CHAPTER I
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There are several hill tribes living in North-East India since the remote past. The Hrangkhol is one such hill tribe that possess a rich socio-cultural heritage. The tribes of Assam belong to the Mongoloid stock. Each of the tribes has its own cultural heritage. The term tribe came into used from the French word Tribu or the Latin word Tribus. Different theories and definition are there regarding the word tribes. Tribes are defined in the Imperial Gazetteer of India as, a collection of families bearing same name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so1. An Indian sociologist D.N. Majumdar define a tribe as “a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, occupation and have developed a well assessed system of reciprocity of obligations. A tribe is originally an endogamous unit, is a political unit in the sense that the tribal society own a political organization.”2 S.C. Dubey states that a tribe generally refers to territorial communities living in the relative isolation of hills and forest. Their comparative isolation in some ways, has kept them apart from the mainstream of society in the country. Partly because of this isolation and partly because of their limited worldview, characterized by lack of historical depth and an overall tradition orientation, they are integrated in terms of certain themes rooted in the past.3 The Readers Digest Universal Dictionary define a tribe as a unit of social

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1 Imperial Gazetteer of India, Oxford University press, 1909 p, 127.
organization, especially among primitive peoples but also surviving in some modern societies, consisting of group of people claiming a common ancestry, usually sharing a common culture and originally living together under a chief or headman. Jacobs and Stern, two European sociologists define tribe thus “a cluster of village communities which share a common territory, language and culture and economically interwoven is often also designated a tribe.”

The word ‘tribe’ is nowhere defined in the Constitution of India, which has been content to declare in Article 342, that the Scheduled Tribes are the tribes or the tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which the President of India may specify by public notification. As these communities are presumed to form the oldest ethnological sector of the population, the term ‘Adivasi’ (‘Adi’ original, and ‘vasi’ inhabitant) has become common. The International Labour Organization has classified these groups as indigenous. The Hrangkhols are declared as Scheduled Tribe under the Kuki groups of tribes through the Indian Constitution Article no 342. They have their own language known as Hrangkhol where similarities in some extent with the language of Kuki- Lushai group of tribes such as Biate, Hmar, Halam, Thado, Lushai, etc., are shown, but due to the lack of their own script, Hrangkhols have no written literature and history. Since the time of their migration to India, the Hrangkhols have their religion known as Sonong literally meant religion. The Sonong is a traditional religion generally called as ‘animism’ or ‘naturalism’, encompassing belief in different benevolent god(s) and malevolent spirits worships and sacrifices to appease

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7 Ibid, p, 29.
them without any image of god(s) and goddess(es). There is no particular place of worship for the Hrangkhols. From the date of the introduction of Christianity in North East India, the Hrangkhols started to convert to Christianity and more than 70% (approximate) population have now changed their religion. Rest still follow their traditional religion. Those who already convert into Christianity, tried to convey the message of their new religion and ask others to adopt it. On the other hand, too much expensive religious rites, use of zu in huge quantity in every sphere of religious activities and the paucity of the Ochai (priest), etc., may include as the causes that the followers of the traditional religion gradually started to convert into Christianity. There is no division on the name of caste but now division begun in between traditional religious follower and Christianity.

The economic institutions of the Hrangkhols are based on jhum cultivation, where they produce rice, millet, maize, vegetables, fruits, ginger and turmeric. They also depend upon the forest for their livelihood to collect firewood, fruits, vegetables, hunting and fishing and for water. Besides, a few number of the population are earning their livelihood from the government or semi-government services. There are no industries or any other institution in Dima Hasao District, which can generate employment or accelerate the economic condition of the people. From the hearsay, it is known that during the time of the British colonial rule a part of the Hrangkhol male members worked as labour in the construction of the railway tracks and road.8 Jhum cultivation is the means of the livelihood for the majority of the population. There is no

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8 Interview with T.S. Hrangkhol, age 56 years, School Inspector of Dima Hasao District, dated 11 Nov, 2011.
proper mode of communication; even the water supply, electricity and transportation is not available in all the villages. The literacy rate is 60% (approximate) in Hrangkhols community but the majority of them are capable only reading and writing only, which is the general criteria of literate.

