CHAPTER II

THE KHAMTI: THEIR HABITAT AND TRADITIONS
The Khamti, one of the very few Buddhist Scheduled Tribes of North East India, are found concentrated in the Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh. The district, Lohit, has derived its present name from one of its principal rivers, Lohit, commonly known as Lauhitya in Sanskrit literature and is associated with the myth of Bhagawan Parsuram. The District is situated in the North-Eastern extremity of Arunachal Pradesh between 27°33' and 29°22' North latitudes, and 95°15' and 97°24' East longitudes. It is bounded by China along the Mac-Mohan line and part of the Dibang valley district in the North, Tirap District in the South, China and Burma in the East, and the State of Assam and a part of Dibang valley district in the West. The district has an area of approximately 11,400 sq. kms.¹

The district consists of continuous chains of hills and mountains, the altitudes of which vary from 500 ft. to 17,000 ft. The mountains in the North, which are the Eastward extensions of the Himalayas, remain snow-clad almost throughout the year, and is the coldest region of the district. The southern part consists of plains, drained by major rivers like the Lohit, Kamlang, Bigaru, Noa-Dihing, Tengapani etc., and their perennial tributaries. The foot-hill regions are covered by dense tropical forests and are the

places of a wide variety of wild animals.

The total population of the district is 69,400 according to the 1981 census enumeration, with a density of about 6 individuals per sq. km. The percentage of literacy is 27.35 in the district. It is inhabited by three major Scheduled Tribes, such as, the Mishmi, Khamti and Singpho. A section of Adis also live in Lohit, although a large number of them live in the Siang district. Formidable mountainous terrains are the abode of the Mishmi, which is divided into three major sub-tribes: the Idu, Miju and Digaru. They are primarily shifting cultivators, and still maintain their animistic beliefs. The Singpho, on the other hand, are Buddhists of the Theravada school and inhabit the Lohit valley region along with the Khamti. They are skilled agriculturists and prosperous farmers. Most of the Singpho, however, live in the neighbouring Tirap district.

Lohit is one of the ten districts of Arunachal Pradesh, which has undergone many political and administrative transformations. Arunachal Pradesh is the bordering State between India, Burma, China, Tibet and Bhutan, lying at the Eastern-most tip of India. Previously named as North Eastern Frontier Agency or popularly called as NEFA, the State roughly rests between 26°28' and 29°30' North latitudes, and 91°30' and 97°30' East longitudes. The State covers an area of 83,578 sq. kms. with a population of 6,28,050 souls as per the 1981 census enumeration. With the enforcement of the

2. ibid., p. II
3. ibid., p. III
North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act of 1971, the erstwhile NEFA was given the status of a Union Territory on January 21, 1972. From the 15th August, 1975, a popular Government was established in Arunachal Pradesh with a Legislative Assembly and the Council of Ministers, elected by the people directly. Recently, on the 20th February, 1987, it was given the status of a State with the enhancement of the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly from 30 to 40 and with the appointment of a Governor in place of a Lt. Governor.

The Administrative history of NEFA is rich with many interesting developments. It reveals that as per Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, the British supremacy was extended to the whole of undivided Assam. But the British administration decided to favour the exiled Ahom King, Purandar Singha, and eventually he was recognized in 1833 as a tributary ruler of Upper Assam excluding Sodiya and Matak regions. These two regions were under the control of the tribal chiefs, with whom the British maintained direct political relations. But King Purandar Singha was deposed in 1838, when he lost the confidence of the British Government and his territories were ceded with the British ruled Assam. Therefore, in 1838 only, the entire undivided Assam came under the British administration, including the present day Arunachal Pradesh.

Although the British took over the administration of Assam, there was hardly any effort whatsoever to introduce any kind

of administrative machinery in this region. About half a century later, in 1882 only, the British took an initial and elementary step in this direction for the administration of the foot-hills by appointing an Assistant Political Officer at Sadiya.

Upto 1880, the Frontier Tracts had come under the operation of the Deregulationizing Act (XXII of 1869 which was repealed by the Scheduled District Act - XIV of 1874, since repealed in 1937), which empowered the Government to declare what acts should, from time to time, be in force in the Frontier Tracts and to lay down rules for their administration. The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (V of 1837) enabled the provincial Government, with the previous sanction of the Governor General in Council, to prescribe an "inner line" which could not be crossed without permission. Under the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation (XI of 1880) which was brought into force in all the Hill areas, the operation of certain enactments relating to civil and criminal procedure, court fee stamps, transfer of property and registration were barred. Instead, a simpler system of administration of justice in civil and criminal matters was prescribed by rules framed under the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874 for these areas.5

Under the Government of India Act 1935, the Frontier Tracts were placed under the category of 'Excluded Areas' and was administered by the Governor of Assam in his discretion as an Agent to the Governor General under the administrative control of the External Affairs Department. No Central or provincial Act was applied to these excluded areas but the

Governor could extend any of them with or without modification. In the broad sphere of civil law, the tribes had continued to be governed by their own customary law, which was often elaborate but nowhere codified, and criminal law took the form of special rules amended from time to time.  

Since Indian Independence, this region which was administered under the Ministry of External Affairs up to the middle of 1965 and then onwards under the Ministry of Home Affairs has undergone various changes in its status, as given below:

1. NORTH EAST FRONTIER TRACT
   (i) Administered by the Government of Assam - 1947 to 1950.
   (ii) Administered by the Governor of Assam in his discretion as agent to the President of India - 1950 to 1954.

2. NORTH EAST FRONTIER AGENCY
   Administered by the Governor in his discretion as agent to the President of India - 1954 to 1972.

3. ARUNACHAL PRADESH (UNION TERRITORY)
   (i) Administered by Chief Commissioner under the Ministry of Home Affairs - 1972 to 1975.

