

THE PAITE

A TRANSBORDER
TRIBE OF INDIA
AND BURMA

H. Kamkhenthang

Foreword by
B. K. ROY BURMAN

This book deals with a people who live in the Indo-Burma border areas. They are known variously as Kamhau, Sakte or Gwuite in the earlier records. They are also known as Paite or Tedim Chin.

The book highlights the structure of the Paite society by unfolding the invisible ties of kinship based on consanguinal, affinal and local membership in a corporate body called **inndongta**. This institution is a household council and it is universal in Paite society in an elaborate form though it is found in vestigial form among other Chin tribes. The author, as a participant of Paite culture, studies the rights, obligations and prerogatives held by members of the society by virtue of his membership in a particular household and also by occupying a particular and definite position in the kinship circle through the institution of **inndongta** as its focal point of study. The book shows vividly how the Paite households are socially, ritually, economically and structurally interrelated, knitted and dependent on one another through the mechanism of **inndongta** in woe and weal for their physical and spiritual survival.

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ISBN 81-7099-070-X

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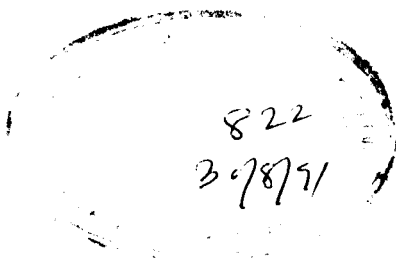
Foreword:
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MITTAL PUBLICATIONS
DELHI-110035 (INDIA)

954.166

KAM



000822

First Edition 1988

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ISBN 81-7099-070-X

Published by K. M. Mittal for MITTAL PUBLICATIONS,
4528/12, Jai Mata Market, Trinagar, DELHI-110035 (INDIA)
Phone: 7217151

Printed at Shree Hari Printers, DELHI-110007

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Historical Background

The Paite belong to the Northern Chin sub-group of Kuki-Chin (Grierson 1967: 59) locally known as Zoumi. The Chin people or the Zoumi literally meaning people of the hills, concentrate in the Chin State of Burma, Mizoram and Manipur in the main. According to the local traditions, the Chin people originated from a pit somewhere in central China. The Burmans are also supposed to have migrated from Western China to the headwaters of the Irrawadi as the Tibetans did (Clewell 1949: 194). The Burmese language is monosyllabic and it lacks 'r'—sound as in Paite or Tedim Chin (Henderson 1965). The absence of 'r'—sound in the speeches of Paite, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou tribes is a peculiar character that distinguishes them from other cognate tribes of Chin-Kuki-Mizo group (Zoumi) who also linguistically belong to the Kuki-Chin sub-group of Tibeto-Burman family. The cave or pit mentioned above is called *khuul* in Paite and it means literally a grave or a hole. It means the same thing as the Lushai and Hmar versions of *Chhinlung* and *sinlung* respectively. A small tribe known as Kom is in Manipur. This vocable, Kom, also means a pit in the Meitei language (Teba 1972: 1). The Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes claimed as a whole, their origin from a cave or pit and before their present tribal identities were established they claimed to have ever lived somewhere in modern China. The present Chin State of Burma

is considered to be the land where the present ethnic identities of most of these tribes seem to have crystallized. The Paite speaking people under the Gwite and the Sukte clans of the Paite claim their historical origin from Chimnuai, the Tahson or the Shunkla claim their origin from a rock at Shunkla, all in the present Chin State of Burma. The Hualngou and the Lushei also claimed that they originally sprang from the rocks at Seipui in Burma. Hence the name Lushai from Lusei which was derived from Seipui (Cf. McCall 1949: 19-20).