They have their traditional dresses for both the male and female. The female wear the Puanbom, an open-ended shawl like cloth to cover their lower part and another cloth, small in length and breadth use to cover the upper part of their body. The men wear the cloth like ‘Duti’(Dhuti) and Zakua (Kamij), Lukom (turban) in head. After conversion into Christianity, their dresses especially to the male almost changed and they started to use western style of dresses like Tuman (trouser), Songkol (shirt) etc. even the girls also use to wear the western dresses gradually.9

They have their traditional rites and rituals from birth to the death practiced in their own way. They believe in the abode after death known as Mithikhua where the soul takes rest after the death of an individual, not similar to the Heaven of Hindu or other religions.10 Already it has been mentioned that a part of the Hrangkhols had changed their traditional religion, hence changes have also taken place in other areas of the Hrangkhol tribe like rituals, food habits, dresses, mode of earning livelihood, etc. Like the other tribes of India especially of North-East India, the Hrangkhols have their

10 Interview with Hrangkhol, T.S. at Haflong, dated 11 November, 2012.
traditional administration known as Halam. Surprisingly they have no king but Kalim who is selected democratically the office is not acquired by hereditary.\textsuperscript{11} 

The Hrangkhols live in the Dima Hasao district of Assam as well as in other areas of North-East India like Mizoram, Manipur, and Tripura. According to the Indian Constitution, the Hrangkhols are included in the Scheduled Tribes Hills under the head of the Old-Kuki in Assam. Among the tribal communities that presently live in North East India, the Hrangkhols are one of the earliest hill tribes of the Mongoloid race. Due to lack of written records, the actual time of their migration to Assam is not known. Based on oral traditions, it is believed that around the early part of the 4\textsuperscript{th} century CE they left China and came down into the plains of Myanmar and some parts of Tibet, where they settled for several centuries. After wandering for hundreds of years, they came down to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) and remained in that area for about three hundred years. Since then they were scattered in different parts of the states of Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. In Assam, they are found in the area of the Dima Hasao and Cachar districts. There are 24 Hrangkhol villages in Dima Hasao District of Assam with a population of more than five thousand. 

Due to their nomadic habits, the Hrangkhols moved across the plains of Cachar and settled in Dima Hasao District of Assam. Dima Hasao is the home to different tribes like the Dimasa, Zeme Naga, Kuki, Hmar, Biate, Hrangkhol, Khelma, Riang, Vaiphai, Karbi, Jaintia, etc. People belonging to non-tribal communities such as Bengali, Nepali, 

\textsuperscript{11} Interview with Bulthoirher Hrangkhol present Kalim the head of traditional administration of Dima Hasao district, at Lungkhok village, dated 12 November, 2012.
Manipuri, Assamese, etc., constitute a considerable percentage of the population of this area. The largest numbers of people in the district are the Dimasa followed by the Zeme Naga while the Hrangkhols constitutes a small percentage of the population and are living here along with the other tribes in this district.

**Survey of literature**

There has not been any systematic study on the socio-cultural and religious beliefs of the Hrangkhols living in Assam and other part of North Eastern India. Some information of a general nature is found in the published works of scholars writing about different tribes and tribal life of North East India. For instance, Sipra Sen in her work *A Brief Description of the Tribes* discusses in detail, about the Khasi, Naga, Abor, Karbi, Dimasa and Boro, but only mentions the name of the Hrangkhols and their area of habitation. Similarly, Jagadish Gana Chaudhury in his book *Tribes of North East India*, highlights many aspects of the different tribes of the region, but only refers to the migration of the Hrangkhols and their co-existence with other tribes. Edward Gait has done considerable work on the relations of the Ahoms with different tribes of North East India but the Hrangkhols finds no mention in his work *A History of Assam*. Other historians like Pratap Chandra Chaudhury and Kanak Lal Barua too have ignored this tribe in their works. *History of the American Baptist Mission In North East Volume-I* by Milton Sangma deals with the origin of the Baptist Church and its spread to all parts of the world resulting in the formation of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in

