towns like Namsai and Bordumsa in Namsai and Changlang districts.

District wise distribution of the Tai Khamyangs in Assam-

1. Tinsukia District- Pawoimukh Village(Margherita) ,Population -550
2. Jorhat District-Na Shyam Gaon-180, Baliyan Shyam Gaon-250, Betbari Shyam Gaon-179.
3. Golaghat District-1. No Rajabari Shyam Gaon-310
4. Charideo District- Chalapather Shyam Gaon - 556 ,Chala Ban Gaon-71,Rohon Shyam Gaon 242, Disangpani Shyam Gaon-342, Maniting Shyam Gaon-120(Rajkhowa,2013)

Total population- 2800.The population in all the above mentioned villages except Chalapathar and Rohon Shyam Gaon was enumerated by Ajanata Rajkhowa in 2013.Population in Chalapathar and Rohon Shyam Gaon was enumerated by the researcher himself in 2019. Besides these places, the Tai Kamyangs have also settled in cities like

Guwahati, Jorhat, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar etcetera. Though, their number is in microscopic minority in the above mentioned cities. Hence the approximate population of the Tai Khamyangs could be estimated at in and around three thousand five hundred.

4.3 THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

The religion of the Tai Khamyangs of Assam can be divided into two types: the indigenous religion and Buddhism. The indigenous religion is often called *Deo Puja* by Assamese speaking Tai Khamyangs which convey the meaning ‘spirit worship’. Buddhism is called *Phasa Puktha* in Tai Khamyang language and is Theravada Buddhism which has the influence of Burmese Buddhism.

Their indigenous religion is a Tai folk religion where spirits of natural phenomena and ancestors are worshipped. They believe that every human being after death becomes *Phi* or spirit and thus protect their family and house from misfortunes and calamities. They believe in the existence of *Moung Phi* or the place of spirits and *Lenglon* is considered to be the lord of this place. Along with this they believe in the spirits of natural phenomena like earth, hills, rivers, forests as well as cities, villages, house, paddy fields etcetera. They believe that every human being possesses *Khon* or a unit of vitality as well as the country, town, village etc. This folk religion is pantheistic and polytheistic in nature and their practice involves Shamans or *Chow Mo*. It is however difficult to trace back the initial time of development of this belief system. But many sources throw lights to this religion and its antiquity could be pushed back at least eighty years back to Christian era when Tai people were establishing their famous Moug Mao Long kingdom in Yunan Province of China. The *Buranjis* of the Assamese Tai mention that Khunlung and Khunlai were sent down to earth by celestial being Lenglon. Since from that time onwards Lenglon was known to Tai people as a lord of Moug Phi and still he is worshipped by Assamese Tai people.

Within the Tai folk religion spirits can be regarded as tutelary deities. Certain deities like Lenglon, Yachingpha, Puchingpha, Chow Laam etcetera are worshipped. Image or idol worshipped are absent in their belief system and certain animist practices like blood sacrifices are part of the rituals. Singh (2013) mentions that while performing their traditional ceremonies, the Tais never involve the Buddhist monk into their

ceremonies. ‘Chow Mo’ the traditional priest performs such ceremony in presence of the villagers. The traditional Tai chants which are mostly of pre Buddhist age, are available in the forms of manuscripts. These manuscripts are not kept in the monastery. They are kept by the village priests or ‘Chow Mo’ in their respective houses.

4.3.1 House and Ancestor Spirits

The Tai Khamyangs believe that every house has spirits and they called it as *Phi Houn*. The house spirit resides in *Sao Phi Lam* or the most important post of the house. They believe that when elderly member die they become spirits and protect the house from calamities and misfortunes. Tai people believe that the house spirits are one and same as the ancestors. Terwiel (1981) describes that Tai Khamyang sacrifice for the *Phi Houn* consisted usually of fowls, and these were presented to the house gods at the *Sao Phi Lam*. There was no fixed time for such offerings. The ceremony could be held by the householder himself and no outside ritual specialist would have to be invited.

Till date Tai Khamyangs believe in ancestral spirits in houses. They worship the house and ancestor spirits during *Kin Khao Mau* or ‘ceremony of eating new rice’, after the Sangken festival (a Tai Buddhist festival) and whenever necessary. But vast changes and modification took place in their rituals. At present they make an offering of eatable items but animal slaughter is totally abandoned by them. Cooked food basically vegetarian, fruits and flowers are offered. The Tai Khamyang, after the Sangken festival in their respective houses with their all family members clean the house post by pouring water on it and offer prayers with cooked food, flowers and incense sticks.

4.3.2 Khon

Tai Khamyang people believe that every human being has one hundred twenty *khons* or *khwans* in their body and when a ‘khon’ leaves the body the person may fall sick. Depending on the case of a patient, one of two ceremonies *Soon Khon* (when Khon is sought out and placated) and *Hong Khon* (calling back the Khwan) is performed. The latter one is an elaborate ritual which involves killing of a fowl, involvement of a shaman, reading of Khon ceremony book and prayer of a spirit called *Pu Ching Pha*. However

many villages have abandoned this ceremony and only Soon Khon ceremony is still practiced.

According to Buragohain (2014: 59) besides Khon for human there also exists Khon for objects and animals. The most important and common in Tai cultures is *Khon Khao* or the *Khon of rice*. In the astrological Sangken calendar which is a Tai Buddhist culture, information of rituals and worshipping of *Nang Khon Khao* or Spirit of rice are provided. In olden days Nang Khon Khao was worshipped by offering traditional rice wine and raw rice cakes. Due to influence of Buddhism, rice wine is not offered anymore. Buddhist teachings have influenced and changed the beliefs and practices of this ceremony. This soul is ceremoniously propitiated by the people in the month of Paush or Magh (Dec-Jan or Jan -Feb). The soul of the rice is always invited by the female member of the family, because they believe that the Khon that resides in rice is a female deity. All of them believe that the soul of the rice dwells in the last sheaf of the paddy. So, the last sheaf of the paddy is brought from the field to the granary in a manner that their custom requires. According to this custom the last sheaf of paddy is left in the field and tied in a bundle. On the auspicious day an elderly lady of the family goes to the field with a sickle and a new hand woven towel. Meanwhile two plantain saplings are erected near the door of the granary. Inside the granary a large bamboo plate is kept with such articles as powdered rice cakes and a pot of water for welcoming the Khon of rice.

