

Impact of Therawada Buddhism in the Traditional Belief of Tai Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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Abstract

The Khamti or Tai-Khamti as they are also known, are a sub- group of the Shan people found in the Sagaing division Hkamti district in northern Burma as well as Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The Khamti who inhabit the region around the Tengapani basin were descendents of Shan migrants who came during the 18th century from the Bor-Khamti region, mountainous valley of the Irrawaddy. The khamtis are a small tribe inhabiting the Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, but they are an important tribe, as they are culturally far advance and have many special characteristics in compare to other tribes of the state. They can hardly be called a “hills tribes”, as they live entirely in the plain areas near Nao-Dihing and Tengapani rivers. Out of 28 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Khamtis and the Monpas are the only tribes, which have their own sound literature. The Tai Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh profess the Therawada school of Buddhism. It is the oldest form of Buddhism and arose in India during the time of the historical Buddha and spread throughout south East Asia. Among the Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh side by side with the canonical Buddhist beliefs there is also a beliefs of phi (sprits). Gods of all kind. The culture, social, traditions and religious beliefs of Tai Khamti revolve in and around the phi. Teaching of Therawada Buddhism has influence this beliefs almost in all extent.

Keywords: Shan Migrant, Tai Khamti, Traditional beliefs, Buddhism, Impact

Shan or Tai

The Khamti or Tai-Khamti as they are also known, are a sub- group of the Shan people found in the Sagaing division Hkamti district in northern Burma as well as Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, India. The Khamti who inhabit the region around the Tengapani basin were descendents of Shan migrants who came during the 18th century from the Bor-Khamti region, mountainous valley of the Irrawadi. The ‘Shan’ word is derived from the word ‘Siam’, which denotes to a group of mountainous people who migrated from Yunnan in the 6th century A.D. The literal meaning of the word is agriculture or cultivation. In Chinese the word ‘Shan’ means a mountain or highland, but by the Myanmar, the Shan are the people who had descended upon the plain of upper Myanmar from the Shan states of the southern highlands of Yunnan. The Myanmar divided the Shan into Myanmar Shan and Chinese Shan. The Khamtis are a sub type of Myanmar Shan.

The Shan call themselves Tai, which means free or freedom or free man. The Tai people are the inhabitant

of central Asia, presently China in or around BC 3000 before the Chinese arrived. According to the history of Tai people, they were attacked by many groups for centuries. Due to continuous attack by many groups, they started migrating towards various directions in search of peaceful and fertile land. The first migration of Shan was said to be taken place in 1st century BC when wars in central China drove out many Tai people from that region. Those people moved toward south and founded ancient Shan cities such as Muong Mao, Muong Nai, Hsenwi, Hsipaw. The second migration took place in 6th century A.D from the mountain of Yunnan. They followed Nam Mao River to the south. They settled down in the valleys and the areas surrounded by the river. Some continued toward west into Thailand. The third migration went north following the Brahmaputra River into north Assam, India. These three groups of Tai migrant were (i) Shan (Shan state) (ii) Siam (Thailand) and (iii) Tai Ahom (Assam). The Shan or Tai lives in India, Thailand, Burma, China, Laos, and Vietnam by different names, but they are always one and the same people in different countries. By whatever name they are known worldwide, the most important and common criterion of the group identity is that all Shan or Tai are Buddhist. A second common thing is that, all Tai settlements are associated with wet rice cultivation.

Tai Khamti

'Khamti' word is the combination of two words, 'Kham' and 'Ti'. Literally, Kham means gold and Ti means region or place. As a whole, the meaning of the word is the region or place of gold. According to another version, Kham means 'to adhere to' and Ti means 'a place or a country. It is so called because the country being protected all side by high hills except the Chau Kang pass. Traditions say that Chau Samlungpha had expelled a big Tibetan (Lama) army from their country and closed the pass with big rocks forever. In this way the residing Shan in this locked country came to be known as Khamti, for being adhere to it. Another third version put forwarded by E.C Leach is that, the word Khamti appeared to have been originally a title associated with the royal family of Mounng Kong. After the elimination of Mounng Kong as an independent political unit, it continued to serve as a description of those Shan principalities which had formally been political dependencies of Mounng Kong in a feudal sense.