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North East India, but mentions nothing about the Hrangkhols of Dima Hasao district of Assam. B.N. Bordoloi and G. C. Sarma Thakur in *Tribes of Assam* have focused briefly on the different festivals and food habits of the Hrangkhols, but have not sufficiently discussed different aspects of their society, culture and religion. Mrs. Zirsangpui Hrangkhol and Mr. Sounneibul Hrangkhol in their book *Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi* (Folk Tales of the Hrangkhol) have compiled the folktales and lore of the Hrangkhol tribe but not discussed their historical basis. In the book *Life And Customary Laws of Tripura Tribe*, K.N. Jena and Babu Dhan Tripura focussed extensively on the Tripuris of Tripura, without mentioning the other tribes like the Hrangkhol. T. Raatan in his book *History Religion And Culture Of North East India* discusses about the society, religion and culture of the various tribes of the North-eastern region of India but here too the author is silent about the Hrangkhols. Jacob John Kattakayam in *Social Structure and Change Among the Tribal* vividly discusses about the *Uralis* of Kerala only. Similarly, Nirmal Kumar Bose in his work *Tribal life of India*, Sarthek Sengupta’s *Tribal Situation in North East India* and *Tribal Studies in North East India*, all deal with the tribes of North East as a whole but there is no discussion on the Hrangkhols. Sarthek Sengupta’s edited work *Peoples of North East India: Anthropological Perspectives* contains eighteen articles on tribes of the North-eastern region. It deals with the issues of anthropology like ethnic elements, human growth, tribal institutions, and process of Sanskritisation, etc., but Hrangkhols are overlooked. Similarly, *Asomar Janajatiya Sanskriti* in Assamese is a collection of selected articles relating to different aspects of the folk culture of the various tribes of North East India by Upen Rabha Hakasam but it does not deal with the any aspect of the Hrangkhol tribe. *Asomar Janajati* is a collection of essays on various tribes of Assam and North East Frontier of Assam and Nagaland.
edited by Promod Chandra Bhattachaaryya and G.C. Kakati but it does not touch the life
and culture of the Hrangkhols. *Tribal Women And Development* edited by N.A.
Hazarika contains papers on tribal women and development dealing only about the
different tribal women. However, here too the Hrangkhols have remained untouched.
*Glimpses of North East India Archaeology* by Dhritiman Sharmah describes the history
and archaeology of North East India since second century B.C. to recent times where
cultural activities of North East India and South East are described, but the Hrangkhols
are not brought under discussion. This is also true of Dharmeswar Duara’s *Uttar Cachar
Paharia Loka Sanskrity* and S. Barkakati’s *Tribes of Assam*, C.A. Soppit’s work, *A
Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes of The North East Frontier*, contain a few lines
about the Hrangkhols, but fail to observe all the aspects of the Hrangkhols. K Zawala in
his book *Mizo-pi Put Lehan Thu leh Chanchin* while discussing the relations of the
different tribes living in Mizoram merely mentions that the Hrangkhols departed from
Mizoram in 1750 CE but he ignores other aspects of the Hrangkhols. Regarding the
transformation of the religious attitude of the Hrangkhols in recent times, Sumchonlal
Hranghol has published articles highlighting the impact and influence of Christianity
on the Hrangkhols. However, he has not discussed other spheres of their life and
society. F. S. Dawn’s *Historical Perspective An Essay On Christianity In North East
India* deals with the contributions of Christianity on the tribes living in North East India.
However, there is no discussion of Christianity among the hill tribes of Cachar area or
the Hrangkhols of Assam. We do find information about the Hrangkhols in the books
written by Lalphirthang Hranghol, T.S. Hranghol and Rmdina Lalsim, but they are
more in the nature of informative booklets and lack a scientific, objective, historical and
empirical approach. Here in lies the importance of the present study i.e. to fully
appreciate and understand different aspect of the society, culture and religion of the Hrangkhols of Dima Hasao district of Assam.

**Significance of the Study:**

As has been observed, a study undertaken on the Hrangkhols of Dima Hasao district of Assam is important for two reasons. First, it will help one to know about the tribe and their traditions, customs, society and religious beliefs. Secondly, the study, it is believed, will help the different scholars in the reconstruction of the tribal history of North East India, and help the administration in evolving effective programmes for development of the tribal people of North East India in general and the hill tribes of Assam in particular.

