



REVISITING THE ORIGIN OF THE HMARS THROUGH ORAL LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT:

Oral literature can be considered as a field of identity formation where it manifest collective ideas that are traditionally and culturally delimited to real life. The outcome of oral literature are sometimes related to folk songs, folk tales, literary anticipation. Therefore, the explanatory ideas or literary prediction may reflect the existence of human civilisation. The importance of oral literature lies in its ability to communicate cultural values, beliefs, and knowledge, about their history and their origin. The fact is that oral literature uphold value in the individual and their society, in all dimensions. Oral literature is also like an embodiment of collective ideas that enables us to learn more about human culture and the history of a community. It also provides a discourse on the important role played by folk songs and folk tales in the transmission and preservation of cultural history and identity of a particular community. The oral literature of the Hmars serve as an invaluable explanation of cultural narratives, contributing significant insights into the cultural heritage and their origin as well. This paper aims to study an in-depth understanding of the oral literature on revisiting to the origin of the Hmars.

Keywords: Oral literature, Folk songs, Folk tales, Origin, Hmar

INTRODUCTION:

The Hmars are one of the tribal community who have been living in the states of Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya. The identity of the Hmars was not well known before as published works relating to the Hmars were very less and limited. Like many other tribal group, the Hmars has no written historical records in the past as such and their origin, history and culture can only be constructed with the help of their rich oral

tradition, which have been handed down through words of mouth from generation to generation. The word 'Hmars' literary means 'North'. It is believed that they came to be known as 'Hmar' for they were living in the north of Lushai hills. If this is true, then the term 'Hmar' as a nomenclature, would be of a recent origin., another opinion holds that the term 'Hmar' is derived from the word 'Marh' or 'Mhar' or Tukbemsawm which means tying of ones hair in a knot on the nape. Tradition tells that the ancestors of the Hmars, Tukbemsawm tied his hair in a knot on his back, and since then, he and his progenies come to be known as the Hmars. Lal Dena, a Hmar historian, have stated, "whatever may be the truth; this much is clear to us that the term Hmar had not gained popularity when the Hmars first come into contact with the British"

ORIGIN OF THE HMARS: SINLUNG

The origin of the Hmar can be traced back to ancient times, rooted in their cultural practices, folk songs and folk tales and beliefs in the form of oral literature. Before the practice of publishing written documents, oral tradition played a crucial role in communication, knowledge transfer, and cultural expression within the Hmar communities. The Hmar did not have any written records before the advent of Christianity; hence the early history has to be gathered largely from the oral traditions which have been passed on through generations, and also the folk tales and songs which have been sung from past generations. (Thiek, 61) Oral tradition dates back to the origins of humanity, preceding the invention of writing. Information was transmitted orally from one generation to another. Even today, many cultures worldwide still rely on oral traditions as a means to convey knowledge and wisdom. (Martin, 2012)

Traditional songs, folk tales, poems and legends though it is unenviable to specify the exact location of their origin. According to the Hmar traditions, their ancient inhabitation of is called "Sinlung" meaning, a great stone cave and they believed that their origin begins from the cave. The Hmars forefathers claimed that they are Manmasi who came out from Sinlung and this tradition and civilization of Sinlung had been handed down from generation to generation through oral literature. The Hmar folk song singing the glories of Sinlung with joyous and respectful admiration have been narrated as the origin of the Hmars. The traditional Song goes as:

Kan siengna Sinlung ram hmingthang

Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai.

Chawngil ang kokir their Changsien

Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai

Which can be translated as

My famous motherland birthplace *Sinlung*,

Home of my own ancestors

Can it be recalled like Chawngil

Home of my own ancestors

The oral tradition of Sinlung has been supported by many writers who have written about the Mizo-Kuki-Chin community . L.H. Songate in his book "Hmar Chanchin" (History of Hmar) have supported the

Sinlung tradition and according to him, Hmars ancestors were the descendants of Manmasi. According to him the location of Sinlung is to be in the present Jaiting or Sinlung in south west China.

The Hmar tradition maintains that the original home of the Hmars is called “Sinlung”. Numerous songs and tales about this place have been handed down orally from generation to generation. However, the exact location of Sinlung is still open to debate. Several theories and views regarding the origin and location of Sinlung have been narrated by Hmar and Lushai scholars like (Songate, 1956), (Pudaite L, 1963), (Keivom L, 1982; 1990), (Darliensung, 1988), (Dena Lal, 2008), (Liangkhaia, 1976), among others. Varying theories given can be understood that Sinlung must be somewhere in South West China, possibly in the present *Tailing* or *Silung* of Yunan Province of today's China or it might have been derived from the Ch'in Dynasty of 221-207 B.C. From its name (sin- seal, close; lung stone, rock), it might have been a cave that was sealed with a huge stone. Another conception is that Sinlung was located at Aopatong in the border of Burma and China. The town was named after the chief Silung during the erection of the Great Wall of China. Or maybe it is the present Sinlung, located near the Yulung River in Szechuan Province of China.