The Khamti's are the sub type of Myanmarese Shan. In India, the tribe inhabiting in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, are an important tribe, as they are culturally far advance and have many special characteristics in compare to other tribes of the state. Arunachal Pradesh is the eastern most state of Indian sub-continent. Located in north east India, the state has an area of 83,743 Sq. kms. Characterized by lofty mountainous terrain, crisscrossed by a number of turbulent rivers and rivulets. Arunachal Pradesh borders the states of Assam and Nagaland to the south, and shares international borders with Bhutan in the west, Myanmar in the east and the People's Republic of China in the north. Arunachal Pradesh means 'Land of the Dawn lit Mountain'. Literally it means the 'land of rising sun', (in Sanskrit Arun means sun and Anchal means mountain valley) in reference to its position as the eastern most state of India. It is also known as the 'Orchid state of India' or the 'paradise of the Botanies'. A large number of migrant from various other parts of India and foreign lands have and have been affecting the state's population. There are 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes found in the state. Each tribe has their own distinct and colorful custom and tradition. The Tai Khamti's are recognized as one of the 26 major tribes of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Out of all tribes reside in the state, the Tai Khamti and the Monpa tribes have their own script. They can hardly be called a "hills tribes", as they live entirely in the plain areas near Nao-Dihing and Tengapani rivers. Out of 26 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Khamtis and the Monpas are the only tribes, which have their own sound literature in compare to other residing tribes of the state. The Tai

Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh profess the Therawada school of Buddhism. It is the oldest form of Buddhism and arose in India during the time of the historical Buddha and spread throughout south East Asia. Among the Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh, side by side with the canonical Buddhist beliefs there is also a belief of *phi* (sprints). Gods of all kind. The culture, social, traditions and religious beliefs of Tai Khamti revolve in and around the *phi*. Teaching of Therawada Buddhism has an influence on these beliefs, almost in all extent. The Shan adopted the Buddhism since A D 71. Later Shan have adopted Therawada Buddhism.

Traditional History of the Tai Khamti

The history book of the Tai Khamti, Cha-Tiu and also others chronicles indicate that the Tai Khamti are the descendents of two celestials brothers- Chow Khun-Lu and Chow Khun-Lai, who were sent down to the earth by the celestials king Chow-Kun Sang to rule here. After successfully ruled for many year on this earth, out of these two brothers, Chow-Khun Lu went back to his celestial's palace. While Chow-Kunlai stay back on the earth and establish his kingdom. During the subsequent days, his successors built several principalities on the earth, such as Moug-Pe, Moug-Hon, Moug-Hwann, Moug-Pakka-So, and so on. It is believed that ancient kingdom of Moug Hon is situated somewhere in the present day Nanchao of China. The Tai Khamtis are believed that their ancestors are related with the descendent of Moug Yang dynasty of upper Myanmar. One of their ancestor, the male is popularly known is Poo-Mon-Pha and the female Yaa-Mon-Kham. These progenitors of the Tai Khamtis are collectively known as Poo-Khay-Mey-Maan. According to the written records available about the Tai Khamti, one of the princesses of Moug Hon had established a semi-independent principality known as Moug Mantalet. He had seven daughters. The younger daughter, Nang King-Ya being blind, the king left her to her destiny by sending her through a river on a raft. A celestials being in disguise of a white tiger married the blind princesses and from both of them three sons and four daughters were born. On attaining adulthood, the three sons namely, Chow Sukhampa, Chow Sulungpha and Chow Sukapha claimed for their ancestral properties from their maternal grandfather, the ruler of Mantalet. On recognizing them, the grandfather conferred upon them a generic name, 'Fan-Sou-Khou-Sang' which means tiger lineage and a celestial origin. These three princesses afterward established three principalities Moug-Kong, Moug-Mit Weign Sou and Moug Yang respectively towards the end of 12th century. Majority of the people of these three principalities were belonged to Tai (great Tai) and Tai Noi (little Tai) people. Because of descending from the tiger lineage, the Tai Khamti used the images of tiger as the mark of their identity.