**Hypothesis:**

- It is believed that the Hrangkhols as a tribe possess their very own traditions, culture and beliefs, separate from other Kuki tribes.
- In recent times, there have been changes in the religious traditions and socio-cultural belief among a section of the Hrangkhols.

**Objectives:**

- It proposed to study the culture and tradition of the Hrangkhol society and economy.
• To examine the traditional religion of the Hrangkhols and changes that has occurred in their religious practices.
• To identify and analyse the factors responsible for changes in different aspects of Hrangkhol society.

Scope of the Study:

The study will be limited to the socio-cultural and religious condition of the Hrangkhol community living in Dima Hasao district of Assam only. The geographical area under review will be limited to the Dima Hasao district of Assam, bounded on the north by present Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts, on the south by Cachar District, in the east by the states of Manipur and Nagaland and on the west by Meghalaya. The period under review will be from the post independent period to the present day.

Methodology:

This is an empirical study, with historical approach, based mainly on primary sources of data through direct observation and interview method. The primary sources include the census report, report from revenue circles and block development offices, information and reports of Christian missionaries etc. At the same time some of the basic data like members of the family, age and the marital status, status of women in society, education, occupational change, etc., which are objective and quantifiable, has been collected through the survey and direct observation method. Informal discussions with functionaries of social organizations and associations of the Hrangkhols together
with that of different intellectuals and scholars on the subject has also been made, for collecting information.

Secondary data has also utilised to find out the origin and the traditional religion and customs of the Old Kuki-Lushai group of tribes of which the Hrangkhols are a section.

The secondary data that includes records and reports of different institutions, articles, published in journals, magazines and newspapers on the subject have been utilised. The surveyed area was limited to the Haflong Subdivision of Dima Hasao district as all the twenty-four Hrangkhol villages (740 household) are concentrated in the Haflong Subdivision only. The surveyed villages were Chaptuk, Tangpui, Buangkung, Paija, Bualjal, Zion, Lungkhok, Asiak Robi, Robipui, Khothang, Khochnuai, Mualpong, Kalimabong, Tuikim, Diyungte, Khotre, Rekho, Dolaichunga, Purna Michikhur, New Michikhur, Lower Michikhur, Purna Zoar, Boro Robi, Choto Robi.

The family was the unit of survey in order to test the hypothesis. From the Gaonburha (village head) the total number of households in each of the villages was taken. Every fifth household was surveyed. All the villages were surveyed, as there are some variations of the data according to the distance of the villages from the town and religious faith. To select the household in the villages the method of simple random sampling was used and sometimes stratified random sampling was used to find out the
required data. The random sampling method was used in order to afford every individual of the population the same chance of being selected.

The structured interview schedule was prepared to fulfil the demands of the objectives framed. Questions were a combination of both open-ended as well as close-ended. In the open-ended structured interview schedules, the respondents were free to answer and in the close-ended structures, the respondents were given options to choose their answers. The questions were designed to highlight the indicators of the study such as society, types of family, their clan system, inheritance, their social organizations, religion, economic activities, language spoken, literary activities etc. The various festivals and ceremonies celebrated and observed by the people of study area were also discussed. It also consisted of questions on the government schemes and their applications.

The individual and group interview was also undertaken to gather the necessary information in the present study. To hold the interview the respondents were informed earlier and the researcher visited the houses of individuals and talked with them. For the group interview, the respondents were requested to gather in a particular place selected by the researcher according to the convenience of the interviewees. The relevant questions were asked to the respondents and they were free to give their views and opinions. The researcher tried to create a friendly and cordial environment so that the respondents could answer without any hesitation.
After applying the test Re-test method the items were selected according to their reliability. The items that were found not reliable was omitted and finally the data thus elicited, tabulated, and analyzed. Hence, the present study is a combination of observation, interview and critical study method with gender-sensitive-approach.

**Organization:**

The material thus collected has been studied and organized under the following heads:

**CHAPTER I: Introduction:** This chapter consist of a discussion of the origin and migration of the Hrangkhols to Assam, their geographical location, the details of their villages, their population in the area under survey i.e. the Hrangkhols living in the Dima Hasao District of Assam. It also contains a survey of literature, hypothesis and scope of study.