4. ARUNACHAL PRADESH (STATE)
   Administered by the Governor - From February, 1987 onwards-

6. ibid., p. II.
The Khamti habitat which is adjacent to the Lohit river supports a deciduous forest with patches of ever-green forests, the vegetation looking very much like that in the Upper Assam plains. The trees are dense, close together, with tall boles carrying the widespread canopy to the sky. Most easily available species are *Dipterocarpus macrocarpus*, *Terminalia myriocarpa*, *Chikrassia tabularis* etc. Frequent growth of a variety of woody climbers, herbaceous climbers, snowpines, tall grasses, epiphytes and bamboos makes the forest surrounding the Khamti villages dense and impenetrable. The Khamti thrive on many tubers, foliage, flowers, fruits and seeds - all collected from the forest, besides their usual harvest of paddy. Palm foliages, bamboo and cane are used for thatching the house and for the construction of suspension bridges.

The forests surrounding Khamti villages nourish a number of wild animals, the common species being the Indian elephant, the tiger and leopard, sambar, flog deer and barking deer etc. A large number of birds, reptiles, amphibians and mollusca are also found in these forests, some of which are relished by the local inhabitants.

The climate of the area inhabited by the Khamti is hot and humid during summer, ranging from April to October, with intermittent heavy rainfall. The winter months from November to March are moderately cold. The annual average rainfall in the area is about 200 cm. Heavy rainfall results in frequent flooding of the rivers, disruption of communication
and mushroom growth of long grasses blocking the foot-tracks.

Notwithstanding the problems of communication, the Khamti maintained a sophisticated way of life, in comparison to the neighbouring communities at the time of migration and after that. They had brought with them from Burma the techniques of wet-rice cultivation, weaving techniques, a language with a good number of manuscripts and a developed religion. After their settlement in Tengapani valley, they practised paddy cultivation and were famous as paddy exporters. Cooper had observed, "The Khamtees are inveterate traders, and to their industry Northern Assam is much indebted for the best rice and vegetables, especially potatoes". They were excellent navigators and were exporting rice with the help of small boats going down from Tengapani to Sodiya, and then to Upper Burma. They, in fact, brought the light of civilization for other neighbouring communities like the Singpho, Mishmi etc.

KHAMTI: A TRANS-BORDER PEOPLE AND THEIR EXPANSION

The Khamti, one of the most prosperous and highly literate tribes, inhabit the Lohit valley, and in fact, is the dominant community in the region. It is the only tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, having a script of its own and a huge collection of hand-written manuscripts, covering all branches of history, religion, medicine and literature. The manuscripts are carefully written and meticulously preserved.

by the individuals and the village monasteries. The Khamti are
the Buddhists of the Theravada school (the Burmese variety),
and still follow the Burmese calendar. The tribe had demonstrated
the bravery of its members in the past, and still nourish the
heritage of excellence in agriculture, business, handicrafts
etc.

**KHAMTI LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC AFFINITIES:**

The Khamti have their own language, for which scripts
are developed and are profusely used in the Khamti country.
Even the world news and entertainment programmes have been
broadcast by the All India Radio, Dibrugarh regularly in
Khamti language. This language closely agrees with the Northern
Shan languages. A large proportion of the vocabulary is
common to these two languages, and the alphabets are nearly
identical. 8

According to Grierson, the Khamti language belongs to
the Tai speech family of the Siamese-Chinese family, coming
under Indo-Chinese super-family. The Siamese-Chinese family
has three speech families, such as, the Tai, Karen and Chinese.
Under the Tai speech family, the languages of Siamese, Lao,
Lu and Khun of trans-Salween Shan states,

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8. G. A. Grierson, ed. (1966): *Linguistic Survey of India,
Shans of Burma and Yun-nan, and finally the Ahom, Khamti and related languages fall. Therefore, the Khamti language has close affinities with all these languages derived from the same speech family. But again, the Tai speech family is divided into two groups, such as, the Northern Tai constituted by the Khamti, Chinese-Shan, Burmese-Shan, Ahom languages; and the Southern Tai consisting of Lao and Thai etc.9

The Khamti language has 33 alphabets, including 16 vowels and 17 consonants. The consonants are Ka, Kha, nga, cha, sha, na (ya), ta, tha, na, pa, pha, ma, ya, ra, la, wa and ha. Characteristically, the alphabets of ga, ghā, ja, jha, da, dha, ba and bha are absent in the Khamti list of consonants. Mr. Needham, who has contributed immensely to the linguistic survey of the region has observed three different tones in which the Khamti language is expressed. These are—

1) The Rising tone - This is the natural pitch of the voice, with a slight rising inflection at the end like mā (a dog);

9. Ibid. p. 58.
2) The straight forward tone of an even pitch;
3) The Falling tone, example - mā (to come); and a fourth tone, recognized by Robinson is:
4) The Emphatic tone, example - mā (a horse). 10

For the beginners, learning of the Khamti language poses serious problem, precisely due to the fact that with slightest variation in pronunciation, an altogether different meaning is emerged from the same word. Example of the following words may be cited in support of the statement -
a) ma = a dog, a horse, a mad fellow, to come;
b) me = the wife, the mother;
c) ka = to go, a crow, the business, to dance, to go away;
d) kho = to laugh, to love, a bridge, a hoe, the neck, to fry etc., and
e) phai = to irrigate, the sharp end of a knife, the intelligence, the playing card, to walk, the fire etc.

The meaning of a word, therefore, is to be understood by the subtlety of difference in pronunciation, and mostly, by noting the content of the sentence. In order to avoid this confusion, an advanced Khamti script is being developed with the initiative of some local people.

The Khamti manifest predominantly Mongoloid traits in their appearance. They are fairer in complexion. They are tall, muscular and well-built. The epicanthic eye-fold is distinct and easily observable. The nose is small rather than flat. The hair is long, straight, lank and rarely of any other

10. ibid: p. 144.
colour than black. The mouth is large and prognathism can be marked in some cases. Hairs are scanty on their body and among the men, beard and mustaches are thinly developed. Their women are pretty with an attractive, lanky, greasy, long hair. The Khamti are less hardy than their immediate neighbour, the Mishmi.