Whatever the case may be the importance of the name Sinlung and its relation to the Hmar origin may be contradicted but the fact cannot be denied that this oral tradition has been passed down from generation to generation.

MIGRATION OF THE HMARS FROM SINLUNG:

Theories abound regarding why the Hmars left Sinlung is also many to describe as such. One view is that the Hmars left Sinlung in search of greener pastures, while another attribute it to the oppressive rule of the Chinese rulers and the Hmars' inability to repulse their enemies in Sinlung (Keivom, 1990, Dena, 2008). The Hmar fore fathers also claimed and narrated that the ancestral home of the Hmar is somewhere in central Asia or China. Some of the settlers in Sinlung home anticipate their consequent nomadic life and their inability to repel their enemies while they were in Sinlung. The Hmars migration from Sinlung in poem is sung as

*Khaw Sinlung-ah,
Kawt siel ang ka zawng suok a;
Mi le rel to tam a li,
Hiemi hrai a.*

The song can be translated as
Out of the city Sinlung
I jumped out like a siel (yak);
With Innumerable ancestors;
With the children of men

From the above poem it can be understood that the people were pushed out by an unbeatable power (I jumped out like a siel). A siel or yak jumps out of the pen only when closed or driven by a fierce force. It is not possible to give the exact time and date of deviation from Sinlung and the original route that was followed is uncertain till this date. However, traces have been found in poems and legends that they crossed the Himalayan mountain and this narration is supported by Hmar folk songs as:

“Tiena Ka chin lei,

Ka pa leileng Himalawi”,

The song can be translated as,

My ancient soil,

The soil of my grand father Himalaya

R, Pudaite assert that the name of the Himalayas was originally given by the moving tribes such as Hmars, Lushais. Biates and Kukis. In the Hmar languages or turning away from a hill or mountain is called Himalawi“. When the multitude of migrants came to the foot of the mountain, it was impossible to cross the mountains with women and children. The Hmars migrated from Sinlung through Himalayas and reached the Shan state around 8th century A.D. According to L.H. Songate their entry into Shan was not with strong opposition and they finally fought their way into it.

SETTLEMENT OF THE HMARS:

The Hmars tribes established their settlement in Shan state (Part of China) for generation with a prosperous life. After travelling for many days and months in great hardship and starvation, they finally entered the unoccupied fertile areas of Kolhai on Valley of Burma (now Myanmar). They established their settlement in the areas of Kabaw and chin wind valley of Burma. According to L.H. Songate after their entry in the kawphai Khapat in the kabaw valley of Burma (Myanmar) they made their habitation in the valley and lasted for about 200 years. According to Mizo historian, the exodus from Kawlphai Khampal (Burma) to Lushai Hills through Chin Hills was mainly due to a severe famine and the cruelty of the new chief of their village. Another reason narrated might be the search of better land but the exact time and date of this departure is not recorded, but some historians and writers believe and suggested that it would be probably in the early centuries of the Christian era. When the Hmars left Sinlung, it was probably considered as one of the successful waves of their migration from China towards the south some thousand years ago and it is believed that the Hmars might have been moving along with one of these waves towards the south, and eventually into India (Keivom, 1990).

At present, the Hmars are settled in the states of India Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura. In Manipur the Hmars resides in the southern part especially in the Churachandpur District and its adjoining areas. In Mizoram, they live mostly in the northern area, especially in the Aizawl District. In Assam, the Hmars live in the Cachar and North Cachar district (Dima Hasao). In Meghalaya, the Hmars live mostly in the Jowai District. In Tripura, the Hmars mostly live around Darchawi, a village in Mizoram-Tripura border. Whatever may be the chronological sequence of the Hmars’ journey from different parts of south east region, to India, revisiting all available indication appears to be depicting of their origin as the region we now know as China or the regions near or around it.

CONCLUSION:

Re-iterating the values in revisiting the oral literature on the origin of the Hmars many interesting facts and stories is unearthed through evaluation. The tribe was just a name to be heard of or composed for many writers but the study of the oral tradition reveals that their history are laid on some facts like any other tribe as

they have their own history and rich cultural heritage which are unique in their own many ways. As such the Hmar traditions are handed down from generation to generation and they are the sources of information for reconstruction of their history, identity and culture. Through the narration of their legends, folk songs, folk tales, poems with respect to the history of their origin, migration we can come to the conclusion that their main origin can be traced back from Sinlung. The Hmars though living in different parts of India at present have common features in their social, cultural, administrative system, economic and religious life.

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