**CHAPTER II: Socio-Cultural Practices:** In this chapter, the social structure of the tribe, their family structure, education, marriage, food habits, dress and ornaments, position of women, festivals and other social ceremonies and practices have been discussed. The traditional political structure of the Hrangkhols has also been discussed.

**CHAPTER III: Livelihood, Cultivation and Trade:** The means of livelihood, nature of economic activities, income groups, relation between economic activities and
social status, as well as between education and economic activities, etc., have been discussed.

CHAPTER IV: Religious Beliefs and Practices: The nature of traditional Hrangkhol religious beliefs, deities worshiped, religious ceremonies and festivals, etc., forms the subject matter of this chapter. It also enquires into the causes and the courses of the changes in traditional religious belief and practices, the nature of changes, and studies the impact of Christianity upon their religious life.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion: This chapter is a summary of the findings and observations of the foregoing discussions.

Dima Hasao is one of the hill districts of Assam along with Karbi Anglong. At the time of independence in 1947, this area was not known as Dima Hasao, but as North Cachar Hills since the time of British rule in India. After independence, the North Cachar Hills area was merged with the Mikir Hills District. On 7th November 1951 by the Government of Assam order vide notification TAD/R31/50/204 dated 3rd November 1951 a new Hills District under the 6th scheduled of Indian Constitution with the name of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills Districts with Diphu as the headquarter was constituted. In the year, 1970 the United Mikir and North Cachar hills district was divided into two districts and North Cachar Hills became a full-fledged district. The United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District lies between latitude of 20°54′ and 26°53′ north and longitude of 92°8′ east. Nagaon and Sivsagar district in the north, by Cachar district in the south, by Sivasagar, Nagaland and Manipur in the east and by the United
Khaki and Jayantia Hills district in the west, bound it. The total area of this district was 5,883 square miles (15,237 sq. kilometres). It was comprised of two sub-divisions namely Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills Districts. The total area of the Mikir Hills Sub-division was 3,995 sq. miles (10,343 sq. kilometres) and the total area of the North Cachar Hills Sub-division is 1,888 sq. miles (4890 sq. kilometres). There were two headquarters namely Diphu and Haflong for United District of Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills respectively.

Topographically the study area consists of both hills and plains. As such, one can find dual climatic atmosphere in the districts associated with a variety of flora and fauna. Physically the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district can broadly be divided into three broad regions: (1) The Mikir Hills, (2) The Kapili, Jamuna and the Dhansiri Valley and (3) North Cachar Hills.

The Dima Hasao (North Cachar) district is situated in the extreme Northeast corner of Indian Territory. According to local legends, North Cachar got its name from the word ‘Kaccha’ meaning lower region of the mountains. Before the advent of the British, it was an independent state ruled by a Dimasa king. On the eve of the British entry into this land, two Dimāsā Princes ruled this district. South Cachar was ruled by Govindra Chandra and North Cachar by Tularam Senapati. Cachar was divided into two divisions - South Cachar and North Cachar. Tularam Senapati died in 1851 and in 1853 his territory was directly included into the British dominion in Assam. Before the

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formation of the United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills district, North Cachar was a part of the Cachar district. In 1951 North Cachar was included into the newly formed sixth scheduled Hills District namely United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district as mentioned earlier. Since the sixteen century, the Dimasa kings ruled North Cachar district until 1833. As per Census Report of India (1961), there were only 357 villages and it has increased up to 640 villages according to the Census of 2001.15

The district is hilly and climate is neither too hot nor cold. The rainfall varies between 200 mm and 270 mm per year. Rainfall is heavy during the months from May to September but it is not regularly distributed throughout the year. The average temperature varies from 10°C to 30°C and average relative humidity at 8.30 hours varies from 73 % to 84 %. The district comprised mostly of hilly areas having steep precipices. The district has six big rivers, namely- Diyung, Jatinga, Mahur, Langting, Dilaima and Jenum. Diyung is the longest river of the district having a length of 240 kilometres. The soil of the district is very fertile. In the Barail Range, Hempewpat is the highest peak at 6153 feet from the sea level of the district. The other main ranges are (i) Kartheng range from Dittokcherra to Garampani, (ii) Mahur-Dehangi-Gunjung. Jatinga is one of the world famous mysterious hilly places where the suicides of migratory birds occur in the month of the October, November, December and January.16

The district is abounding in various types of bamboos and tall grass. Apart from the bamboos, a variety of trees used for timber are found to a considerable extent such

15 Ibid, p 12.
as-gamari, titachapa, badam, bonsoam, bola, koroi, bhelo, etc. The production of rice, maize, millet, orange, and pineapple is famous in this district. Minerals like limestone and coal are found, in Umrangso (limestone), Longlai and Ardao area (coal) in the district. Elephant, bear, leopard, deer, pig, tiger, mithun (a kind of wild cow), buffalo etc. populate the forests.