HISTORY OF THE KHAMTI MIGRATION

It is an established fact that the Khamti entered into Assam through the Patkoi pass from the Upper Burma towards the last part of the 18th century. The process of emigration, however, continued in batches till 1850, and in 1891, the total Khamti population reached 3,040 in Assam province.11 There are various views about their migration into India,12 either recorded in some of the Buranjis or are fresh in the memories of some of the Khamti elders through the perpetuating oral traditions. It would be appropriate first to examine the story of migration, as narrated by the people themselves around Chowkham, which is still regarded as the centre of Khamti learning.

The Khamti were the original inhabitants of the Khamti-lang or Khamti-mung or the great Khamti land in the valley of the river Irrawaddy in Burma. It is believed that the name of the tribe is derived from the significance of their place of habitation; the word Khamti literally meaning

the 'place of gold' (Kham=gold, and ti=place in Khamti language).

It is further told that the place had rich mineral deposits and was an important centre of wet-rice cultivation. The Khamti country was a tributary to the Kingdom of Burma. Once it so happened that the Emperor of Burma invited the Khamti Chief to train the Burmese warriors. Those days, one had to cross through high mountains and dense forests to reach the Burmese capital. The Khamti Chief had two brothers. Therefore, he sent his second brother to fulfil the desire of the Burmese Emperor. While moving towards the capital, the second brother met with an accident and expired in the forest. The Khamti Chief waited for a year, and when did not get any message from the brother, he sent his third brother to the capital. The youngest brother reached the capital safe and met the Emperor. In course of time, he could impress the Emperor by his acts of bravery and expertise in military skills. As a token of honour to him, while the Emperor inducted him to the royal Court, he enquired whether the young man had any brother. The shrewd youngest brother replied in negative and found a place in the royal Court.

When the Khamti chief could not hear anything about both his brothers, he personally went to the Burmese capital. When he entered into the royal Court with an intention to meet the Emperor, the youngest brother stood up from his seat as a mark of reverence to his eldest brother. When the Emperor questioned him about this behaviour, the youngest brother confessed that he had two elder brothers. Immediately an angry Burmese Emperor offered his sword to the Khamti Chief and ordered him to behead his liar brother. The Khamti Chief
fervently requested the Emperor to withdraw his order, as he expected that his brother would come to the rescue at the moment of crisis.

Being pleased with the kindness and magnanimity of the Khamti chief, the Burmese Emperor permitted him to return back to the Khamti land and rule peacefully. While seeing him off, the Emperor also presented a golden image of Lord Buddha to the Chief and conferred to him the title of Phra taka or the devotee of God. After reaching the country, the eldest brother or Phra taka asked the youngest brother to rule. The latter agreed to it and time passed by. The new chief had two sons. The eldest of the two was extremely notorious and unruly in his behaviour. He ultimately murdered his father to rule over the Khamti-lang. Being upset with that incidence, the Phra taka left the country with a few followers and got into India through the Patkoi pass and reached near the river Tengapani to settle. They had to face the Singpho attacks, who were the rulers of that part of India. But the Khamti won the battle and moved towards Sadiya later. This traditional tale of Khamti migration, however, resembles to some extent with the narration by Neog in his foreword to the book, The Tai Khamtis.¹³

The historical accounts vary considerably about the migration of the Khamti from Burma to India. Gogoi has presented at least three versions of their migration, and one of these versions reads: "The Burmese king Alamphra subjugated

the kingdom of Mung-kong and Mao-lung or Pong, applying the divide and rule policy, and as a consequence, the Chiefs of the principalities of the Bar Khamti country lost their unity, and strength as well. At first, the conflict broke out in between the chiefs of Lung-king and Man-ci. Man-ci chief killed Lung-king chief and subjugated his country, and the three sons of Lung-king chief namely Phrateka, Chao-tang and Lung-king kept in the prison. In the meantime the Man-ci chief was assassinated by his own son, and brought the principality under his own control. At that time, Phrateka, Chao-tang and Lung-king left their home-land, crossing the Patkai ranges through Chowkang pass, and subsequently arrived in the Ahom Kingdom probably in 1752. Phrateka was a very pious Buddhist. He brought with him an image of Lord Buddha presented by the king of Mung-kong. The image of Lord Buddha brought by the Khamti is still worshipped with due solemnity. Phra-teka, the eldest brother keenly inclined towards religious activities, the youngest son was made leader or chief of the principalities of Lung-king dynasty.\(^1\)

The rivalry between groups of Khamti people, as evidenced from the preceding account, is also substantiated in the accounts presented by Dalton. He writes, "Captain Wilcox found them a divided people. Two great clans had been at feud for fifty years, and it was partly owing to these dissensions that horde after horde continued to flow into Assam".\(^1\)

This statement was made by Wilcox, when he personally visited the Khamti land in 1826.

The Khamti maintain their own buranji or chronicle systematically, which is popularly known as Chetuie, and

\(^{14}\) ibid., p. XXXI.

\(^{15}\) F.T. Dalton.
written in Khamti language and script. Chetuie reads: there was a big pond in the Mung Khamti with a very big and old wonder tree in it. The tree had five branches, made out of precious metals like gold, silver, copper, brass and iron. The people inhabiting the area were very happy and prosperous due to the blessing of the wonder tree. The neighbouring countries were poor and their people were poverty stricken. Therefore, they were jealous of the Mung Khamti and its people. In one of the neighbouring countries, there was a magician named Takasu. Through his magical power, Takasu was able to send an Extra-large and ferocious magical bird to Mung Khamti. On whichever tree the magical bird sat, the tree was broken into pieces. Ultimately, the magic bird took shelter on the tree, which was having the precious metals. When the bird could not do any harm to the tree, it started swallowing the human beings around and also the domestic animals. This created panic among the local resident Khamtis. Eventually, the people, out of fear and insecurity, left Mung Khamti in search of new habitations. It is mentioned in the Chetuie that leaving only 3,000 families, rest others left the country. Some of them came to Vaishali (India), while some others went to Thailand, Mung Phang, Thampasia and other countries.