4.3.3 Sacrificial Practices

There were several sacrificial rituals amongst Tai Khamyangs and such practices were held to pay homage the spirits. The most important sacrificial ritual about which information could be obtained was held for *Phi Mueang* or the spirit of the nation. This ceremony was one of the most elaborate Tai sacrificial practices during which buffalo, pigs as well as fowls were sacrificed. The Tai Khamyang people practiced it in the month of April or sometimes twice in a year. Restrictions of women in this ceremony and declaration of *Wan Kam* (villagers could not go out and outsiders could not come in) were common amongst Assamese Tai. However regarding the time when a sacrificial ritual for Phii Mueang was last performed, there are variations amongst different villages. Nowadays flowers and candles are presented to the spirits.

4.3.4 Therapeutic Rituals

One of the least known practices amongst the Tai Khamyang was the making of therapeutic tattoos. Tai people are generally known in South East Asia for the art of making tattoos on their body. This tradition was carried by the Tai Khamyangs and was made for healing illness. The Tai people called it as *Aang* and in olden days these were made for victory in war and to cure illness. Specialists were called from Burma for this practice.

4.3.5 Buddhism

4.3.5.1 Adoption of Buddhism

Some sources suggest that the Tai people came in contact with Buddhism in the seventh and eighth centuries in the upper southern part of Yunnan. According to Gogoi(1999) in medieval time the Tai kingdom of Nanchao in Yunnan province of China was influenced by a kind of old Buddhism and Moug Mao Long kingdom had also political and cultural relationship with Nanchao kingdom. But it was after king Anawratha's conquest of the old Mon capital of Thaton in 1057 A.D that Theravada Buddhism grew in Myanmar. Harvey (1925) suggests that King Anawratha marched to Thaton and brought back Buddhist scriptures to Pagan along with monks and artisans. Sai Kam Mong (2004) further states that since the Burmese adopted Buddhism in the eleventh century A.D., the Tai people also could have been influenced by Buddhism. Burmese king Bayinnaung sent Buddhist monks to Tai states and the Tai rulers were ordered to follow these monks. From these sources we can come to a conclusion that the Tai people adopted Buddhism at least seven, eight centuries ago.

Though the Assamese Tai adopted Buddhism centuries ago but till the nineteen fifties they did not followed the Buddhist rituals and practices too rigidly. Terwiel(1981) in his book *The Tai of Assam and Ancient Tai Ritual Volume II* has tried to find out the dates when these sacrificial and animistic rituals were last performed among Assamese Tai. They did not give up their traditional belief which has ideas of spirits, souls, and sacrificial rituals. Indigenous rituals and practices were much stronger which often

opposed the teachings of Buddhism. Due to this reason certain rituals and customs were changed, modified or completely abandoned by them.

Tai Khamyang people practice Theravada Buddhism. As Buddhism is a worldly recognized religion, the Khamyangs do not feel the necessity of embracing any other religion to upgrade themselves in the estimation of the people in general (Prasad, 1998). Their festivals generally involve various family level and community level rituals. They are devout Buddhist and try to follow the different precepts of Buddhism during the different stages of life. There are three types of precepts followed by them .The *Pancha Shila* (five precepts) or *Sin Haa*, the *Astha Shila* (eight precepts) or *Sin Pet* and the *Dassa Shila* (ten precepts) or *Sin Sip*. The *Pancha Shila* is generally supposed to be followed by common people. The *Astha Shila* is meant for elderly people and the *Dassa Shila* is meant for novices and monks.

Five precepts of Buddhism (Pancha Shila)

1. To refrain from killing any living beings.
2. To refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. To refrain from committing sexual misconduct.
4. To refrain from telling lies.
5. To refrain from taking any intoxicant and drugs.

Eight Precepts of Buddhism (Astha Shila)

The Astha Shila contains the above mentioned five precepts along with three other precepts-

1. To refrain from untimely eating.
2. To refrain from dancing, singing, music and going to see unseemly shows
3. To refrain from wearing garlands, using perfumes and beautifying the body with cosmetics.

Ten Percepts of Buddhism (Dassa Shila)

The Dassa Shila contains the above mentioned eight precepts along with two other precepts-

1. To refrain from the use of high and large luxurious sleeping place.
2. To refrain from accepting gold and silver (money).

The Tai Khamyangs of Assam celebrate different Buddhist festivals throughout the year. Following are some of the festivals associated with Buddhism followed by the Khamyang people-

1. **Mangala Moun**g - Mangala Moun is performed for the protection of village or a city from misfortunes and calamities. The word Mangala is derived from the *Pali* word *Mangal* and *Moun*g means country. It is done on the following day or after about seven days of Poi-Sang-Ken festival in April. It is believed by the people that if this spirit is not worshipped properly every year, there might be an outbreak of epidemic and unnatural death etcetera. For this purpose they construct a sandy *Chaitya* (Pyramid like structure) in the outskirts of the village, generally near the main entrance of the village. The *Chaitya* must have eight steps in round shape. The shape of the *Chaitya* is conical having a wooden crown on its top. Every step of the *Chaitya* is decorated with colored papers and colored paper flag called *Tan Khon*. *Tan Khon* means long and narrow strips pieces of cloths with various designs. These are commonly seen hanging from trees or bamboo poles near a Buddhist Vihar in all the Buddhist villages (Sarmah, 2001).

2. **Poi- Lu-Phra** – ‘Poi’ means festival, ‘Lu’ means to offer and ‘Phra’ means God (Lord Buddha). Etymologically, thus it means a festival associated with the presentation of the image of Lord Buddha to the Vihar. It can be done by an individual, a group of individuals or by the villagers collectively. There is no fixed time when it could be celebrated. Though it cannot be celebrated during the three months retreat.

3. **Mai-Ko-Sum-Phai** - Mai-Ko-Sum-Phai means burning of wood in a pile. It is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Magha (Jan-Feb) by burning heaps of wood arranged in a particular way. Young boys and girls are very much enthusiastic to

celebrate it and arrangements are made for the same well in advance. They go for collection of firewood from the nearby forest. The firewood is piled up horizontally in either triangular or pentagonal in shape. Just before the piled up firewood is set on fire by old people of the village, the village monk conducts prayers and administers Pancha Shila to the people. Some Buddhist records suggest that Lord Buddha had declared the date of his Parinirvana (nirvana after death) in front of his disciples in the full moon day of the Magha month. Hence the Buddhists consider this day as a very pious day.



Figure 4.1- A glimpse from *Mai- Ko -Sum- Phai* ceremony

4. **Poi Loun Si Tapong-** It is a gift giving ceremony. Traditionally, it is an annual festival observed on full moon day of Fagun (Feb-March). This function is celebrated in the afternoon on a river bank. The Khamyangs believe that gifts are the only means to attain peace and also in the life after death. Offering of Chaityas are considered to be the most important gift any Khamyang person can give. It is said that Emperor Ashoka after his conversion to Buddhism, had built eighty four thousand Chaityas and the Khamyangs and other Buddhists follow the same tradition by observing the Poi-Loun-Si ceremony (Sarmah, 2001).