Mode of communication of the area is very poor. A metre gauge railway covers 133.25 Km, connecting Silchar, Agartala and Lumding constructed by the British connects the region to the rest of the state. There are thirty-two numbers of railway tunnels and Mahur is the longest railway tunnel in the entire north-eastern region. There are two main metalled roads for road communication namely Lanka Umrangsu Haflong Road and Lanka Maibang Silchar Road. The other important roads of the district are-(i) Haflong-Dehangi-Diyungbra-Diyungmukh 118 Km (ii) Haflong-Dehangi-Umrangsu 112 Km, (iii) Umrangsu-Longku Haflong-Tiniali-Diyungmukh 50 Km, (iv) Haflong-Jatinga-Maibang-Lumding 140 Km, (v) Maibang-NabdiLungting-Khepre 54Km, (vi) Haflong-Harangajao-Silchar 110 Km, (vii) Mahur-Tulpoi-Laisong 31 Km. At present a broad gauges railways line from Lumding to Silchar and Agartala and four-lane National highway from Lanka to Silchar are under construction.17

The North Cachar Hills became a full-fledged district in the year 1970 on 2 February and declared an independent administrative district. It comprises of an area of 4888 square kilometres and Forest Reserve Area of 637.77 Sq. Km. The district is bounded by Manipur in the east, Nagaon district of Assam and Nagaland in the north, in

17 Report from the office of the PWD Roads, Haflong, Dima Hasao district.
the west by Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong district of Assam and in the south by Cachar
district of Assam. It lies between the latitudes of 25° N and 25.45° N and longitudes of
92.30° East and 93.3° East and has an altitude of 3900 feet from the sea level. Presently
there are two subdivisions in North Cachar Hills District namely Maibong and Haflong.
According to the population census of India 2011, the population of the district is
214102 (male 110802, female 103300), total scheduled tribe population is 151843 out
of which total literate is 140873, of this male literate are 78559 and female literate are
62314.18

The Hrangkhol belongs to Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes of the Mongoloid
group. During the time of the independence of India, the Hrangkhol were known as
the Old-Kuki. According to Colonel J. Shakespear, Hmar consisting of two tribes
namely the Rangkhols (sic. Hrangkhol) and Biate first moved across the plains of
Cachar and Kuki-Lushai-Chin settled down in North Cachar Hills and came to be
known as ‘Old Kuki’.19 C.A. Soppitt in his book, A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai
tribe trace the origin of the Hrangkhol and Old-Kuki groups of tribes as the term ‘
Lushai’ where he traced the people ruled over by the Lua kings or king, in remote past
and to him, it was the Hrangkhol and their co-tribes ruled by the Lua king would be
styled ‘Lushai’.20 Again he mentioned that the name they styled themselves, was
probably given to the few traders they came across as “Luahai”. It is but natural that
these men should change the name in repeating it to their own people and that “Luahai”