All these are suggestive of the fact that political crisis and inter-tribal hostility marked by head-hunting were the common features of that time, which rather forced the inhabitants to seek for other alternate places of residence. This must have culminated in gradual emigration of people batch by batch for at least peaceful existence in a foreign
THE KHAMTI IN AHOM KINGDOM

During the reign of King Alamphra of Burma (1752-60), when the kingdom of Mung-kong was dismembered by the king, the Khamti, in all probability, entered into Assam. Perhaps the contemporary Ahom Emperor, Rajeswara Singha (1751-69) had permitted them to settle, as both the Ahom and Khamti belonged to the same racial and ethnic stock. The Khamti were allowed to settle down and cultivate the land near the river, Tengapani. The Chetwic reinforces the probable time of immigration, when it mentions that the village Chowkham was established in 1147 Tai era, which can be approximately equated with 1785 AD. The village Chowkham, in fact, is regarded as one of the oldest villages in the area.

Domestic rebellion in the Ahom territory encouraged the Khamti to capture power and continue to rule in Upper Assam, hardly within a span of three decades from their time of immigration. When the Maomaria rebellion broke out in Assam during 1779 AD, the Khamti chiefs could study the weaknesses and liberal attitudes of the Ahom ruler Gourinath Singha (1780-95), and they found that an opportunity to extend their territorial jurisdiction and power. In 1793 AD, under the leadership of Burha Raja and Deka Raja, the valiant Khamti army dethroned the Ahom Governor of Sadiya, popularly known as Sadiya Khowa Gohain, and assumed the same title. In 1799 AD there was a fierce battle fought between the Ahom King Kamaleshawar Singh (1795-1811) and the Khamti army. The

16. L. Gogoi: op. cit., p. XXX.
Khamti lost the battle and Sadiya again came under the Ahom control.  

THE KHAMTI DURING BRITISH RAJ

When the Sadiya Khowa Gohain or Chaw Chalan Gohain passed away in the year 1835, his son was allowed to continue as the Khamti Chief and the ruler of Sadiya. At the same time, an unfortunate dispute arose between the Chiefs of Sadiya and Matak over a patch of land on the South of the river Brahmaputra. The British Officer posted at Sadiya interfered in the matter and summoned both the parties with a view to make a mutual compromise. But the Khamti Chief ignored the summon and forcibly occupied the disputed tract of land. This step of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain annoyed the British Officer and eventually, the Khamti Chief was removed from his position and his post was abolished. The Khamti regarded it a deliberate humiliation to the whole community and decided to take revenge. Accordingly, on January 19, 1839, a band of 500 Khamtis attacked the British garrison at Sadiya and murdered Col. White, who was posted there as Political Agent. Later, the British soldiers caught hold of the culprits and the administration decided to divide the rebellious Khamti, eventually to make them weak. Accordingly a section of them was resettled in North Lakhimpur of Assam, where they continue to live till to-date.

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17. ibid: P. XXXIV.
By 1845, the Khamti reconciled themselves and became increasingly loyal to the British Government. In course of time, the Khamti chiefs like Chow Cha Gohain, Chaw Kanmung Gohain, Chaw Kanan Gohain and others rendered timely and valuable services to the British administration and its officers, and were regarded as Khamti Chiefs by the administration. Even they were allowed to levy taxes from the non-tribal residents of their area, and were receiving presentations from the Government from time to time. 20

**THE KHAMTI IN INDEPENDENT INDIA**

After the Indian Independence in 1947, the Khamti were granted the status of Indian citizens, as given to the people of other parts of the country. During the Five Year Plan periods, developmental programmes initiated by the Government of India attracted the Khamti beneficiaries. There were improvements in communication networks, modern education, health and sanitation facilities, and trade and commerce activities. The Khamti contributed to the Indian polity with the nomination of Chow Khoom Gohain as the first nominated M.P. from the then NEFA from 1952 till he resigned in 1961. His younger brother, Chow Chandrit Gohain also became the M.F. for a period of five years from 1971 to 1976. The Khamti have now been absorbed in various professions, and some of them excel in rice production and timber trading.

Modern education has contributed significantly to bring the Khamti to the mainstream of Indian nationalism. Hindi and English are the media of instruction starting from the primary level upwards. Encouragement by the Government of

20. Gogoi, comp., op. cit., pp.XL-XLI.
India in the form of offering scholarships, teaching materials and hostel facilities has been attracting students to be in the school and college roles. Many students have been suitably rewarded and are found in various professions. Full subsidy for all India study-tours conducted in schools and Colleges attracts students, and eventually expose them to the regions outside Arunachal Pradesh.

**KHAMTI VILLAGES STUDIED**

**LOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF KHAMTI VILLAGES**

The Khambi inhabit some 30 villages - big and small-coming under Namsai Subdivision in the Lohit district. The subdivision is on the Assam border and the subdivisional Headquarter is about 10 Km. from the border. A section of the Khambi also continue to live in Tirap District of Arunachal and North Lakhimpur district of Assam, and all these groups were separated from each other by a historical accident. The kin net-work, however, is still strong between these spatially and locationally separated Khambi groups.

The Khambi are distributed in three circles out of the four coming under Namsai Subdivision. Mostly they are concentrated in Namsai and Chowkham circles, and the Lekan circle has a few villages, inhabited by the Khambi. The major Khambi villages include Namsai, Piyong, Changlai, Wingko, Nangtow, Enten, Nanam, Manmow, Sengsap, Sulungtoo, Lathaw, Momong, Chowkham, Kherem, Empong, Māl, Mankao, Manmo, Pankhaw, Emphom etc. Some of these villages are connected by the National Highway No. 52 running between the Dirak check-gate.
on the Assam border and Alubari, while some others are connected by the road between Chowkham and Wakro. Some remote villages are not still connected by all-weather roads, as villages like Mimi and Emphom are surrounded by perennial streams.