The history of migration of Khamti is a history of long struggle from century to century which they had to Carry on against the powerful Chinese imperial pressure from north and against the powerful neighbors in the south resulting in a succession of glorious period of their supremacy in China, Burma, Laos, Assam, and Thailand. There have been a many views regarding the migration or original place of Khamti. It is said that they migrated to Assam from the BorKhamti near the Irrawadi River. The first batch of Khamti which left Moug Khamti made their first settlement on the Tengapani River, south of Sadiya with the permission of the ruling Ahom authorities. During the reign of Ahom king Gaurinath Singh, the Khamti pushed to Sadiya and ousted the Ahom Khowa Gohain. The Khamti were so sturdy and powerful that then Ahom and later the British acknowledged the Khamti Gohain.

Social Organization

The traditional society of the Tai Khamti is divided into social hierarchy. The chieftain family or clan lies the top of the hierarchy. The second higher layer of the hierarchy is occupied by the priestly class. It is a noble class respected and honored by all the other classes as it is concerned with the performance of indigenous ceremonies and rituals. The common people are considered as the bottom layer of the hierarchy. In the past, the slaves also constituted their own class in the society, but nowadays such classes are no more in existence. Today, the traditional society of the Tai Khamti has changed. On account of democratization and modernization, the system of superior and inferior clans disappeared. There is no class or clan prejudice which was used to be prevalent in their society. Today, they are in same platform. Thus, in this way, the traditional social pattern of the Tai Khamti seems to disappear providing rooms for democracy and equality. The Tai Khamti society has patriarchal and patrilineal in nature and character. Such tilting is generally seen during the distribution of parental property among the children.

Social Position of Women

In Tai Khamti society, the women accorded a higher status. Like the other tribes of the state, the child marriage system is not known to the Tai Khamti. The women are not treated as inferior to men. They enjoy various social, cultural and individual freedom in the society. They have the personal right to choose their life partner. Today, numbers of Tai Khamti talented lady personalities are coming up in administration, politics, education, business, technical domains, medical and so on. This indicates the liberal nature and character of their society. In Khamti society, the widows are also enjoy sufficient freedom. They are not hated, ignored or neglected by the society. They are permitted to remarry if they want to do so.

Dresses

The Khamti men and women can be identified by their dresses. The men commonly wear a tight fitting cotton Chyn (jacket) and a cotton or silk Fanoi (lungi). The lungi has a chequered pattern in a combination of colorful threads i.e. green, red, white, black, etc. They also put a white turban, which is known as Fa-Ho in their language. The female dresses consist of a Sein (black skirt), Chyn Khenyao (long sleeved jacket), Sai Sein (red color belt), Fa-Mai (white color scarf), Langwat (green waist cloth) and a white turban. The last two are generally worn by married women.

Arts and Culture

The Tai Khamti has a very rich culture equipped with magnificent arts and culture. The tribe has a preference for conventional attire, enriched by brilliant craft work, which command a huge market. The beautifully crafted sword known as Pha-Nap, Pheaan-Khao, Loong, Um-Pa, Saah, Pan-Mok-Yah, etc. which are made up of cane and bamboo in different shapes, size and design are very popular around the state. The Khamti makes embossed shield and are fond of mask, mainly of the horror type of colored cloth stretched on bamboo frames for use in ceremonial dances, which illustrate the temptation of the lord Buddha and other themes. Their finest work however, is in their carving of images of the lord Buddha. The khamti women have retained their skill in weaving and embroidery. They make finely woven belts known as sai-sin, sin, pha-noi, thong, pha-mai, etc. with colorful threads and design.

Literature

It is said that literature is the mirror of a sound and well-founded society. It reflects the culture and tradition of the society. A good literature nourishes and helps to improve the all-round development of a society. It molds the psychological and sociological aspects of a society and has a good hand in bringing the society to the track of popular civilization. The Tai Khampti has a rich and invaluable treasure in the form of literature which they call it "Lik-Lai-Pai-Pe". Their literature is generally written in ancient Tai-Khampti script. They have a very sound and rich literature which embraces every facet of human life. Their literature touches history, astrology and divination, omens and remedies, cosmology and cosmogony, invocation and prayers, worship and sacrifice manuals, religious scriptures, criminal codes and ethics, marriage manuals, legends and tradition, almanac and calendars, etc.