18 Census report of India 2011. Information collected from Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council
Office.
19 Shakespear, J. The Lushai Kuki, Firma-KLM Pvt Ltd, 1893, cited by Risely H. H. in India
Ethnographic Appendices, 1903,Vol. I, page, 223
20 Soppitt, C.A. Kuki Lushai Tribes on the North-east Frontier with an outline grammar of the
Hrangkhol Lushai Language, Firma-KLM, Pvt Ltd, 1893, P,2.
would first become “Lukai” then “Kukai” and ultimately “Kuki”. The designation “Kuki” was never used by the tribes themselves, though many of them answer to it when addressed, from knowing it to be the Bengali or plains term for their people. In the same book, Soppitt divided the so-called Kukis into four tribes: - (i) Rangkhol (Hrangkhol) (ii) Biate (iii) Jansen and (iii) Tado (Thado). At a later period after reaching the territory of the Assam frontier, the Kukis came to be known as “Old Kuki” where the Hrangkhols were also included. In due time the term ‘Old Kuki’ among the Hrangkhols vanished from the people’s conscience and the term Hrangkhol started to be used by the common people. The Hrangkhols themselves also started to feel good when they were called ‘Hrangkhol rather than Old Kuki. The term Hrangkhol is used since the time of migration from the great cave “Khurpuitabum” or “Singlung” or Chhinlung of Mizos which means a great cave, with slight different pronunciation from the other Kuki-Chin group of tribes. The word ‘Hrangkhol’ is variably spelled by different scholars as ‘Rangkol’, ‘Rangkhol’, ‘Rangkol’, ‘Rungkul’, ‘Hrangkhol’, ‘Hrangkhowl’ and ‘Hrangchul’. All the word gives same designation. The most commonly accepted one is ‘Hrangkhol’ or ‘Hrangkhowl’. The term ‘Hrang’ means courageous and ‘Khol’ means to win over. Hence, the term Hrangkhol or Hrangkhowl stands for a courageous warrior. Here the word Hrangkhol will be used in all the study, as it is favourably accepted by the Hrangkhols. Like the Kuki-Chin-Lushai group of tribes, the Hrangkhol believed that their ancestor came out from ‘Khurpuitabum’ (a hole under earth) somewhere in Myanmar or in the China border. According to the Hrangkhols legends all human beings called ‘Munisi’ literally meant man originated

from a big cave or a great hole named 'Khurpuitabum', which other Mongoloid groups called as ‘Singlung’ meaning a cave covered with stone. However, due to paucity of written records the actual time and date of their migration and origin is still in dark. The similarities with other allied (brother) tribes of Hrangkhol like Lushai, Kuki, Hmar, Thado, Biate, Halam and others shows that they migrated around the early part of the 6th century CE and they came down to the plains of Myanmar (Burma) and some parts of Tibet and settled there for hundreds of years. After that, they came down to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) and settled there, about three hundred years, since the early part of the 14th century CE. From the study of allied tribes of the same group, it is considered that the origin of the Hrangkhols is same as that of the Old Kuki-Lushai tribes. In this regard we may examine the view of Thankim Haolai in his work *Kuki Culture in North Cachar Hills* that “it appear practically certain that the ancestor of the Old Kuki and Lushai were closed related and lived together somewhere in the centre of the hills on the bank of the Tyou river in Manipur.” At the time of the migration these Old-Kuki-Lushai group of tribes was not termed as it today or in the later part of their movement. Sometime all the tribes were termed as Lushai or Kuki, even Halam or Hranchal. The old Kuki appeared in Cachar about 1780 and are described by Lieutenant J. Shakespear as being divided into three clans called Rhangkhol, Khelma and Beteh. The first and last were known in the Lushai hills as Hranchal and Bete respectively. The Hranchal and Bete (Biate) are two of many clans collectively known as Hmar. For instance Kuki is an Assamese or Bengali term used to denote various hills tribes like modern Lushai.

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Biate, Thado, Hmar, Hrangkhol etc. The Kuki are an off-shoot of the Tibeto-Burman race, their original home, which many believe to be across the Chin-hills. There are a number of people related to the Chin who are usually not called Chin. All are however within the Kuki-Chin linguistic group. The Linguistics some time included Hrangkhol into the Halam group of tribes. The Halams ethnologically belong to the Kuki groups. The Halams are divided into 17 Dafas (clan) where along with the other 16 tribes Hrangkhols are also included. Again, in the Old Kuki group along with the other sub tribes Biate and Hrangchals are also included. Here the Hrangchul is a reference to the Hrangkhol. The Old Kukis are divided into three Clans called Hrangkhol, Jansen and Biate. The Hrangkhol and Biate were known in the Lushei Hills as Hrunchul. As the Hruncul is none other than the Hrangkhol, hence the origin of the Hrangkhol is the same as the origin of the Old Kuki-Lushei Group of tribes. Before the word termed (by the plains people) as Old Kuki, in Cachar about 1780 the migrated group of tribes which were popularly known as Old Kuki are described by the Lieutenant Stewart divided into three clans called Hrangkhol, Khelma and Biate. At that time the Hrangkhol were known in Lushai Hills as Hrunchal and the Biate were known as Beteh (Biate). Again, the Hranchul (Hrangkhol) and Biate were collectively known in Lushai as Hmar.