**KHAMTI VILLAGE AND HOUSE PATTERN**

The Khamti village does not follow any definite pattern. But each village is demarcated by a boundary. Every village has its own monastery or bapu chang and the paddy fields in southerly direction. Villages have roads or foot-tracks for communication and good drainage facilities.

The typical Khamti houses are strong timber structures with raised floors and thatched roofs. Every house (hun) has a boundary with bamboo fencing. The land surrounding the house is used for paddy or mustard cropping. A part of the land is used for kitchen garden. The Khamti house can be divided into four parts: 1) Chan, 2) Tinon, 3) Kho tang, and 4) Kho pino. The Chan is the sitting place for the visitors and adjacent to the unroofed open balcony. The tinon is the bedroom of the house, having a fire-place (hutta phai) at its centre. While the Kho tang is the kitchen, the Kho pino is the guest room of the Khamti house. The house is thought to be incomplete without a granary or ye. The granary is invariably constructed a little away from the main house on a raised platform. The space below the raised platform, popularly known as Chang is used in multiple ways. It is the space for domestic animals, storage of fire-wood, and also the place for their traditional loom or kihok. The walls of the house are made up of bamboo
but the roofs are so low that it becomes difficult to see the walls from outside. The cow-shed (Khong ngo) is also away from the main house but within the boundary.

**VILLAGE RESOURCE BASE**

Every Khamti village has invariably some cultivable and forest land, and at least one perennial stream passing through the village boundary. All the existing resources within the jurisdiction of the village is controlled and regulated either by the village headman or the village King, belonging to Namsoom clan. The allocation of land for the purpose of cultivation to individual families is the discretion of the King. No extension or encroachment is possible without his permission. This customary law has given free hand to the dishonest Kings to utilize the communal property for self gratification. Sometimes, the King is found to have sold timbers from the grazing forest, earmarked for the grazing of the village cattle and domesticated elephants.

**DEMOGRAPHY OF THREE SELECTED KHAMTI VILLAGES**

As per the 1971 census, the total Khamti population in the Lohit district was 3,953, out of which 2,607 were males and 1,936 were females. This shows that for every 1,000 males, there were 743 females approximately. As the 1981 census figure for this tribe is not available, the population of this tribe can be roughly estimated for 1981. It is found that the decennial growth of the total population of the district is 45.70 per cent between 1971 and 1981. Assuming that this rate of growth is also applicable to the Khamti, the estimated population for 1981 would be around 5,760 only. Since no data
are available from second hand sources about sex-ratio, average family size, age-group etc., the data generated from the detail census of three villages may be generalised for the community as a whole. As all the Khamti villages are almost identical in their composition and share similar socio-economic features, no sampling was found necessary for selection of the villages. Nevertheless, these three villages were the base-camps during the period of field-work and were chosen considering their differential communication facilities only.

Table 2.1 shows that the female population is less than the male population in the community. The number of females for every 1,000 males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>No. of females for every 1000</th>
<th>Average female number for every 1000 male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Empong</td>
<td>84 81 165</td>
<td>964.28</td>
<td>849.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kherem</td>
<td>91 81 172</td>
<td>890.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Manmow</td>
<td>82 57 139</td>
<td>695.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in the villages of Empong, Kherem and Manmow come to 964.28, 890.10 and 695.12 respectively with an average of 849.83 females for every 1000 male. This is marked by an increase of the female proportion in comparison to 1971 census figures.
Although no data on fertility is available, the census taken in these three villages shows that the average size of the family is 7.89. By any standard, the family size here is bigger than the national average of the family size in rural areas of India. The rate of high fertility is due to the Khamti cultural convention of condemning the acts of abortion and family planning practices by artificial means. Therefore, the females use to give birth till the end of their child-bearing period. Although no information are collected on the infant and child mortality, it is observed that these are also high, and hence, the average size of the family is limited within 8.

The distribution of the population according to age reveals that about 46.68 per cent of the total population belong to the age-group below 15 years and 3.83 per cent above 60 years. Hence, about 50 per cent of the population is dependent. This structure may be found in Table III.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>EMPONG</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>KHEREM</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>HANNON</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>AGERAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>70-74</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2-3: AGE-GROUP OF THE POPULATION
The Khamti are basically the advanced people, precisely due to the fact that they are having their own language and script. Their tradition of writing and preserving the manuscripts is associated very closely with their religious beliefs and practices. Almost all elderly Khamti can now read and write books written in Khamti. If we take formal school education also, the rate of literacy is higher in this society. As per 1981 census enumeration, when 35.69 and 16.69 per cents were Male and Female literates respectively in the Lohit district, among the Khamti, Male and Female adult literates constitute 58.16 and 21.28 per cents respectively of the total population, as may be revealed from the analysis of three villages.

**TABLE 2-4: PERCENTAGE OF ADULT LITERACY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>MANICHOW</th>
<th>EMPONG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male %</td>
<td>Female %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>10(23.80)</td>
<td>18(62.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>32(76.19)</td>
<td>11(37.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>42(99.99)</td>
<td>29(99.99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**++**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Average %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male &amp; %</td>
<td>Female &amp; %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>12(26.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>33(73.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>45(99.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The educational standard of these three villages can be seen from the following table, which shows that a larger percentage of the educated male and female Kharati belong to the educational group between Class VIII and Class XII or Higher Secondary Exam.