5. **Buddha Purnima or Buddha Jayanati-** This is a one or two day festival popularly known among them as Buddha Jayanti or Buddha Purnima. It is observed on the full moon day of May to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of Lord Buddha. All the three events in the life of Buddha have incidentally occurred on the same day. This festival is also common among the Thais of Thailand, Laosans of Laos and Shans of Burma. The Vihars are decorated and cultural processions are taken out in the villages. The village monk addresses a huge gathering and the life and teachings of Lord Buddha is discussed.

These days cultural processions are held and different activities are organized in the villages during Buddha Purnima.



Figure 4.2 and 4.3 Buddha Purnima being celebrated at Chalapather Shyam Gaon

6. **Poi Pee Mau**- Though Poi Pee Mau is an indigenous Tai festival yet the ceremony also has considerable Buddhist influences these days as the Tai Khamyangs are staunch Buddhists. In the Khamyang society, the Buddhist calendar is generally used to calculate the important dates in case of religious matters. The Gregorian calendar is followed in day to day practice. However, to calculate the auspicious days like marriage and festivals still the old Tai calendar is occasionally followed, though it is losing its relevance in due course of time .The Tai people follow the lunar calendar. The Tai year consists of twelve months i.e. Loun Cheing, Loun Kam, Loun Sam, Loun Si, Noun Ha, Loun Houk, Loun Seit, Loun Pet, Loun Kau, Loun Sip, Loun Sip Eit and Loun Sip Song respectively .The Tai people all around the world celebrate the first day of the first month of their calendar year as Poi Pee Mau. Poi means festival and Pee Mau means New Year. It is celebrated in the month of November-December, though the dates can vary according to the lunar calendar .Fairs are organized in the Khamyang villages during this time and people are involved in merry making and celebrations. In the morning of the first day of the New Year, a ritual known as *Tang Som* is performed. This ritual is performed in gratitude and memory of their ancestors. Cooked rice and vegetable is given to the ancestors as offering. (Gohain, 2014). Khamyang delicacies are prepared and distributed among the relatives and vice versa. Traditional Khamyang song and dance is performed by the young people and the evening

is spent in joyful activities and merry making. Since the past few years the Poi Pee Mau festival is celebrated as a community festival.

7. **Poi Sangken-** Poi Sangken is one of the most important festivals celebrated by all the Tai Buddhist communities of Assam. It is similar to Songkran festival which is celebrated in Thailand. It marks the beginning of the New Year in the Tai Buddhist calendar .It is celebrated for three days. Basically it is celebrated around 13th or 14th April every year. It falls every year on the last day of the month of Choit according to the Assamese calendar (around 13 April).The locals call it Pani Bihu. The word Bihu is used because this festival synchronizes with their Assamese festival Bohag Bihu which falls on the same day every year (Chowlu, 2014) .In this festival people throw water at each other which signifies the washing away of the sins. They cleanse Buddha images and statues from household shrines as well as from monasteries (Vihars) by gently pouring water on them. It is noteworthy that the Budha statues are taken out of the Vihars only once in a year at a particular time i.e. during the Sangken festival. That is why this festival is considered very special by the Tai Buddhists. During the celebration the people make homemade sweets and distribute them. The exchange of gifts is also a common practice in this festival. In the evening all the people of the village light candles known as *Simithong* (Sarmah, 2001).

8. **Chatang (Satang) or Monsoon Fast-** The Chatang or Monsoon fast starts from the Assamese calendar month on Ashara (June-July) and lasts till full moon day of Ahina (September-October).During monsoon fast, the monks and their disciples perform prayers and undertake fast for three months. The tradition dates back to the time of Buddha. It was a custom among the mendicant ascetics not to travel during the rainy season as they may unintentionally harm crops, insects and even themselves during their travels. Hence the monks remained at one place and dedicate themselves to meditation and fasting. Chatang (Satang) or Monsoon Fest is followed by the Kathina ceremony. *Kathina* is a Buddhist festival which comes at the end of the three month rainy season retreat for Theraveda Buddhists (usually in October).The season during which a monastery may hold Kathina is one month long, beginning after the full moon of the eleventh month of the lunar calendar. Kathina is a Pali word referring to the wooden frame used to measure the length and width by which the robes of the Buddhist monks are cut. Generally offering of the new saffron robes and other gifts are made to the monks is done on that day.

9. **Monastic Life** - A Tai Khamyang monastery or *Vihar* is commonly known as *Kyong*. Every Tai Khamyang village essentially has a *Kyong*. It is the center of activity of the village. A monastery (Vihar) compound has different rooms or buildings meant for specific purposes. *Kyong* is the proper Vihar where Buddha idols are kept and monks and devotees do prayers. *Kongmu* is a place like a library where relics and old books are kept. *Sima* is the ordination hall of novices and monks. *Sima* is a *Pali* word. In Assamese language it is known as *Sima Ghar*. *Kyaung Phra* is the shrine where images are kept and washed. Replicas of Ashoka pillar, Sanchi stupa, and images of Buddha depicting different phases of his life are also built within the compound of a Vihar. There can be store rooms in a temple or attached to monk quarters. There is also a community hall for all the villagers where they hold meetings and cultural programmes. There is also a hall for elderly members who follow the eight precepts of Buddhism and have to stay within the compound of a Vihar. A Vihar traditionally doesn't have a kitchen as monks don't cook food for consumption. But a small kitchen is found in the Vihar compound these days. It is used mainly for hot water and tea for guests. The kitchen is used mainly by the temple boys or *Mong Jang*. The Chalapather Shyam Vihar which is one of the villages selected as micro field also has a guest house within the compound of the Vihar. The researcher stayed in the guest house during the field study.

The daily routine of a monk is to get up early and do prayers and meditation. After that they generally go for alms rounds. From that food which they receive as alms they offer it to the Buddha. The ritual is known as *Tang Som*. *Tang* means to offer and *Som* means the food of the Buddha and monk community. Devotees also perform *Tang Som* at home. Then they are engaged in cleaning of the compound of the Vihar. Again they offer lunch as alms by the villagers. They offer it to the Buddha first before eating. Along with food they also offer flowers and water. In the evening they only offer water to Buddha. The monks generally don't take food after twelve noon nor do they offer food to the Buddha after noon. Studying of religious texts and Tai scripts is usually done by them during morning and evening time. However there is no specific time for that. It depends from temple to temple and monks to monks.