According to the myths these Chin people left China and moved southwards into Tibet. It is further said by Mr. Ngul Kho Pau (1970: 5) that the Chin people migrated southward as their population increased. He maintained that owing to exhaustion of land and natural resources migration took place from the vicinity of the cave in China towards Tibet. Owing to a fear complex as a consequence of internecine tribal wars and famines they moved away from Tibet and reached south. Some of them reached as far as Thailand. In the waves of migration from Tibet the Chin ancestors are stated to be the last migrants after the Shans and Karens. The Shans and Mons were already in Burma before the Chins. It is said that the Chin ancestors were the elder brothers of the Kachin People. In the course of their migration from Tibet the ancestors of the Chins moved away followed by the Kachins in quick succession. Along their path of migration the Chin cut banana stems. The cut ends of the plants threw new shoots quickly. The Kachins who followed the Chins saw the cut ends of banana stumps bearing long shoots. They deduced from these that their 'elder brothers' were quite ahead of them and hence they had a little hope and velleity to overtake them. Then they settled in a place where they are now, *i.e.* in the present Kachin State to the north-east of the Chin State of Burma. The Chins moved farther south in their pre-Chin stage and settled in the valley of the Irrawady in close contact with the Shans and Burmans. But their relationship with the Shans and Burmans was not cordial. Owing to oppressions by the Shans and Burman, the Chins migrated again northwards into the present Chin State of

Burma and consequently some of them proceeded to the north and north-east as far as India (Kamkhenthang 1975). The oral tradition of the mythological origin of the Chin people from a cave in Chins and their subsequent movements are dim vistas of myth. It is based on legendary stories of pre-Chin stage. We cannot be sure as to when the ancestors of the Chin left China and Tibet to enter Burma from what the legendary stories reveal. These groups of people did not certainly come as distinct socio-cultural units though historical linguistics, archaeology, and racial studies definitely indicate that the ancestors of these ethno-cultural groups did, indeed, come from the north. They cannot be identified with any particular group as we know them today (Cf. Lehman 1963: 11).

Origin of the Word Chin

There are different versions as to the origin of the word Chin. According to one version the term, Chin is a Burmese word derived from *khyang*. It means a basket in Burmese. It is derived from the old Burmese word *khyan*, meaning ally or comrade (Lehman 1963: 5). It is also supposed by some scholars that the word Chin came from a Burmese word *tagechin* which means 'dear friend'. It is a word signifying the friendliness of the Chin people to the Burmans (Siang Lian 1973). It is said that there is no single word Chin in the language of the Chin tribes. But a poetical expression for elder sibling is Chin (*cin*) in Paite language. Even if this has some bearing in some way, the people themselves popularly do not use the word Chin to mean a congery of their cognates. The Chin people themselves do not recognise the name Chin but call themselves Yo or Zo (Zou) in the north, Lai in the centre and Sho in the south, besides many other tribal names (Grierson 1967 : 55). These words are used as synonyms for the term, Chin by the speakers. According to another version the word, Chin is said to be derived from the Chinese word *jen*, meaning 'man'. The Chins in Burma call the Chinese *Sen* as the Burmese call them *jen*. Mr. Ngul Kho Pau (1970: 5-6) further said that the Shans and Mons asked the ancestors of the Chin about their identity when they first met. They

answered that they were *jens* which the Shans and the Mons pronounced as Chin. It is also said (Grierson 1967: 55) that the term *jen* is used by the Burmese to denote all the hill tribes and is equally applied to the Kachin.

The Term Kuki

The term Kuki is also given by outsiders to the group of Chin in India who migrated more northwardly and earlier than the Paite. The term has no meaning locally. The earlier groups of immigrants from Mizoram and Chin State to Assam and Manipur were known as Old Kukis. The term Old Kuki included Rangkhoh and Biete (clans of Hmar tribe) with their offshoots (Davis 1894). Das (1945: 19) included Aimol, Kolhen, Anal, Kom, Lamgang, Purum, Tikhup, Vaiphei and Hmar of Manipur and Hrangkhoh and Biete clans of Hmar in Cachar under Old Kuki. According to Davis the Old Kukis were pressed forward by the Thadou and Changsen from the present Mizoram into Cachar district of Assam where they were labelled as Kuki, a term quite unknown to them at first. In turn the Thadou, particularly the clans of Singson and Changsan were pushed out of Mizoram by the Lushais under the great Sailo chief, Lallula who established political supremacy in the northern Mizoram in 1810 (cf. McCall 1949: 35). About the same time the first chief of Sukte clan of the Paite named Khan Thuam and the Gwite chiefs drove the Thadou out of the Chinland into Manipur, except six Thadou villages (cf. Grierson 1957: 59). The appearance of the Thadou in Manipur and Assam made the earlier immigrants of the same ethnic origin bear the term 'Old Kuki'. Then the Thadou bore the term New Kuki to distinguish themselves from the former groups of immigrants. These terms give the chronology of migration of the Chin people into India upto the period of migration of the Thadou in the 18th and first part of 19th centuries.