According to their nature and character, the vast literary works of the Tai Khampti can be broadly divided into two categories. Firstly, those literary works which deal only with specialized subject i.e. religion. Secondly, those literary works which deal with other secular subject. The Tai Khampti villages are laden with innumerable number of literary books. Those literary books and manuscript which deal with specialized subject i.e. religion, are being read and recited by them in melodious tune with pure heart and devotion. These books and manuscript are regularly recited and taught to the pupils at the monasteries. These books and manuscripts are rich in high quality teachings of truthfulness, wisdom, non-violence and so on. After completing the course of training and learning in the monastery, the pupils are converted into good and exemplary human beings in the world. They become fully conscious about their religion, religious practices and about the society from these religious books and manuscripts. This kind of literary works of the Tai Khamptis, which is mainly concerned with specialized subjects, are generally dealt with universal, temporal and ethical knowledge of the whole universe. In this category, mention may be given of the Buddha's teachings, jataka tales, fables, Chau-La-Maung (Ramayana), Thamma-Puktram (Mahabharata), and so on. Beside these, many more illustrated books such as 'Pha-Mahol' – a great epic of wise noble man, 'Chau-Khun-Hong' – a vivid account left by the Chinese traveler, Huen-Tsang during the 17th century A.D., 'Pe-Takat-Tusng-Pung' commonly known as Tripitaka, etc. are in the possession of the praiseworthy Tai Khampti. The numbers of literary works of Tai Khampti are so numerous that it is not an easy job to tell the exact number of the manuscripts and books.

The teachings of Lord Buddha are especially mentioned in the three illustrated manuscripts. They are – 'Ho-Tham' (Dhammasirsak), 'Lik-Puppa-Ho-Tham' (Adi Dhammasirsakkatha), and 'Lik-Ho-Tham-Chum' (illustrated religious scriptures). In this later scripture, the narration about how Chou Khun Hong and Pu-Lepling had brought the religious scripture from the Pha-Tong-Phati island.

Some of the other Buddhist scriptures which are written in Tai-Khampti script are 'Suk-Chilakahan', 'Suk-Mahawa', 'Suk-Patheya', 'Phung-Chin', etc. The Phung-Chin basically indicates and shows the heavenly abode of gods and the nature and character of its surroundings.

The second categories of their literary works are basically dealt with secular character. The 'Cha-Tiu', 'Paytang-Kanan' (astrology and astronomy), 'Paap-Mangan-Nay-Ya' (black magics and treaties on herbal medicines), 'Thamma-Satt' (customary jurisprudence), 'Sang-Waku', 'Pu-Shon-Lan', 'Loka-Niti', 'Loka-Pingya', 'Hitopadesa', 'Kem-Shon', 'Sasana-Tong-Pan', 'Chau-Lee-Chhi-Youn' (great tragedy novel), 'Yay-Khamko-Maw-Nong-Yong' (romantic tragedy novel), etc. fall in the category. The 'Loka-Samukthi' is also a literary book which is concerned with the procedures of disposal of dead. The book mentions about the different ways and procedures of funeral rites according to the nature of death. Such as, death of a pregnant woman, death by burning, death by drowning in the river, death of a child and so on. Moreover,

there are also such manuscript and books which deal with the guidance to good living, worldly knowledge and wisdom, songs of prayer and also of invocation and incantation. They are 'Kham-Poong' (the song or verses for dramatic performances), 'Kham- Pali' (manuscript which deals with love songs), 'Traa' (it's basically dealt with moral values of day-to-day life), 'Kham-Myok-Lang-Nin' (songs to praise the mother goddess), 'Kham-Phoy' (it deals with songs of dedication or donation), etc.

The 'Pe-Takat-Tsung-Pung' (Tripitaka) which has three division i.e., the VinayanaPitaka, the SuttaPitaka, and the AbhidhammaPitaka is the most authentic religious and sacred book of Tai-Khampti. The Tripitaka is the wheel around which all the structures of the Therawada school of Buddhism revolves. The Tai-Khampti also have great reverence and respect for the two great Indian epics- the Ramayana (Chau-La-Maung) and the Mahabharata (ThammaPuktram). Though the basic structures of the two epics of the Tai-Khamptis are same with the original one, they have depicted the stories with slight variations in order to suit them their expression and recitation.