The monk community holds a special position among the Tai Khamyang people. They are the most respected people even a young novice would be respected and paid homage by an

elderly person. They are not counted in the social division of Tai Khamyang community due to fact that they have abandoned their worldly life. There are different stages in the monastic life. *Mong Jang's* are young temple boys who stay at the temple (Vihar) for learning, helping the monks and they also work there. Every Tai Khamyang temple has a monk and novices. A novice is called *Sramenera* or *Chowsang*. It is mention worthy that the Tai Khamyang boys are often ordained as a novice in their teenage lives. It could be temporary or permanent depending upon individual choice. The ordination ceremony of a novice is known as *Chowsang Kham* .The next stage of novice hood consists of the monks who are known as *Chowke* .The ordination ceremony of a monk is known as *Chowke Kham*. The next stage is of the elder monks who are called as *Bhante* (as in Pali) or *Chow Sara* (in Tai language). They are the spiritual guide, teachers and religious leader of the Tai Khamyangs. The monks generally follow the ten precepts *Dassa Shila* in their daily life. They are always engaged in meditation and performing prayers. There are generally four stages of monkhood depending on the experience. After becoming *Chowke*, they have to complete number of vassa (tithi) or years to become a *Chow Sara*. Likewise the monks get the title of a *Sthavir*, *Mahasthavir*, *Ther* and *Mahather* depending on their age and experience. It is to be mentioned here that women are generally not ordained as nun or *Bhikhuni* in Theraveda form of Buddhism. Since the Tai Khamyangs also follow Thereveda Buddhism women are not ordained as nuns. The dress of a monk comprise of four different pieces of cloth known as *Sangpen* or a saffron colour sarong to cover the lower part of the body, *Sangkan* or a wrapper to cover the upper part of the body, *Kahampeng* or a piece of cloth used as undergarment and *Oanghati* or a vest used an undershirt.

The death of a monk is celebrated in a different way than those of the lay people. When a monk dies their body is kept in a special coffin which is placed in a chariot. The chariot or wagon with six wheels is made of wood. It is generally designed in the shape of a swan or a peacock and is properly decorated A very big festival is organized called *Poi Leng* or the festival of pulling the chariot. There is no fixed date for this festival. It is celebrated according to the comfort of the villagers and organizers.

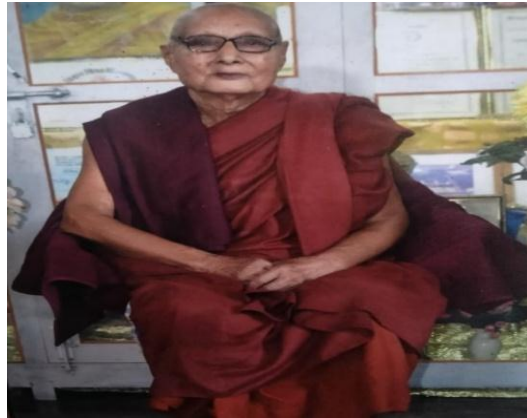


Figure 4.4- Ven. Dr Shasanabangsha Mahathera
Head Monk (Chalapather Buddhist Monastery)

10. Household Prayer Place- Every Tai Khamyang household has a prayer room or hall in the household where they perform the morning and the evening prayers by offering flowers, water, incense stick and candle. Food is offered only in the morning. The place of worship could either be in a small temple built within the compound or a separate hall. Due to modernization and paucity of space many Khamyang houses have their place of worship in a specified corner of their drawing room. This was observed by the researcher during the field study.



Figure 4. 5 - A Tai Khamyang household prayer place

4.4 MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE TAI KHAMYANGS OF ASSAM

The Tai Khamyangs are maintaining their traditional artistic creativity since ages which is reflected in their buildings, daily household objects, costumes and ornaments. Though there is not much historical evidence regarding this aspect, evidences of their material culture would help to understand their life style in historical ages. In this section, short notes on aspects of Tai Khamyang buildings and artifacts are discussed which are classified as religious building, house structure, bamboo and cane products, dress and ornaments and other hand woven items.

i. Kyong or Vihar -Tai Khamyangs follow Tai-Burmese form of Theravada Buddhism and in their every settlement they have a Buddhist temple called *Kyong*. It is characterized by raised floor and multi staged roofs with an odd number of tiers (usually three). Historically the *Kyongs* were made with wood and bamboo neatly and elaborately carved in typical Southeast Asian architectural designs. The roofs were made with locally available leafs or sometimes tin was used depending upon the economic condition of the villagers. The *Kyong* is constructed usually with three gables of crossed gable roofs. Usually not more than two successive small gabled rectangular roofs in an exaggerated pyramidal shape, with an intervening box like structure between each roof are made. The edges of each tier are decorated with metal sheets in various designs. The top roof is crowned with a wooden or metal umbrella often decorated with bright color. The traditional Khamyang *Kyongs* however could not escape from modern trends of using bricks, cements and other materials. Architects and masons from Myanmar are mostly favored today.

ii. Housing Pattern - The house of Tai Khamyang like other Tai groups is a wooden or bamboo structure rose on strong pillars. The floors and walls are made of either bamboo or wooden planks depended on the economic situation of the people. The traditional houses are characterized by thatched roofs which are made of locally available leafs. The house is divided as '*Houn Haang* or 'the main house' and the *Houn Tang Khao* or 'the kitchen'. In front of the main house a floor is constructed called Chan or verandah. The main house includes the hall where *Sao Phii Nam* or 'pillar of the ancestors' and 'house spirits' are located in the bedroom of parents. The kitchen consists of a hall where they sit by the fire

in winters called *Tii-Phai*. The portion where they cook food has a *Hang Heng* or a kind of hanging bamboo shelf which blocks the burning coal and to store necessary stuffs used while cooking. The back door of the kitchen has a floor called *Khe-Hong* where they wash their utensils.