Lehman (1963: 25) said that the expansion of tribal realms in the Palam-Haka area of the Chin State, strengthened, subsequently by renewed connections with Burmans who fought against Manipur, pushed the ancestral Lushai further into

Assam (Mizoram) in pre-Mizo stage. The New Kuki (Thadou) were pushed out of the Chin-Lushai country by their relatives in the 1700's and 1800's before the Thadou were identified as Kuki. This is the pre-Kuki stage of the Thadou. The population explosion, sometimes in the sixteenth century in the northern Chin State, might have been the cause of exodus of the so-called Old Kukis of Manipur and Assam. The first mention of the Old Kuki was as early as 1554 in the Manipur Chronicles (Shakespeare 1909: 373, cf. Dalton 1973: 44). These two dates of population explosion in the Northern Chin and the early mention of 'Kuki' coincide. Now it is clear that the Old Kukis came to Manipur in the 16th century and the Thadou (New Kuki) in the later part of 18th and the early part of 19th centuries. The Paite who came to Manipur only in the later part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries are too late chronologically to be included even in the New Kuki group. For example, Lungchin (the village of my study) was established as recently as 1910. The Zou tribe reached Manipur earlier than the Paite but later than the Thadou. The Zou were pushed northwardly, as a matter of avenger, by the Falam Chin after the Zou under Manlun clan attacked Phuaizang village of the Paite near Tedim.

'Kuki' is a rejected term of nomenclature as it is not acceptable to the people themselves. Zou, Hmar and Paite were too late to arrive in the region to accept and to be included under the terms either Old Kuki or New Kuki although all these three also belong to the same ethnic group. The New Kuki includes a single tribe called Thadou who are found in Cachar, Nagaland and Manipur (Das 1945: 19). Of the 21 clans of Hmar tribe (Pudaite 1963: 32) only two clans were included in the Old Kuki group in the anthropological literature. Other clans of the Hmar do not accept the term. They are more prone to accept Mizo than Kuki. Kuki is a vague term. The tribes who are supposed to be Kuki never call themselves by that name. They regard it as a name contemptuously used by the plainsmen (Barkataki 1964: 71). Many so-called Kuki tribes in Manipur rather resent to be labelled as Kuki. The non-Thadou groups think that it is a term appropriate for the Thadou for their identification in

relation to outside world. However, consistency in the use of the term *Kuki* is also not maintained among the Thadou themselves. The Thadou prefer to be known at different levels either as Thadou or *Kuki*. At political level the Thadou are *Kuki*. The All India Radio has Thadou programme at Imphal and *Kuki* programme at Kohima station in Thadou language. The so-called *Kuki* rebellion of 1917-19 was known to the Paite as *Zougal*, a war waged by the Zou tribe. Gautam (1973: 14) hesitated to call this insurgence as *Kuki* rebellion as he found it to be fought by the Thadou only. He is inclined to call it 'Thadou Rebellion' instead of calling it a *Kuki* one as it is not known outside that the Zou also fought for it in collusion with the Thadou. It may, however, be noted that the Thadou and the Zou are cognate ethnic units stemming from the Chin group.