All the important literary works of the Tai-khampti, excluding only a few, are basically compiled in scholarly poetic and rhyme style. They are very accurate and rich in resonance and alliteration. The quality of their works cannot be measured by words alone. In order to understand the quality of their literary works, one has to adjust and adapt himself with the very spirit and soul of the works. If a listener understands the true meaning and can analyze the various compositions of the songs of different occasions, he/she will simply have to accept their inner-lying quality. Some of the songs are so universal and meaningful that there becomes a straight communication between the songs and one's heart and mind. Beside this, they are so sweet and sublime that it is bound to provoke one's emotional thought.

Language and Script

The Tai Khamti has a script which is known as Lik Tai in their language. Their script and language are not of recent origin. Their literature is far advance in compare to the other tribe of the state. It is available in written form. The language of Tai Khamti is basically a branch of parental Tai language spoken in Southeast Asia, China and Myanmar. They had brought this distinct language with them when they had come into this part of the world during the first half of 18th century. They also brought with them, a popular script to write and keep their memorable events and other feelings safe. Now they are in the possession of such manuscript and books which were compiled or written before several hundred years. Their language is more akin to the language of the northern Shan language of Myanmar than the other Tais. Except some minor variation and differences in pronunciations between the Tai Khamti and the northern Shans of Myanmar, the basic and major sections are more or less the same. The language of the Tai Khamti is basically depends on sound. Emphasis is given by the speaker only to the nature of sound of a word. So, their language is tonal and monosyllabic in nature. In Tai Khamti language, each syllable or word has various speaking tones. The meaning of a same word changes according to the nature of tones. To changes the meaning of the same word, a speaker bring variations in his tone by pulling it longer or shorter or by pressing more at a particular syllable of the word. It is desirable to mention here that the Tai Khamti syllable or word has about five to eleven speaking tones. Due to this extraordinary feature, C.K. LONGKENG, an eminent scholar and Rtd. A D C, has called the language as 'Glottal'. Likewise, another eminent scholar and Ex MLA Chow Khok Manpoong also named it as 'Sing-Song-Talk language' because of its peculiarity. Therefore, due to this reason, it is not an easy task for a non Khamti to speak and learn this language perfectly.

Festival

The Tai Khamti people traditionally follow the lunar year. All their socio religion ceremonies and social culture festivals are tie up with the cycle of the lunar months. April (Noun Haa) is the first month of the year. Sangken festival popularly known as water festival is celebrated on the last days of the old year lasting for two to three days. The lunar New Year begins on the following days just after the end of the Sangken festival. During festival, the statue of Buddha are brought out from the main monastery and placed in temporary made structure Kyong Fra, then ceremoniously washed with clean water on all days of the festival. Buddhist script (lik), Bodhi tree, Sang-Fa-Upuk, monks and elder citizen are also given symbolic wash with clean and scented water. In the month of May on the full moon day Buddha Purnima is celebrated. On this day lord Buddha attained enlightenment under Bodhi tree. In the month of July (Noun pet) from full moon day the three months rainy retreat (Khao-Wa) for monks start until the full moon day of October (Noun Siep-Eit). During rainy retreat the monk does not move out of monastery or travel. They do meditation, study and refresh their knowledge on Buddha, Dhamma and conduct the discourse to the devotes on thirteen Uposatha days. In September (Noun-Sip) full moon day is observed by offering honey, fruits, vegetable, etc. to the monk. Traditionally it is believed that on this day the monkey, elephant and other animal offered honey, fruits, etc. to the lord Buddha when he spent one such three months rainy retreat in a forest. In the same month, the dark moon day is celebrated with cleaning houses, granaries and taking bath early in the morning in the nearby river. In October (Noun-Siep-Eit) full moon day which mark the end of the three months rainy retreat for the monks. This day is celebrated with discourse on Buddha's teaching, paying homage to Lord Buddha, dhamma and offering gifts to the sangha. In the month of October- November (Noun Siep-Eit-Sipsong) Kathing festival is celebrated. In this festival the yellow robes are offered to the monk. Although yellow robes are offered to individual monks at any time by the faithful, but those robes which offered during the Kathing festival comes under special category. These are believed to be more precious and meritorious because they are prepared during the night beginning from plucking of cotton, spinning, weaving, stitching, dyeing before the day break and offered to an entire monks instead of individual monk. In the month of February (Noun-Sam) on full moon day Mai-Ko-Shumfai festival is celebrated. For which a high bamboo conical structure is made and filled up with dry wood and bamboo and burnt it in the early morning. This ceremony is followed by feasting with special cooked 'Khau-Ya-Ku, a mix of rice, sesame, yam, leafy vegetable. In the month of March (Noun-Si) on full moon day, 'Lu Kongmu' festival is celebrated. For the celebration of this festival the Kongmus, Shrines, Monuments are renovated, refurbished, new one built, illuminated with flowers and candle light. During each festival they pay homage to Lord Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha by offering food, flower, candle, incense stick in the monastery.