**TABLE 2-5: LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>EMPONG</th>
<th>KHREM</th>
<th>MANMOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M &amp; %</td>
<td>F &amp; %</td>
<td>M &amp; %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>5(50)</td>
<td>1(100)</td>
<td>11(33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>4(40)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20(60.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>1(10)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2(6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technically Educated</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* AVERAGE %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40.26</td>
<td>52.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>44.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTERACTION WITH OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS**

The Khamti come into contact with a number of ethnic groups in their day-to-day life. But they are more closer to
the Singpho, Khomong, Shyam and similar groups due to their locational proximity. Sometimes, the villages are multi-ethnic, so that the interaction is more in daily life. Otherwise, the homogeneous Khamti villages are very close to the villages inhabited by other ethnic groups. The relationship between the Khamti and other communities is characterized by mutual love and brother-hood. Nevertheless, interethnic marital relations are not encouraged.

The Khamti also frequently come into very close contact with the Nepalese Hindus, who are engaged in clearing the forest and working as share-croppers or agricultural labourers of the Khamti masters. These groups are settled in the middle of the paddy fields and cultivate, harvest and protect the crops. Some of them also work as domestic servants in Khamti residences.

The pool of the Khamti domestic servants is, however, dominated by the Assamese speakers of the bordering areas. They are given accommodation and paid handsomely by their Khamti masters. They are usually engaged in paddy fields, taking care of the domestic animals, and doing necessary house-hold works. As all the Khamti are not in a position to afford to engage a domestic servant, it is the prerogative of some well-to-do and rich Khamtis.

Due to the entreprenurial involvement of a section of the Khamti, they interact with a wide variety of people from all over India. This interaction and eventual exposure to the world outside the Khamti-land have greatly influenced the Khamti style of life.
The Khamti normally live in multi-clan villages and hence, their social life is chiefly regulated by their village and clan affiliations. The tribal endogamy and clan exogamy are the basic principles in materializing marital ties in the Khamti society. Marriages are usually solemnized outside the village, although village exogamy is not prescriptive. The Khamti society is patrilineal and patrilocal. Monogamy is the general rule, but polygyny is also recognized among them. Although no caste-like rigid hierarchization exists, the society is divided into some strata, based on status differences, some of which are ascribed.

THE FAMILY

Family is the basic social unit in Khamti society. The descent in the family is patrilineal. The father or any other elder male member of the family is regarded as the head, who represents the family in all contexts. Inside the family, he is honoured and his decisions are final in all matters. The women normally enjoy a lower status, despite the freedom given to them in many respects. Children are loved by the elders, and reciprocally, the elders are treated with humility and reverence. In case of polygynous family, the eldest wife enjoys a higher status than the rest.

If the family size is considered, the medium sized families with 5-8 members are predominant, constituting about 52.1 per cent of the total families of the three villages where
detailed house-hold census was taken. The small families with 1-4 members and large families with 9 members or above constitute 12.6 and 35.1 per cents of the total families respectively. Table VI shows the details of the position.

**TABLE 2-6: SIZE OF THE FAMILY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of the Family</th>
<th>EMPONG</th>
<th>KHEREM</th>
<th>MANMOW</th>
<th>Average %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (upto 4)</td>
<td>3 13</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>5 25</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (5-8)</td>
<td>14 60.8</td>
<td>10 55.5</td>
<td>8 40</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (9 and above)</td>
<td>6 26</td>
<td>8 44.4</td>
<td>7 35</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Khamti are basically agriculturists; and since agricultural activities demand large labour force, most of the families are joint or extended in nature. But these days, the joint families are gradually giving way to nuclear or elementary families. The trend may be attributed to the abundance of land resources and the preference of the young married sons to accumulate more landed property away from the village. The census, however, shows that the occurrence of the joint families is 50.07 per cent of the total families, while nuclear families constitute 46.99 per cent. The picture can be clearly visualised from the following table:

**TABLE 2-7: KHAMTI FAMILY TYPE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>EMPONG</th>
<th>KHEREM</th>
<th>MANMOW</th>
<th>Average %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>12 52.17</td>
<td>7 38.8</td>
<td>10 50</td>
<td>46.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>9 39.13</td>
<td>11 61.1</td>
<td>10 50</td>
<td>50.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>2 8.69</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The family property, both movable and immovable, are exclusively inherited in the male line. The movable properties include utensils, clothing, ornaments and domestic animals etc., while the immovable property includes land, house etc. As the inheritance is patrilineal, the women do not have a share in the parental property. If the daughter is unmarried, she is free to remain with one of her brothers till her death. In case of a widow, who is not willing to remarry to one of her husband's younger brothers, is granted her husband's share. Usually, there is equal division of property among the brothers, but the father has the discretion of granting some additional property to a son, taking into consideration the number of children and his source of income. Usually, a needy brother gets a little favour at the time of property division.

**MARRIAGE:**

Even if the tribal endogamy is the general rule, instances of inter-tribal marriage is not uncommon in Khamti society. Clan exogamy, however, is strictly observed among them and the violation of this rule leads to an offence. Although monogamous type of marriage is always preferred, polygyny is also recognized; but polyandry is a hard taboo. Cross-cousin marriage is very much in vogue in Khamti society and in fact, the first preference is always given to the maternal uncle's daughter, if she is eligible.

Although there is no particular term for marriage in Khamti language, it is popularly known as *lap thap mangala* or *tang hun*, literally meaning union of the spouses. Khamti
marriages are regarded as most sacred and usually, the birth day and time of both the partners are matched before any financial decision is taken. Arranged marriage (aw na aw tasi tang hun) is most prestigious and hence, the preferred form, but other forms like elopement (aw paise tang hun), love marriage (hak kansi tang hun), marriage by service (khun khoi) etc., are also practised. Widow remarriage (me mai tang hun), levirate (put pilo) and sorrorate (put nong saw) are also institutionalized in Khamti society.