Figure 4.6 - A traditional Tai Khamyang House *Houn Haang*

iii. Bamboo and Cane Items - The Tai Khamyangs use variety of cane and bamboo products such as flower basket or *Saa- Mokya*, *Paak* or a conical basket, *Paan* or flower tray, *Kup* or a wicker hat etcetera. The most beautiful bamboo and cane product is perhaps the *Oup - Khao*, a huge tray with a pagoda shaped cover. The *Yeip* or lacquered cane basket is not made by them and but are brought from Myanmar. In ancient times the Tai Khamyangs also worked as potters. The *Mo-Khao* or the steam rice maker is the finest example of pottery. They don't usually make metal objects, except for swords, brass utensils are brought from either Ahoms or Burmese. The Khamyangs used to make their own papers and inks or sometimes wrote on a bark of a special tree.

iv. Traditional Clothing - Regarding the traditional dress of the Tai Khamyangs, they wear simple and neat dresses. Coarse white cotton garments are more common with them. Tai Khamyang men wear white colored long sleeve shirts. As a bottom garment men wear sarong of chequered pattern known as *Pha Lung*. The women wear a complete black colored sarong on their chest called *Pha-Sin* and a red belt called *Sai-Kaap* is worn over it. Both men and women began to cover their body with a white shawl called *Pha-Mai*. Additionally the women wear a white or green piece of cloth over the *Pha-Sin* which is

called *Lang-Bat*. Some Tais in Assam consider *Lang-Bat* as non-indigenous to Tai people. Both Tai Khamyang men and women carry a handbag called *Thoong*. *Pha Chet* is the piece of cloth worn as scarf. It is also worn as a turban by both men and women. *Chyu* is a piece of cloth worn by both men and women.



Figure 4.7 - An elderly Khamyang lady wearing *Phasin*



Figure 4.8- Tai Khamyang Youth in traditional attire

According to Tai Khamyang Buranji, both male and female used to keep long hair. The head is wrapped with a white cloth leaving the top hair bun exposed. In an eighteenth century portrait of a Tai Khamyang man, a chequered pattern of turban was worn by him. The turban is known as *Pok - Kho*. Clothes worn by the married and the unmarried women are easily distinguishable. An unmarried female generally a black dyed *Pha Sin*, a *Sai Kaap* around the waist and *Chyu* to cover the upper body. Besides all the above mentioned costumes a married women has to wear a long bat and drape a *Pha Mai* over her chest.



Figure 4.9- Lang Bat



Figure 4.10- Sai Kaap



Figure 4.11- Pha Lung



Figure 4.12- Pha Chet



Figure 4.13- Thoong

v. Ornaments - The women folk used a silver hair pin made in beautiful flower designs called *Kat Kaw*. Terweil mentioned that Khamyangs also used wooden hair pin. As an earring Khamyang women used to wear cylindrical ear plugs of bright amber pieces and massive silver bangles. It is said that men also used ear plugs.



Figure 4.14- Kat Kaw (Silver Hair Pin)
Source- Anthropological Museum of Indigenous People, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University



Figure 4.15- Wein Ngoun (Silver Bangle)
Source- Nang Purobi Chowlu

vi. Hand Woven Items- A very important hand-woven item among the Khamyang is the *Taan-Khwan*, a long handmade rectangular flag of religious purpose, its length varied depending upon the weavers. This is the most beautiful hand woven item among the Tai Khamyangs. Various designs depicting the scenes from Buddhist *Jatakas* or religious symbols are woven. At the top of the bamboo post where *Taan - Khwan* is hanged, a wooden mythical bird is placed. A plain white *Taan - Khwan* hanged in a cross bar at the top of the bamboo is generally seen in the grave of a dead person.

4.5 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY/OCCUPATION

Primarily the Tai Khamyangs of Assam are engaged in agriculture. They grow different types of seasonal crops, basically for their own consumption. Besides, many of them are engaged in Government and Private sector jobs. Due to the presence of oil in the area many of them pursue technical education in ITI's and engineering Colleges and are employed in companies like Oil India Limited and Indian Oil Corporation. Domestication of animals like cow, goat, pig is done mainly for agricultural and food purpose. Elephant rearing was one of the common occupations of the people in Rohon Shyam Gaon up to the nineties of the twentieth century. Elephants were mainly engaged in wood logging business. Elephant rearing was such a lucrative business that elephants were exported outside the country as well. However the practice slowly went into oblivion mainly because of wildlife conservation acts prohibiting domestication of wild animals. These days many of the Tai Khamyang people are engaged in small time businesses. Many people own small tea plantations as well. Data relating to the economic activity of the two surveyed villages is presented in table 5.10 and 5.10.1 of Chapter 5.

4.6 FOOD HABITS

Though the Khamyangs profess Buddhism, religion does not stand in their way of consumption of non-vegetarian food. Drinking is not prohibited though it is not considered good also. Domestication of cattle for milk is seen though not to a great extent. Fish is a delicacy and they consume pork as well. According to one informant, eating beef is not prohibited, but they don't eat beef as their ancestors decided not to take beef to respect their Hindu neighbors, and the practice is still continuing.



Figure 4.16- Traditional way of cooking rice



Figure 4.17- Tai Khamyang Ethnic food

Rice (Khaw) is the staple foods of the Khamyangs .Traditional food items include steamed rice (Khao Hai),Sour Fish (Pa Som), Sour Meat (Lo Som),Smoked Fermented fish (Pa Nao) and smoked meat (Lo Heng), Khaw Lam (bamboo rice), Khaw Tek (Akhoi), Khaw Pong (Puffed rice),Tong Tap(steamed rice cake), Khaw Puk and Khaw Osa (rice pudding) (Shyam,2019).The specialty of all the meat and fish dishes mentioned above is that they can be preserved for many days. Besides the above mentioned items, the Khamyangs also take different types of vegetables and special herbs like *Pokoi Hom, Ling, Piki, Makat* leaves etcetera. They generally prefer to have a boiled or steamed preparation with the help of locally available spices and herbs. Different type of pulses is very common in their diet.

4.6.1 Ethno - Medicine

Ethno-medicine is a study of the traditional medicine practiced by various ethnic groups. The Khamyang ethno medical system constitutes herbal medicine as well as magico religious-spiritual practices. Jiji (2014) has discussed in details about the ethno-medicinal uses of wild vegetables used by Tai Khamyang people of Disangpani Shyam and Chalapathar Shyam villages of the present Charaideo districts of Assam .Since ancient times, the Tai Khamyang people are using medicinal herbs which can treat kidney stones, blood pressure, joint pains, intermittent fever, dysentery, leprosy, gastric ulcer, piles ,bronchitis etc. Some of the popular herbs used to treat different diseases are *Sapindus Mukorssi, Terminilia Arjuna, Terminalia Chebula* etcetera. Gogoi (1999) has made special reference to the practice of colour making among the Khamyangs with the help of a special herb. This colour was also sold commercially till recent past. However the ethno-medicinal practices and colour making are going into oblivion due to the influences of allopathic practices and easy availability of chemical colors.

4.7 LANGUAGE

Tai Khamyang language belongs to the *Tai-Kadai* language family spoken by only a few speakers in some districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. According to SIL Ethnologue, it is spoken by about fifty speakers in Pawaoimukh village of the Margherita subdivision. However, the number of fluent speakers is less than ten. The researcher came

across only two fluent speaker of Tai- Khamyang language, one each in Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon. Tai Khamyang has been assigned the ‘dying’ status on the ethnologue EDIGS scale (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption scale).The dominant language spoken by the Tai Khamyangs of Assam is Assamese. (Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University).