Traditional Beliefs

From the beginning of the civilization human beings beliefs and pay homage to that supernatural power who is the creator of this universe. Each civilization or races exist, at the beginning they were the worshiper of nature because their life is totally depend upon the nature. By the course of development and modernization, many religions have been coming up with their teaching and way of worship. The Shan or Tai also have their own traditional beliefs, which they still practice in this date of modernization. The Shan adopted the Buddhism since AD 71. Later they have adopted Therawada Buddhism. Almost all Shan are Buddhist. That is why they use to say that 'Shan are Buddhist'. Even though the Shan declared that

they are Buddhist, they also believe in many kind of spirit. Among the Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh, India with the canonical Buddhist beliefs there is also a traditional belief, which is known as 'Phi'. Phi is considered as gods of all kind. Good and helpful one and wicked, evil and harmful one. The Khamti beliefs that they live in a world inhabited not only by human beings but by spirit and gods of various kind. The world of spirit is thousand types and is larger than the human world. There are many spirits, both good and evils, everywhere in forest, trees, rivers, streams, ponds, villages, town, rice fields, animal, house, etc. Good things come from the good spirit. Diseases and sickness come from evil spirit. They believe that good spirit watch over fruits trees and crops but they are not as stronger as the evil spirit that destroys the crops. The most fearful spirit is 'Phi Houn' (spirit of house). The Phi Houn protect from all the evil spirit within the house. There are no spirit with the power to do both good and evil. Good spirits are altogether good and bad spirits are altogether bad. Although theoretically it is believe that a man or a women is rewarded for good deeds or suffers for the bad deeds of previous life. Still there is a strong feeling regarding the phi. The Phi Mung is propitiated once before stepping down into the rice fields and once before the harvesting. The offering to the phi is like giving a bribe, which may persuade the spirit to put off the evil. There is always a danger that they may offend one spirit or other at the some point because the worlds of Phi are invisible by the human beings. If is it so, the other ritual have to be performed in order to propitiate these spirit and seek for pardon for unknowingly offending them and seek relief from the misery caused by them. There is a strong belief in spirit among the Khamti, but there have been no attempts to made image form of a particular phi which exist in their mind. These spirits exist everywhere and they live among the human beings. It is believed that the phi can see the human world but human cannot see them. The acknowledgement of the phi is considered to belong to the profane world and is kept apart from Buddhist practice. The monastic order does not participate in these activities, because the spirit belong to profane world and the Buddhism is of sacred world. When the Phi Mung (spirit of the country) is being propitiated, at the collective level of the village, it occurs in the afternoon hours as they consider that the hours after 12 noon belong to the world of the profane. The villagers believe that the phi Mung is a good and helpful spirit who guards and watches over the village and the most powerful among all Phis. The Khamti characterize the Phi Mung as the king of the village. Everything within the boundary of the village is under his control. He is the lord of the mountain and lives on the top of the mountain from where he can see everything. All the fortunes and misfortunes of the village are under his control. According to their traditional belief that this guardian spirit must be propitiated collectively by them every year, otherwise, they feared that the village might become a land of disease, famine and death. Crops may go bad, cattle may die and the village may become a place of disunity and disharmony. They believe that if the Phi Mung is not propitiated he begins to eat everything up in the village. Thus, in the religion of Tai Khamti, there are two religious exist mutually, the traditional beliefs and the Buddhism.

Buddhism

Mahatma Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His real name was Siddhartha, lived from about 566 to about 480 B.C. He was the prince of Sakya clan. The son of an Indian warrior king Gautama led a luxury life in his early years, enjoying the privileges of his cast. But eventually he tried of the affluence and ease, and set out what some might call a 'vision quest'. After encountering an old man, an ill man, a corpse and an ascetic, Gautama became convinced that suffering lay at the heart of all existence. He left his place leaving behind his beautiful wife, the lovely son and the worldly pleasure in search of enlightenment as he had perceived that there was constant misery and suffering in human right from birth to death.