The Khamti marriage ritual can be divided into three stages, such as: (a) preliminary talk, (b) engagement or pong phak, and (c) the marriage proper. In case of an arranged marriage, initially, when the boy's parents choose a particular girl as their prospective daughter-in-law, taking into account her family background and her expertise in house-hold work, a mediator (pa chaw) is selected who should be related to or acquainted with both the families. On an auspicious day, in consultation with the village astrologer (chow lem phe), the mediator is sent by the groom's parents with a packet of sugar and Rs. 140/- (Choi lung) 18 to the bride's father to place the proposal for marriage. The mediator is treated with honour, and if the proposal is accepted prima facie, the bride's parents keep with them the sugar packet and money. If they do not agree to the proposal for some reason or the other, the gifts are returned forthwith, which ends up in withdrawing the proposal.

18. Choi refers to 140 rupees and is the minimum amount given for the purpose. In some cases, two or more Choi is given, depending on the economic condition of the family.
After the proposal is accepted by the bride's father, the second stage begins. On another appointed auspicious day, the mediator and a party of groom's relatives and friends reach the bride's residence. They carry with them thousands of dry fish (pa heng), rice-cakes (Khaw tung) and some money in the denominations of 140 (Choi) like 5 Choi or 10 Choi as bride-price, as demanded by the bride's father. The party is treated with a nice feast and rice-beer at the bride's residence, after which they return back. The gift articles like cakes, dry-fishes and money are distributed among the bride's relatives.

Another auspicious day according to the Burmese calendar is selected for the marriage. The previous afternoon, again a small party of elders is sent from the groom's village to get the bride. They also carry rice cakes and dry-fishes with them. The next day at the right moment, the bride and her relatives in a big group start towards the groom's village. All the presentations given to the bride are also carried. On the way, the bride's relatives demand money several times from the groom's party, and if the demands are not met, the bride is not allowed to move further. The demand, denial and mutual negotiation in payment continue till the party reaches the groom's residence. At the stair-case of the house, the village priest or Chaw Chale reads out the codes of conduct for the new bride from the manuscript, like phat nålaw, and then she is greeted to the house after being blessed by the village elders. She is allowed to put on the green coloured langwat, which is the only symbol of a married woman. In the evening,
a feast is offered to the bride's party, the groom's villagers and relatives, which ends up the marriage.

The trend of cosmopolitanization of marriage in Khamti society has added many new dimensions, while the old customs are gradually eschewed. Inter-communal marriage is mostly responsible for this trend. As the life of a Khamti wife is nothing but a working schedule from 4 AM in the morning till late evening, the educated girls now prefer to marry the outsiders for an easy life.

**SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

Traditionally, the Khamti society was divided into three distinct strata, namely the group of chiefs, commoners and the slaves. Although the monks (bhante) had a higher status than the commoners, they are not brought to the category of stratified groups due to their detachment from the worldly affairs. Mostly they spend their time in the village Chang by reading, writing sacred literature and teaching the novices or shramans the excellence of Buddhism. According to the Khamti tradition, only the members of three clans, such as, the Namsoom, Lungking and Chowtan are put under one category called phan chaw, whose status is the highest by virtue of their birth in the royal family. Members of all other clans except the royal clans are grouped under paklung, which stands next to phan chaw. The slave clans are termed as phan kha, the members of which were doing the menial works and the group was at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The situation has become different these days. Now there is no restriction whatsoever in marriage and all clans are bound by marital ties. Even if the members of the younger generation do not bother
much about the strata, the old people still have an inner regard towards the members of the royal dynasty and they are in favour of the traditional system of kingship.

**KHAMTI ECONOMIC PURSUITS**

The Khamti are expert wet-rice cultivators and agriculture is their primary occupation. They have their indigenous device of irrigation by the method of embankment (tey). Their rice cultivation cycle begins in the month of April (Nunha in Khamti calendar) and ends in the month of November-December (Nunching-Nunkam). The cycle is divided into various stages like field-preparation (thai na/long na), nursery preparation (wan ka), transplantation (sanna), weeding (maina), cutting (pat khaw), harvesting (pal khaw), fanning (wi khaw) and storing (to khaw) etc. The important local paddy varieties include Khaw naw, Khaw pakhi, Khaw yi-kan, Khaw noo, Khaw jaha, Khaw shyang khaw etc. The Khamti are surplus producers of rice and every year sell out a portion of the produce. Mustard cultivation is also widely done by the Khamti. The mustard seeds are sown in September-October and the crop is harvested in December. As it requires less water, unirrigated fields are used for the purpose. The Khamti also grow ahu (upland) paddy, potato, varieties of vegetables etc., in their fields and kitchen gardens. Their dependence on the forest is intense. They use to collect wild potato (man), sour fruits (mak), mango (momong), jack-fruit (ma lang), tender tip of cane (mur) and many other wild varieties of roots, fruits and tubers. They also hunt the local varieties of games like Kang, phan, mu, mein, Kaithun etc., from the jungle to meet their food requirement. Fishes (pa) of innumerable varieties are plenty in the streams,
which are relished with greatest satisfaction. All the economic activities are carried out with the help of the lineage members and friends. Till now, fencing before the cultivation, house construction/are done communally. During acute need of labour for agricultural operation and also during hunting and fishing, the villagers come forward to help, and hence, the economic activities are co-operative activities.

Timber cutting and selling out timber products have given new hopes to the Khamti. Due to the acute demand of timber in outside markets, some Khamtis have turned to be flourishing businessmen and entrepreneurs. This has made their economic base stable, and shattered the traditional social bond. Group formation has started due to differential level of income, and is gradually becoming consolidated due to widening of the gap between the rich and the poor.