4.7.1 Script and Literature

The Tai Khamyangs have their own script and a rich literature. They brought their script along with them when they migrated to Assam from in the eighteenth century. They called their script as ‘Lik-Tai’ or Tai script. Most of their literary works are written in their own script. The script has thirty five letters out of which seventeen are consonants and eighteen are vowels. The Tai Khamyangs have a very rich literature both oral and written. Their literature can be divided as secular and non-secular categories. The non-secular literature mainly deals with the religious scriptures. Almost all the parts of *Tripitaka* (Buddhist scriptures) are translated in their script.



Figure 4.18- Tai Khamyang Script (Source- Chow Kensan Tunkhang)

Apart from this, their non-secular literature also includes scriptures on Tai Khamyang indigenous religion. The secular literature of the Tai Khamyangs includes vast number of subjects such as Astrology and Astronomy, Folklores and Folktales, Medicines etc. Religious books mainly include *Lik Ho Tham* (Dharma Sirsak), *Lik Abhidhamma*, (Parts of Tripitaka) *Lik Hong Khon* (Book of calling back lost *Khon*). Non-Religious or

secular literature mainly includes *Lik Petang* (Book on Astrology), *Lik Sattua* (*Tai Khamyang Buranji* or historical chronicle which is written in Assamese), *Thamma - Sat* (comes from *Dharma Shastra* meaning Customary Jurisprudence).

4.7.2 Literacy

The literacy rate is considerably high among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. According to the data collected during the field study in the two villages it was found that their literacy rate is very high. Chalapther Shyam Gaon had a literacy rate of 93.5 percent and Rohon Shyam Gaon has a literacy rate of 91.3 percent. Not much gender disparity is found in the literacy rate. The male and female literacy rate is almost the same with 93.3 percent (male) and 93.8 percent (female) in Chalapather and 91.7 percent (male) and 91 percent (female) in Rohon Shyam Gaon. It is mention worthy that this literacy rate is much higher than the total literacy rate of India which is 74.04 percent (Census of India, 2011).The detailed analysis of the literacy in the two villages is being done in Chapter 5(Table 5.8 and 5.8.1).

4.7.3 Scheduled Tribe Status

According to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act of 1956, the Tai Khamyang community has been accorded the scheduled tribes status. They are being referred to as Man (Tai-Speaking) community in the same.

4.8 SOCIAL LIFE

The Khamyang society is patriarchal where the eldest male member is the head of the family and commands respect from them. All members of the family are expected to obey him in all important matters .Works are however shared by all the members of the family on the basis of division of labour and sex. In the absence of father or his death, wife plays an important role in many matters. The normal activities of the wife generally include cooking, weaving, looking after children and keeping account of household expenses. It is generally seen that the head of the family generally consults other members of the family before taking important decisions .Some of the important relationships in Tai

Khamyang language are- Mei - Mother, Pou - Father, Luk Chai - Son, Chai - Elder Brother, Luk Sao-Daughter and Pi- Elder Sister.

In the Khamyang society, property, both movable and immovable traditionally belongs to the head of the family. He generally has the right to possess, sell, donate or rent it during his lifetime. In the event of death of the head of the family, traditionally the sons inherit the father's property. In order to avert any impending dispute among the heirs after his death, the father generally distributes the property among the sons during his lifetime, often before death. In the absence of any biological or adopted son or any other potential heir, the property is generally inherited by the daughters. However, now a days it is seen that the father during his old age divides the property both among his sons and daughters. While doing so, he generally keeps the homestead and some amount of cultivable land in his name. This is done to ensure his secured livelihood during the last days in the event of their sons not taking care of them (Sarmah, 2001).

4.8.1 Status of Women

Among the Khamyangs, traditionally most of the domestic work is left to women. From early morning to evening they are seen engaged in homely affairs. Women bear children, rear them up, and look after the elderly members. They are engaged in activities like cleaning the house and surroundings, cooking, washing, collect, working in kitchen garden and weaving. The Tai Khamyang women are expert weavers. All the traditional clothes are generally weaved by the women folk. It is to be mentioned here that the Tai Khamyang women prepare robes for the monks in just one right for the Kathina ceremony. They also help the head of the family in agricultural activities like planting and harvesting. The grown up daughters of the family assist their mothers in all kinds of domestic and agricultural works. They also learn the art of weaving. But now-a -days, the young educated women have taken employment as teachers, professors, doctors and engineers etcetera. Weaving is no longer a commercial vocation among the Khamyang women.

The society does not make discrimination against a widow. Remarriage of a widow is not forbidden among them. No restriction is put on a widow in matters of dress or food or other spheres of day today life. She is free to go outside or visit people as she did before.

In the earlier times, a woman who was unable of procreating children was not allowed to take part in any function or auspicious occasion. However due to spread of education, this practice is not seen these days.

The role of a Khamyang woman is extended to religious sphere as well. It is a part of regular duty of the eldest female member of the family to offer portion of the first cooked food to the monks of the monastery. A woman is free to attend any religious function held in the monastery. There are some rituals and ceremonies specifically attached to the womenfolk. One of such rituals is *Khonlik* (‘Ayush Mota’ which means ‘to invite heath’).If a person falls sick for a long time without any specific reason, then the elderly women of the village are invited to perform the ritual and ward off any bad omen. They also play a major role in the child purification rituals after a child is born. There are not much restrictions bestowed upon the Tai Khamyang women and they enjoy considerable freedom and liberty.

4.8.2 Clan

A clan is a grouping whose membership claims descent from a common ancestor without actually being able to trace genealogical links in all cases (Schwartz B.M, 1968). Persons belonging to a clan though genealogically may not be traceable, behave like siblings. A clan may be ancestral, totemic or territorial depending on from whom or where the members trace origin. According to Britannica, *Totemism* is the belief in which humans are said to have a mystical relationship with a spirit- being such as an animal or plant. With regards to the Khamyangs, there were members of the nine Khamyang clans who came to Assam. The name of the nine clans or *Phans* are presented below with some information-

1. Thaumung- Linked with the concept of harbinger or messenger.
2. Chowhai- Associated with leadership.
3. Chowlu- People from ‘Lu’ (Burma).First group of Khamyang people to migrate to Assam.
4. Chowlik- ‘Metal People’ Associated with blacksmiths.
5. Tunkhang- One of the earliest Khamyang group to settle in Assam.
6. Wailoung- Associated with astrology.

