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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE TAI KHAMTIS OF NORTH-EAST INDIA: A SOCIO CULTURAL STUDY.

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Abstract

North-East India is a place of various tribal and ethnic groups and it is the place of about 145 tribal groups. The Tai ethnic group of North-east India is one of the largest ethnic group of the region. It has six sub groups namely- Tai khamti, Tai Ahom, Tai Aiton, Tai Phake, tai Khamyang and Tai Turung. The Khamti is one of the smallest sub groups of Tai people. The Khamti people are mainly Buddhists and believer of the *Hinyan sect* of Buddhism. They are culturally and socially very rich. Here in this study it is trying to give a socio-cultural identity of the Tai khamtis.

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Introduction:-

Tai Khamtis are one of the richest tribes of North-East India in terms of their historically, socially and culturally. They are mainly concentrated in Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh but a little part of the group spread in Assam also. Khamti' word is the combination of two words, 'Kham' and 'Ti'. Literally, Kham the means gold and Ti means region or place. As a whole, the meaning of the word is the region or place of gold. According to another version, Kham means 'to adhere to' and Ti means 'a place or a country. According to some historians the Tai-Khamti people migrated to India from the Irrawaddy valley, Myanmar, in 1751 (Rahman, 2005). The Khamti people are a part of the great Shan race, migrated to Assam only in the second half of the 18th century (Gogoi, 1971). The first Tai-Khamti kingdom was in Sadiya, Assam. In Assam, they spread in Narayanpur of Lakhimpur district and Tinsukia district. Narayanpur has the largest number of Tai-Khamtis in Assam. There are mostly seven villages in Lakhimpur district namely, Bor-Khamti gaon, Deotola, Barpathar, Tunijan, Tipling, Sribhuyan and Barigaon where the language is spoken. The Tai Khamtis of the region showing their own identity by giving cultural and social harmony.

Objectives:-

1. To study about the social activities of Tai khamtis
2. To study about the cultural and religion activities of Tai khamtis

Data and Methodology:-

The study is descriptive in nature and based on secondary sources followed by different books, journals, articles, news-papers etc. For analytical data, the study also used the census reports. The paper observes an analytical approach and the topic has been discussed with the concerned research persons

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Analysis:-**Cultural and Religion activities of Tai khamtis****Tai-Khamti language and religion**

The Tai-Khamtis are one of the smallest Tai ethnic groups of North-East India. They have their own script, called Lik-Tai, which resembles the script used by the Mon in southern Myanmar. Khamti society is hierarchical. It has a village chief at the top and the Buddhist monks because most of the Tai-Khamti people are the followers of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism is the religion of almost every Khamti person. Each village has its own monastery, where proud parents send their sons to study the teachings of Buddha. The Bor Khamti village of Narayanpur which is situated in the Lakhimpur district of Assam also follows Buddhism.

Dresses and Ornaments

The Khamti men wear a shirt known as 'siu pachai' and a lungi known as 'phanoi.' The women wear a blouse 'siu pasao' a long skirt 'sinn' and a cloth used as scarf called 'famia'.

Pha-Huo : Pha huo is a traditional Tai khamti turban and part of the traditional attire of many ethnic groups. Pha-huo literally means "headdress" in Tai language.

Suea Hatt Tuo :

This is an outer garment wear over the shirt similarly like half jacket. This garment is wear only during ceremonies and festivals. The distinctive feature of Suea Hatt Tuo is that they often have gold gilded decoration, with floral works and precious gems, which can be somehow recognisable as Tai Khamti style.

Housing type of Khamti people

According to P.R Gurdon in his work explains that, the Khamtis live in fairly large villages, the houses of which are built on platforms several feet above the ground. The houses are reached by means of a ladder, which is often the notched trunk of a tree. The houses themselves are comfortable, substantially built, with good roofs. Men, women and children, apparently, all live together in the same room, but there are partitions for the married people. They use bamboo but not entirely, rather wood is the main material in house construction. The structure is raised on wooden pillars. The floor and walls are made of either wooden planks or bamboo depended mainly on the economic condition of the people. As an ongoing tradition, the Tai houses generally face towards the southern direction. Generally, the house has two doors - one at the southern side (the main door) and the other at the western side. Each chambers of the house is provided with different names according to their purpose. The floor which is at the front of the house facing the south directly, is called by the Tai people as 'Chan'.

Festivals of Khamti people

The main festival of the Khamti people is Sangken festival. It is the Khamti New Year and is celebrated on 14th April. It is celebrated by all the religions and tribes together. On this day, after the ceremonial bath the images of Buddha are taken out for procession along with drums and music. People splash water on each other. This may seem similar to 'Holi' festival celebrated in other parts of the country; however no colour is used here. This festival is celebrated for three days and people make and gorge on sweets and other edibles on these days. Afterwards people exchange gifts among themselves. They also celebrate *Buddha Purnima*, because they are mainly Buddhist. On the occasion of *Buddha Purnima*, they celebrate the birthday of Gautama Buddha like a festival.

Marriage system of Tai Khamtis

The marriage ceremony of the tribe called "*Lap Thop Magla*" in their own language. Their marriage ceremony is unique in nature. They support monogamy marriages rather than Polygamy marriages.

Traditional Beliefs

The Khamti beliefs that they live in a world inhabited not only by human beings but by spirit and gods of various kind. The world of spirit is thousands types and is larger than the human world (Nang Sulina Chautang).

Social and Economic Activities of Tai khamtis**Family Type of Tai khamtis**

Family type of the Tai-Khamtis mainly joint. They do not support the concept of nuclear family. This is around 50 to 60 percent of the total population are joint. Traditionally they believed that, joint family is the symbol of love and

unity among the individuals. A joint family can be easier to organize any activities such as agricultural and social ceremonies.

Education and Literacy Rate of Tai Khamtis

According to 2011 census there are 12,810 people found in Arunachal Pradesh and 1,106 found in Assam. Out of the total population the literacy rate of the tribe is 78.8 percent. The male literacy rate 82.2 percent and female literacy rate 63.9 percent. In ancient times they only concentrated on Tai studies and some of the places of the region focused on *Pali* language, but in recent years they give more importance on all other languages called English, Hindi etc.

Major Earnings Source of Tai Khamtis

Agriculture is the main source of earning of the Khamti people. 80 percent of the total population of Khamtis directly engaged in agriculture. Paddy cultivation is the main agro items of the tribe and used bullock to cultivate it. Tea cultivation, sugarcane etc. are some of the allied activities of agriculture of Tai Khamtis. They also grow various crops, mustard and potato etc. Their main food is rice and vegetable with occasional meat. They make a drink made of rice (rice beer) and drink as beverage.

Conclusion:-

In the above study we mainly focused on Tai Kamti people and their cultural and social activities. The khamti tribe has many contributions to the culture of Assam and North-East India. The culture and traditions of the tribe is unique in nature. They have distinct script, age old culture and tradition and the glorious history. Their social and cultural activities always have a great impact in the society of Kamtis as well as in the Assamese society. Their ethnic identities always have a great impact to the society of North-East India

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