The Hrangkhols, along with the other sub-clan of the Old Kuki group of tribes believed to emerge from under a large covering rock known as Khurpuitabum or Chhinlung. Two of Ralte clan of same origin started to talk loudly while coming out from the region by which Pathian (the supreme god) raised his hands and say enough is

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26 Thangkim Haolai, *Kuki Culture In North Cachar Hills*,
28 *Encyclopedia of Indian Tribes Nagaland and Tripura*, page 123.
30 ibid, page 185.
31 Ibid, page 185.
enough. He felt too many people had already stepped out and so closed the door with the rock.

History often varies from legends but the story of the Hrangkhol and their original group as Kuki-Lushai stock getting out into open from the world through a rock opening is now part of the Hrangkhol folklore. Considering the view of different scholars, it may be assumed that the Chhinlung was the Chinese city of Chhinlingsang situated close to the Sino-Burmese border. Hrangkhol and other sub-clan of same stock like, Mizo, Kuki, Biate, etc., have song and stories about the glory of the ancient Chhinlung civilization handed down from generation to another. It is thus, believed that they (all the Lushai-Kuki-Chin Group of tribe) formerly lived together if not, very close to one other. There are many similarities are noticed among the dialects of various tribal groups living in the state of Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam. Since the dialects have some similarities with the other tribes such as Hrangkhol, Halam, Kaipeng, Mualsuam, Chorai, Hmar, Darlong, Ranglong, Sakache, Kom, Aimol, Chiru etc., their forefathers believed to have originated from one and same stock. However, there are certain differences due to assimilation of culture, language and religious faith with other tribal and non-tribal people in their respective area of habitation. The changes in the Hrangkhol society are going on due to vast conversion into Christianity and the assimilation of western culture and use of modern technology and communication.

32 R. S. Rosanglua, A Brief Account of Ranglong, 2005, Tribal Research Institute, Directorate of Art and Culture, Tripura, p. 4.
From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the origin of the Hrangkhols is same with the Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes. They belong to the Tibeto Mongoloid race, who believed in the origin of the great cave, ‘singlung’ or the ‘khurpuitabum’ in Hrangkhol language. There are also many similarities in languages, culture and religious beliefs among the Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes. At the very beginning of the migration of these groups of tribes all were known Chin and they lived in Myanmar. Since then, differences start in languages, customs, religious believe and other activities of day today life. Internal quarrel for security, scarcity for food and shelter was the main causes for differences. They started to engage in frequent war with each other forgetting their common origin and established their separate identities as Hrangkhol, Mizo, Hmar, Biate, Kuki, Thado, etc. They left China as part of the waves of migration and moved from China to Myanmar and then to India under force of circumstances. They first settled in the Shan state after having overcome the resistance put up by the indigenous people. Then they changed settlements several times, moving from the Shan state to the Kabow Valley from there to Khampat and to Chin hill in Myanmar. They finally began to move across the river Tiao to India In the middle of 16th century. As a part of that Kuki-Lushai-Chin group of tribes, the Hrangkhols also migrated to those places from Singlung or Khurpuitabum. Gradually the sentiment of separate identity and power was developed and intra clan quarrels occurred frequently. The Hrangkhols were less powerful than the others were and the Jansens (Kuki) clan headed by Thangur family who were most powerful gradually pushed out them from their hamlets. The Hrangkhols, started to move from Mizoram to Manipur, Tripura and finally to Assam. There was quarrel amongst the tribes of Old-Kuki group during the process of migration. The chief of the Thangur family was responsible for the migration
of the Old Kuki (Hrangkhol, Biate, Thado etc.) from the Lushai hills to the Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. As the same origin, there are some resemblances in socio-religious and linguistic activities among the branches of the Old-Kuki-Chin group of tribes. However, as the other allied tribes have, the Hrangkhols also maintain separate culture, customs and rituals as a tribe.