KHAMTI RELIGION, RITUAL AND SACRED LITERATURE

The Khamti are the ardent Buddhists of the Theravada school or Buddhism of the Burmese variety. They believe that nippam (Nirvana in Sanskrit) or the salvation of the human soul after death is possible by following the Noble Eightfold Path - Right Views, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right mindfulness and Right Meditation, as preached by Lord Buddha. The Khamti follow Pancha Shila, Ashta Shila and Dasa Shila or five, eight and ten principles respectively to lead a pious life like a devout Buddhist. They also believe that the worship to Lord Buddha, offering Buddha images and manuscripts to monasteries and
offering food, dress to the monks etc., are the deeds to attain nippan in the long run. Offering of cooked food to the monks in the village monastery every morning, before any one taking the meal, is still strictly followed in all the Khamti villages, which is a clear indication of their attachment to Buddhism.21

The Khamti celebrate a number of festivals round the year. Most important of the festivals is the Sangken, which is celebrated during the month of April (Nunha in Khamti calendar). Only during this festival, which is observed for three consecutive days, the images of Lord Buddha are brought out of the Chang to a specially designed pandal in the premises. The images are given clean wash in all these days and at the end, the images are taken back to the Chang. This celebration is followed by praying, feasting, putting on new garments, offering, merry-making and spraying coloured water to each other. The village youth greatly participate in this festival.

Besides Sangken, the Khamti also observe the Kha-wa or nan-wa in the month of July-August (on the full-moon day of Numpet), which marks the starting of three months' period of meditation by the monks. They are not supposed to move out of the Chang for three months during the rains. Shatang Chale or Shatang Charge is observed during September-October (on the full-moon day of Nunship) for offering honey to the monks, for which the festival is also known as Madhu Purnima. On the new-moon day of the same month, the festival Meipi is celebrated with cleaning the houses and giving a holy dip

in the nearby river. The festival Put-wa which marks the end of three months' meditation period is celebrated during October-November, on the full-moon day of Nunshipet. The monks are worshipped with valuable offerings on this occasion. The full-moon day of Nunshi-song or during November-December, the monks are offered with yellow robes or cheewar by the villagers, which is considered an act to gain virtuousness. Till recently, the Khamti women, who are expert weavers, were weaving and dyeing the robes within one night preceding the festival, and in the next morning it was offered to the monks. Mai me FONG is observed on the full-moon day of Nunsiaw or during February-March, for which the village youth collect fire-wood and bamboo, make a tall structure and light it by the sacred fire in the early morning. This is followed by feasting and merry-making. On each occasion, the villagers propitiate Lord Buddha with offerings of food, flowers, candles and incense sticks in the Chang. They listen to holy scriptures and follow Pancha Shila for that day at least.

The Khamti way of celebrating all these communal festivals is regulated by the monks as advisors and the village headman, or Raja as the chief patron. A greater responsibility on each occasion is shouldered by the village young men and women, who unhesitatingly extend their cooperation till the ritual is over.22

The Khamti has volumes of sacred texts, all in the form of manuscripts. These include volumes of Abhidhamma, Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas, illustrated manuscripts on heavens and ghostly worlds, handbooks on tenets and principles of Theravada Buddhism, historical works, jatakas and other tales, and many

individual works. The manuscripts are copied, produced and preserved meticulously by the monks as well as the common men. Every village temple is rich with collection of these manuscripts, which are donated by the individuals due to the belief that donation of manuscripts to temples earns charity. 23

KHAMTI POLITICAL SYSTEM

The traditional political system in the Khamti society revolves round chieftaincy. Like many other tribal communities in India, the Khamti village headman or Chow man belongs to the clan (phan) which settled first and established the village. Rest other clans are either invited or are settled with due permission of the Chow man, as he holds absolute power over the village land and its allotment. Although the post of Chow man is not hereditary, it is confined within the first settled clan, and other clan members are not at all entitled for it. At the village level, an informal council is constituted under the leadership of the headman to resolve the cases of theft, seduction of unmarried girls, adultery, violation of other taboos, quarrels, disputes over property and domesticated animals etc. The members of the Council are either nominated by the headman or all adult members of the village, depending on the gravity of the case. If the case is somehow not resolved at the village level, the matter is referred to the Khamti Chief for decision.

Some villages have their own kings (chowfa) belonging to the Namsoom clan. It was regarded essential to invite a family of the Raja clan (phan chaw), when the village was

established by other clan members. But when one of the pham chaw members established the village, they held the post of Chow man as well. The village Chowfa is paid the highest respect by virtue of his birth, and his consent is invariably taken in all matters relating to the village. He presides over village meetings, communal rituals etc., and his presence is honoured by the villagers.

At the community level, there is a chief of the Khamti, called as Chowfa. The post is though not hereditary, is circulated within the Namsoom clan. The headquarter of the Chowfa is at Chowkham, one of the oldest villages in the area. There is a council of Ministers called mokchum under the chowfa, with a Prime Minister (Chow amat) at the top of the council. The mokchum is a representative body consisting of members of all clans including some non-Khamti traders, who are conferred with Khamti titles by the Raja, so that no section of the population goes unrepresented. The mokchum under the chairmanship of the Chowfa has the power to decide all the relating to the community, from judicial to developmental. But unfortunately, the mokchum is now almost defunct, the meeting of which has not been convened since years. Nevertheless, the present Chowfa, an ex-M.P., a politically active leader and flourishing businessman gets highest respect from most of the Khamti.

The village Chowfa, the Khamti chief or the Chow man takes the help of the holy Thamasat to decide the cases. Thamasat is the manuscript of law for the Khamti, and the punishment is decided as per the verdict of this sacred book, but not by any individual consideration.
Panchayati Raj was introduced in the area since 1972. As a result of this, a district is divided into some Anchals or Zones and each Zone is constituted by some villages. At the village level, there is direct election of Gram Panchayat Members, who again elect some Anchal Samiti Members, and who in turn elect some Zilla Parishad Members. Besides this, there is direct election to the State Assembly from the Namsai constituency, formed by the majority of Khamtai villages and in the strong-hold of the Khamtai society. None other than a Khamtai is elected from this constituency from the first general election till now.

There is a co-existence of both the traditional and the modern political systems now in the Khamtai country, although there is a mild wave to overthrow the traditional one. Most of the people regard the traditional system as essential to ensure communal harmony, while the modern system as inevitable to implement various developmental programmes initiated by the Government in the wider interest of the Khamtai community.