At first, as per the then prevailing philosophy, especially Vedanta Darshan, he went in the forest in search of peace, did hard meditation up to a period of about twelve years. Thereafter he realized that the act of self-mortification is not the true course to achieve eternal peace. Then, at Bodh Gaya he sat calmly under a tree, which was later on called as Bodhi tree and got the light of knowledge and understood the real truth. He got enlightenment and was called enlightened. After being enlightened, Lord Buddha with a view to remove the suffering of mankind decided to impart his message to the public. Buddhism and Buddha philosophy flourished and got its hold first in India. Mahatma Buddha has not written any book. After he attained *Mahaparinirvana*, his disciples collected all those sermons and messages in Tripitaka. Tripitaka can be described as the original theory of Buddhism. The creation of Tripitaka is estimated to be 300 years B.C. Tripitaka is written in Pali language. Tri means three and Pitaka means box. Therefore the meaning of the Tripitaka as per the word is three boxes. Tripitaka is the three fine boxes consisting of the preaching of Mahatma Buddha. This three boxes are- Sutta Pitaka, Abhidhamma Pitaka and Vinaya Pitaka. In Sutta Pitaka, religion is dealt. Dhammapada is a portion of the Sutta Pitaka. Abhidhamma Pitaka is a collection of philosophical and psychological thought of Lord Buddha. In Vinaya Pitaka, description and statement regarding the ways of life of monk have been pointed out. The core beliefs of Buddhism are the four noble truths and the eight fold path.

The four noble truths of Lord Buddha explore human suffering. They are described as:-

- I) Dukkha:- Suffering
- II) Samudaya:- There is a cause of suffering
- III) Nirodha:- There is an end to suffering.
- IV) Magga:- there is a way to the end of suffering.

The eight fold path of lord Buddha consists of:-

- i) SAMMA DITTHI – Right understanding of the four noble Truths.
- ii) SAMMA SANKAPPO – Right thinking, following the right path in life.
- iii) SAMMA VACA – Right speech.
- iv) SAMMA KAMMANTA – Right conduct by following the five precepts.
- v) SAMMA AJIVA – Right livelihood.
- vi) SAMMA VAYAMA – Right effort.
- vii) SAMMA SATI – Right mindfulness.
- viii) SAMMA SAMADHI – Right concentration.

Like every religion on the earth the Buddhism is also divided into many sect. The two main sect of Buddhism are the Mahayana and the Hinayana. In Mahayana, the Buddha tends not to be viewed as merely human, but as the earthly projection of a beginningless and endless, omnipresent being beyond the range and reach of thought. Moreover, in some Mahayana sutras, the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are viewed essentially as one. This entire three, are seen as the eternal Buddha himself. Hinayana is based upon the message of Lord Buddha. It is believed in the philosophy of Buddhism. Therefore it is called as the original and ancient religion. Hinayana does not accept the existence of god. The ideal of Hinayana is self-sufficiency and Sanyas. Their line is very hard and difficult to follow. They believed in self-sufficiency.

Therawada Buddhism

Therawada is a branch of Buddhism that uses the Buddha's teaching preserved in the Pali canon as its doctrine core. Therawada is a Pali word. The literal meaning of the word is 'school of the elder monk'. The Pali canon is the only complete Buddhist canon which is written in Pali language. Therawada tends to very conservative about matters of doctrine and monastic discipline. As a distinct sect, Therawada Buddhism developed in Sri Lanka and spread to the rest of the world. Therawada Buddhism includes a rich diversity of traditions and practices that have developed over its long history of interaction with various cultures and communities. It is the main religion in the country like, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and practiced by a groups in India, Nepal, china, Bangladesh, Vietnam, etc.