7. Panyok- Linked with the concept of ‘banana shoot’.
8. Phalek- This clan is associated with teachers. Lik means book.
9. Chowsong- Also known as Chaownn. (Sarmah, 2001).

Besides these nine clans, there are few other clans such as ‘Ma Loy’, ‘Kum Chai’, ‘Chau Teu Mung’. ‘Thek’, ‘Mouke’, ‘Kamthong’, ‘Chaw Kong’, ‘Pomung’ etcetera. These clans were assimilated to the Tai Khamyang community by the practice of *Tun Chap*. The Tai Khamyangs are very accepting by nature. If anyone from the neighboring community wanted to be a part of the Tai Khamyang community then he could be allowed to be a part of the community by following the practice of *Tun Chap*. ‘Tun’ means clan and ‘Chap’ means ‘to add’ or ‘to include (Rajkhowa, 2013). So literally it would mean to include someone outside of the clan within the community. However, to include someone into their clan, the family had to take the permission of other members of the community. The newly inducted member to take the clan name of the adoptive family or he may be given a new clan name. If any member of the Tai Khamyang community does an unpardonable offence, then there is a provision of making him outcast too. This practice is known as *Kha Chap*. However there are very few instance of someone getting outcaste or socially boycotted in the Tai Khamyang community. Marriages are prohibited within the same clans as people belonging to the same clan are considered as brothers and sisters.

People of different clans generally live in the same village. It has been observed that clan differentiation is hardly given preference or importance among them, except in marriage. The Khamyangs do not marry in the same clan. There is no hierarchy among them. All are considered to be equal in status. Children inherit the clan name of their father. In day today life, settlement pattern, elevation to the status of monk or in any similar matter, the clan identity does not play any role (Sarmah, 2001).

4.8.3 Surname

Shyam is the most common surname found in the two villages. The surname Shyam is in tune with the general tendency to identify themselves with Siam or Thailand.

But since the last few years there has been a new trend among the people in this regard. Many of the members have started using clan name as surname.

4.8.4 Social Stratification/ Village Administration

The *Gaonburha* is the village headman who presides over the meetings of the village elders. Next to him in the social hierarchy is the *Barik* who also acts as the informer. He informs the general villagers about the deliberations of the village elders. He has a part to play during the time of festivals also. After the *Barik*, comes the *Pathek* or *Chow Siri* who acts as a guide in all religious activities. All these portfolios are honorary (Thakur, 1972).

4.8.5 Marriage

Khamyangs are traditionally an endogamous group having a number of exogamous clans. They do not marry within the same clan. Though there are many cases of inter-religious and inter-caste marriages, they prefer to marry the Tai Buddhist tribes namely the Khamtis, the Aitons, the Phakes, Turungs and other Buddhist tribes like Singpho and even the Baruah Buddhists. Large number of marriages with the Tai Ahoms is also seen. Marriage date is fixed on an auspicious day selected by consulting an auspicious book named *Petang*. The people consider marriage as a social contract and generally recognize three types of marriage:

Paan Long Marriage -This type of marriage was very grand and expensive. It was prevalent in the olden days among the high ranking officials and royal family.

Bor Biya or Paan On -The marriage performed by negotiation and performed as per detailed social procedures. In a *Paan On* marriage ceremony marriage is fixed by the parents by sending a middle man known as *Pa Chow* or *Kotoki*. *Pa Chow* generally acts as a messenger. Interaction between the two families, questions and queries and correspondence is handled by him. In olden days the groom had to stay at the bride's family and help them for a month after the marriage was fixed. He did this to show the bride's family that he is an able man. There was also a practice prevalent in the earlier days

where bride's family and relatives were invited before the marriage by the groom's family for a feast which was known as *Khao Lom Som Kin* or *Petpura*. On the day of the marriage as soon as the groom reaches the bride's house he is given a warm welcome. The elders from the bride's family perform the white thread (*Phuk Mai*) winding ceremony and tie white cotton thread to the couple as a sign of blessing. The thread is tied in the right hand of the groom and left hand of the bride. During the marriage *Xorai* or offering tray having specific numbers of areca nut and betel leaves (one *Xorai* each) is given by the groom's side mainly to the father, mother, maternal uncle, paternal uncle and the general people. The numbers of areca nut and betel leaves (*Tamul- Paan*) are given according to the demand of the bride's family. The maternal family or *Lung Ta* is given high regard in a Tai Khamyang marriage. The paternal family is known as *Pu Ton*. Since monks are not considered as part of the social life they are not involved in any marriage ritual. After the deliberations are done the *Pa Chow* (*Kataki*) announces that marriage ceremony is successfully completed and he announces the bride and groom as man and wife. After this the bride is taken to the groom's place.

A ritual is performed at the house gate of the groom's house to ward off any bad omens. They pray to the *Phi Houn* or house spirit and *Phi Lam* or ancestor spirits for good luck. The groom is then welcomed inside the house and is made to wear a new dress. It is to be mentioned that the groom's family also sends a special offering tray or a *Xorai* along with the other trays consisting of areca nuts and betel leaves. This special tray consisting of boiled egg, four strings of raw white cotton thread, rice and areca nut and betel leaf (*Tamul -Pan*). Egg has great significance in Tai culture. The Tai people consider egg as a symbol of creation. The tray is handed over to the father of the bride at the time of marriage. As soon as the marriage gets over the tray is handed over to the members of bride's maternal family (*Lung Ta*) who accompany her to the groom's place. Before leaving the groom's place, the *Lung Ta* takes the white thread from the tray (which was given to the bride's father) and ties it to the wrist of the couple. He also smears the egg yolk on the couple's forehead and blesses them with rice. This ritual is known as *Mai Khon* (*Tai Khamyang Buranji*, 2004). This ritual concludes the marriage ceremony. After few days of the marriage monks are invited into the house to bless the newlyweds and a ceremony known as *Mangala Houn* is performed. *Mangal* means auspicious and *Houn* means house. So *Mangala Houn* means a ceremony performed by the monks to bring good luck to the house

or the family. It is to be mentioned here that there is no specific time of performing the *Mangala Houn* ceremony as it is not essentially associated with marriage. It is performed to bring good luck to the house or family as mentioned above.



Figure 4.19 - A *Xorai* sent by the groom's family to the bride's family for *Mai Khon* ritual

Chowali Biya or Liakhwa Li Phak - It is a marriage that results out of mutual understanding and the desire of the perspective bride and groom and is ultimately approved by both the families. The marriage is performed generally without any elaborate arrangement and done in the presence of very few people who mainly include the close relatives of bride and groom.