The Thadou initially accepted the nomenclature '*Kuki*' for their ethnic identification. They, however, wanted to include other Chin tribes who came to Manipur after them in the fold of *Kuki*. At the same time the Thadou held an ambivalent attitude towards the Paite while inviting them to join them. Several meetings of the Non-Naga or Chin tribes of Manipur had been called in the name of and by the *Kuki* National Assembly in 1940's. But there had never been a consensus over the term '*Kuki*' as the Paite and other tribes could not accept it at all. The meetings ended in a fiasco instead of linking up the hill people of Manipur. The Thadou group regarded themselves as '*Kuki* proper' as the term was first applied to them as '*New Kuki*' and the Paite an '*Pseudo-Kuki*' or '*Half-Kuki*' as they are late comers in Manipur. Besides these, many other controversies like language, its foreign origin and its meaninglessness and absurdity in local view repelled the Paite from identifying themselves as *Kuki*. To be included within the *Kuki* group would mean to the Paite, absorption of the group into Thadou and loss of identity. As such a *Khuul* union was formed as a political front embracing the Chin tribes of Manipur who did not like to be merged with the *Kuki*. This *khuul* recalls the mythological cave or hole in China mentioned earlier.

Probable Origin of the Term Paite

Paite is the tribal name of the people under study on the Indian side of the Indo-Burma border. The meaning of the term is currently interpreted to denote their migratory habit. It means people on the move (cf. Goswami and Kamkhen-thang 1972: 22; Roy 1973: 190). The term 'Tedim Chin' came in vogue sometimes after the Pan Britanica of 1892. The term Paite and originally Paithe, in Lushai version, was given by the Hualngo and Lushai people with a slantingly degradatory sense to designate this Tedim Chin people as they apply the term Pawi to the Haks and Falam Chins. Lushai people were in the habit of giving names to ethno-cultural groups according to their choice. The term was used to include all the Paite (non-'r' group) speaking population living between the Lushai and Falam Chins. Grierson (1967: 82) wrote the probable origin of the term Paite in this way:

The Lushais called all the hill tribes who wear their hair in a knot upon the top of the head Poi or Pai. Most of the central and southern Chin tribes tie their hair up in this way. A thousand individuals in the north Lushai Hills (Mizoram) have been returned as speaking Paite. This word is simply the plural of Pai or Poi mentioned above, and Paite should accordingly be supposed to be a central Chin dialect.

Grierson adds that the Zahau and Wheno (Hualngo) at one time were also known as Poite and Paite. He goes on to say that "They include the two powerful communities of Zahau and Wheno which were formerly known as Pois, Poite and Paite" (Grierson: 107). The Punjabis of India are also denoted by the Lushai as 'Vai Pawi' meaning Indian Pawi because of the hair knot on the top of the head like the southern Chins of Burma (Barkatoki 1969: 109) whom the Burmans call *Baungshe* for the same reason. The term Lakher was also a Lushai version for the people who call themselves Mara (Parry 1932:1). Lakher means 'spinning cotton' in Lushai language.

For a long time the term Paite was not popularly accepted internally as a group identity in India by the people themselves, except in Lushai area. Till the attainment of Indian Independence and separation of Burma from India the people opted

to be known by the clan names of their political overlords within their local groups (Goswami and Kamkhenthang 1975: 22). The different clans of the Paite under the Gwite chieftainship were invariably known as Vuite (Lushai version for Gwite) or Gwite or Paite (Cf. Shakespear 1912: 142) and Sukte. Similarly members of the same clans and any other clans of the identical ethnic origin under the Sukte chiefs were also referred to as Sukte after the name of the clan of their political overlord in Burma. Paite (pronounced as Paihte) is a term used in India whereas Tedim Chin is the term used in Burma for the same people after Independence from the British. The same people happens to be known by two different names in two countries now. A member of a group is Paite so long as he or she is within the Indian territory and he or she is again Tedim Chin as soon as he or she is in Burma. In short Paite implies Indian citizenship and Tedim Chin implies Burmese citizenship. The term Paite or Paihte is not acceptable popularly in Burma as the term Tedim Chin is also not popularly acceptable in Indian side by the people for whom it was meant. As the name Paihte was given by the R-group of Chin 'people like Lushai, Hualngo, Pawi the term was initially accepted by the Paite in Lushai areas only. It takes time to get acceptance in areas outside Lushai influence. In Manipur also the term Paite did not get popular acceptance among the Paites themselves initially while they were identifying themselves with the clan of their political overlords. Similarly the term Chin became more popular in areas of Burmese influence. Hence Tedim Chin in Burma and Paite in India cropped up as names of the same community. Even personal name of a ruling chief happened to be used as group identity, e.g., people under Kamhau the great, the Sukte chief were generally identified as Kamhau who began to rule c. 1848 (See Grierson 1967: 72). Woodthorpe (1873: 71) showed the interchangeability of the terms Paite and Sukte during the course of Lushai expedition in 1871-72. He wrote, "The Lushai with whom we became acquainted during our journeys, belonged to three different tribes, the Lushais, Paitēs or Sokte (Sukte) and Pois." Sukte and Gwite were synonymous for Paite or Tedim Chin. Now