The name Therawada comes from the ancestral Sthaviriyā, early Buddhist schools. After unsuccessfully trying to modify the Vinaya, a small group of elderly monk, broke away from the majority Mahasamghika during second Buddhist council. According to its own account, the Therawada School is fundamentally derived from the Vibhajjavādai, 'doctrine of analysis' group, which was a division of the Sthaviriyā. The Therawada path starts with learning, to be followed by practices, culminating in the realization of nirvana. To attain nirvana is the ultimate goal of Therawadin. In Therawada Buddhism, the cause of human existence and suffering is identified as various defilements. These are believed to be deeply connected with the mind that created suffering and stress. In order to free from suffering and stress, these defilement need to be uprooted permanently through internal investigation, analyzing, experiencing and understanding the true nature of those defilements by following the four noble truths, Panchsila and eight fold paths.

Therawada Buddhism among the Tai Khamti

The Tai Khamtis are one of the most advanced tribes of the north eastern region of India in the fields of culture and traditions. They profess the Therawada sect of Buddhism. They refer it as 'Tra Stratow'. Each village has a temple which is used as the common ground for community religious and social gathering. Every houses of the Khamti has a prayer room and they pray every morning and evening by offering flowers (khao-tang-som, mok-ya, nam-taw-yongli). Therawada means doctrine of elder, where the elder refers to senior monks who are the preserver of traditions. Therawada Buddhism is a sect; instead, it would be more precisely defined as a denomination. Buddhist considers three jewels that define in their religion, namely the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. All the rituals and religious ceremonies are always started by taking refuge in the three jewels three times. The Khamti refers the lord Buddha as chow Kotama or Phra-Pen-Chow. The Khamti believed that chow Kotama occupies the fourth position after Konna-koung, Ko-Kashan and Ka-Shappa, in the life of Buddhas and after five thousand years of his death he will be succeeded by Ari-Mitya, the fifth Buddha. The doctrine of the Dhamma is regarded as the truth and the law and both prescribes and describes. Taking refuge in the Sangha, a Buddhist primarily thinks of the monks (Gombrich, 1998). The Buddhist believes that if one lives by Dhamma, he/she will ultimately attain Nipaan (Nirvan). The Khamti's consider enlightenment to be a desirable goal and an end to suffering but they also believe that it is incredibly difficult to attain. For Tai Khamti, the monastery is a traditional school where the pupils learn about the ways of life and the teaching of Gautam Buddha. The monastery acts as a center for teaching and preaching Buddhism. The Tai Khamtis are very sincere and faithful towards their religious principles and practices. They are very much conscious and concern about their present and future life. So, it has become a habitual tradition to perform the act of *Dana* in any rituals,

festival and celebration in order to acquire merits. It is a belief among the community that the poverty and suffering in the present life is only due to cause of 'Kamma Dana' in one's past life. For Tai Khamti Buddhism is not simply a religion, but a creed and a way of life. They are so conscious about it that they always try to avoid any kind of sin and always agar to acquire merits for the present and future life in order to avail peace, happiness and to attain Nirvana.

Therawada Buddhism and Traditional Belief

The Tai Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh, India, follows and practices the Therawada sect of Buddhism. They strictly follow the five precept of Buddhism. Influence of Therawada Buddhism can be seen in once daily life. The day of the Khamti start with the paying homage to the three jewels the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha early in the morning. Along with the canonical Buddhist principles, they belief in Phi or spirit. The teaching of Lord Buddha and the phi co-exist mutually. The phi is definitely placed in subordination to the belief and practices that revolve around the Buddha's teaching. The spirit world is unavoidable that one must acknowledge since they have power over their fortunes and misfortunes. The belief in the Buddhism is related to metaphysical goals, the ultimate way to the attainment of nirvana. Despite this co-existence, they maintain a definite boundary between the two different religions.

Conclusion

The Tai Khamti inhabited in the Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, India, are a Buddhist group belonging to the greater Tai-Shan civilization. They migrated from the Moug Khamti in the Irrawadi valley, Burma and settled around the Tegapani River in 1751. Later they occupied different place in and around Sadiya. The Tai Khamti profess the Therawada sect of Buddhism. They have distinct script, age old culture and tradition and the glorious history. Beside the canonical belief of Buddhism, they also belief in phi. One cannot deny the present of phi. According to them if the phi is not propitiated properly, there will be a lost in all ways. There will be disunity and dishonesty in the village. The Buddhist belief and practices are considered superior because it belongs to the sacred world. The belief in phi is regarded as profane. They kept apart the practices of phi from Buddhist belief and practices. The *Buddhist* religion practices and traditional belief of *phi* co-exist mutually in the Tai Khamti society of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

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