Marriage by Elopement or Lak Pasau or Ao Pai Sau - Marriage by elopement happens when the parents generally don't approve of the union. After the elopement occurs, they are generally accepted by their parents (Sarmah, 2001). It is to be mentioned there that even though the marriage is done by elopement yet the couple has to perform a social ceremony to get accepted by the society. In case of such marriages generally three *Xorai's* or offering tray consisting of areca nut and betel leaf are given by the groom's family to the bride's family. It is interesting to know that the bride's mother is not given the *Xorai*. It may be considered as a symbolic punishment to the bride's mother for not raising the girl in a disciplined way. As mentioned above, the maternal family or *Lung Ta* is given great importance in any Tai Khamyang marriage. The eloped couple is not considered socially acceptable unless they seek the blessings the material family and offer them a *Xorai*.



Figure 4.20- Tai Khamyang Marriage ceremony (Source - Chiranjiv Chowlik)

Monogamy is the general rule among the Khamyangs. In the earlier days some people had more than one wife. However this practice is almost extinct these days. During the course of field study only two cases of polygamous marriages have been found where the husband has married again after the death of the first wife. There is no restriction on widow remarriage. Earlier they used to marry at a very young age. But the trend is changing now mainly because they want to get married after getting formal education and becoming self-sufficient. It is a generally conceived belief that to have a successful conjugal life, the husband should be elder than the wife by a few years. However, in the course of study few cases were seen where the wife was of the same age or even few years older than the husband.

There is a traditional custom of bride price known as *Phul Pani Bech* among the Tais of Assam. Through the mediator, the father of the bride generally demands a reasonable amount of bride price from the groom's parents. Generally the bride price is paid one day before the marriage. Sometimes it is paid on the day of the marriage too. In some cases bride price is paid in kind such as buffalo or bullock is also permitted. In case of elopement, the bride price is always on the higher side. Marriages are not solemnized during the *Varsa Vas* months i.e. from July to October.

4.8.6 Life Cycle

4.8.6.1 Birth

It is expected that birth of the baby should take place in the house of the husband. Any birth taking place in the mother's paternal house is considered to be inauspicious. At the time of delivery, many take recourse to magical activities to cure the suffering of the expectant mother. The practice is noticed in other Tai groups of Assam namely, Turungs, Aitons and the Phakes (Sarmah, 2001).

Another important practice associated with the birth of a child in the Khamyang society is the cutting of the umbilical cord. Soon after the umbilical cord dries up and drops, the father of the child seeks advice from the village monk to select a suitable day to take out the child from confinement so as to show the child worldly objects. On the stipulated day, the child is placed on a small alter (tumuli). In case of a boy, articles like spear, sword, axe, knife, bow and arrow and a piece of rock are placed near the alter. In case of a girl, items like, sickle, needle etcetera are placed. The child is taken near those objects to touch the same. The baby is then shown the sky and some grains of rice are thrown on the ground and the baby's right foot is made to touch the earth, in case of a girl left foot is made to touch the earth. After that, the baby is brought inside the house and yolk of a boiled egg is smeared all over his/her body. The elders utter blessings by binding a piece of white cotton thread on both the wrists of the baby.

4.8.6.2 Naming of the Child

Naming of the newborn child is also an important custom among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. Name of a child is given ceremonially and is done generally after about a month from the date of birth. The date of naming the child is selected in consultation with the monk of the village monastery. It is interesting to note that the order of birth and sex of the child are always taken into consideration in choosing the name of the new born. For example, if it is the eldest male child then it will start with the prefix *Chao Ai* and *Nang Je* would mean the first daughter of the family, the second male child will use the prefix *Chao Yi* and the second female will use the prefix *Nang Ye*. The system

continues like this for other children accordingly. Similar system prevails among the other Tai groups of Assam (Sarmah, 2001).

4.8.6.3 Death

Death is viewed as a natural phenomenon by the Khamyangs of Assam. Both burial as well as cremation system of the dead ones is in practice. The dead bodies of elderly people who follow the eight precepts are generally cremated. In all cases of normal death, burial or cremation is done according to the wish of the deceased person. In case of unnatural death such as, accident, murder, drowning, snake bite, suicide etc. the body is invariably buried. Death of a pregnant woman is considered as inauspicious and unnatural. Person who died outside the village (such as hospital or in an accident) are not allowed to bring the body inside the village territory. Washing of the dead body before cremation is must. The dead body is dressed with new traditional clothes most of the time. The monk stands towards the head of the dead body and recites portions from the Buddhist scriptures. There is no fixed place for cremation, but it is generally done on river banks. The eldest son usually lights up the fire of the funeral pyre. The main purification ceremony is practiced on the sixth day. Feast is organized for the villagers and gifts are offered to the temple monks as part of the purification ceremony. On the seventh day, monks are invited to perform the *Mangal Sutra* and after that, the owner of the house offers valuable articles of daily use to them (Thakur, 1972).

4. 9 DANCE AND MUSIC

The Tai Khamyangs have a rich variety of dances and songs. Most of their dances are organized during their religious festivals. Their dances include *Ka-Ya-Phra* (Buddha statue procession dance), *Ka-Chong* (umbrella dance) and *Ka-Thung Tai* (Tai cultural dance) etc. Dances are generally accompanied with their traditional musical instruments such as *Kong Pat* (a big drum), *Yam-Mong* (Gongs), *Pai-Seng* (cymbals), *Pee* or flutes and a violin like instrument known as *Saiting* which is rarely used. The Tai Khamyangs perform a stage dance known as *Pya Pung* (Gogoi, 1999). Dance dramas based on *Jataka tales* known as *Ka Pung* are also performed.



Figure 4.21- *Kong Pat* (Drum)



Figure 4.22 - *Yam Mong*

The Tai Khamyangs traditionally perform a number of songs, rhymes and ritualistic chanting. Ladies perform a special song while pounding rice which is known as *Mo Kam Soi Yoi*. *Oi Thoun* song is performed while collecting timber and food in the forest. *Kham Poong* is a song which is performed during drama. Buddhist hymns known as *Khaam Tra* are chanted during religious occasions. Besides there are other folk songs sung while searching for vegetables in the field, songs for counting or teaching numbers, lullabies and songs sung during religious processions. It is to be mentioned here that most of these folk songs and dances are slowly going into oblivion.

In this Chapter, the researcher has made an attempt to draw a brief sketch of the history and socio-cultural life of the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. From the socio-cultural study of the various aspects of the population it is evident that they are a distinct group having their own socio-cultural identity. Traditionally in almost every aspect of their life, their indigenous tradition played a pivotal role. However, most of these traditions and practices are slowly going into oblivion. The researcher has discussed in details about those aspects in Chapter 6.