Paite and Tedim Chin are synonymous. The ruling clans before the British came were the Sukte and the Gwite. These two chiefly clans of the Paite were affines. The Gwite were the wife-givers and the Sukte were the wife-takers. The Gwite ruled in area north of the Sukte and the Sukte ruled in area south of the Gwite. Relation of the Paite with the Meitei was historically bitter and hostile till a group of Paite came to settle in Manipur in 1870 under the leadership of Sumkam, the Gwite Chief (Shakespeare 1912: 143). They often attacked Manipuri villages. "The tribe had remained comparatively quiet with little of the aggressiveness which they had shown... in January 1883" (Singh 1969: 173). There are confusions after confusions as to the identity of this people. Grierson himself treated the groups under Sukte and Paite as separate and different people and could not get linguistic samples for Sukte while he got for Paite. Again he could not estimate the probable population of the Paite while he could do so for the Sukte. The same confusion may occur and continue when one hears Paite and Tedim Chin. Throughout the book I am using the term Paite freely to mean both the Paite of India and the Tedim Chin of India who are living in the Indo-Burma border areas.

Though the term Paite had been in use since a long time, as mentioned above, it has been officially accepted in record by the people themselves in Manipur only in 1948 with the formation of the Paite National Council. The official adoption of the name and its organisation was necessitated by a heavy pressure to include the Paite people under either Kuki or Lushai (Mizo) in India. This organisation has been a political organ of the Paite since then. It had briskly pressed the Governments of Assam and India to recognise Paite as a scheduled tribe of India and its inclusion in the Scheduled list of the constitution of India (Kamkhenthang: 1975) to get the benefits in their own right of the safeguards provided in the constitution (Bose 1968). The Government of India have since (1956) included the Paite as one of the Scheduled tribes of the country.

Affiliation of a tribe to a sub-nation within a nation is a matter of group choice under conditions of local politics.

The Paite as a whole can either be Mizo or Chin or Kuki according to the group feeling and group interactions. Some of the Paite now in Mizoram and Mizo just as they are Chin in Chin State of Burma. The Paite of Burma think that they are neither Mizo nor Kuki. The Paite of Manipur do not like to be labelled as Kuki partly because there is no Paite speaker in the Kuki group and for some other reasons as mentioned above. The Paite feel that the Thadou are Kuki proper. They also feel that they are not politically Mizo under different political umbrella, though the literal meaning of the term 'Mizo' is applicable to them ethnologically and topologically. According to Paite attitude any Lushai speaker is a Lushai. The Mizo or Lushai speakers do not count at personal level or more at political level the language of Hmar and Paite, except their own Lushai language as the Mizo language. This have a repulsive effect on the Paite and Hmar of Manipur. The Paite are more inclined to be identified with their cognates, the Tedim Chin, than with Mizo or Kuki. They prefer a generic term Zoumi as a group identity of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes either to the term Chin or Kuki or Mizo. This inclination is based on linguistic oneness and kinship based on clanship apart from socio-cultural affinities. The position of the Paite in Chin-Kuki Mizo world is of the nature described above. Variation in territorial and local political affiliations keep the different tribes under the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group further and further apart while acknowledging their ethnicity and linguistic affinity.

Zoumi

The so-called Chin-Kuki-Mizo people do not have a common generic name by which they may be identified as the Nagas do by a single generic name. As stated earlier, it is a matter of popular acceptance to be either Chin or Kuki or Mizo or even Zoumi. Uptil now all the people under the great name of Chin-Kuki-Mizo do not like to be termed uniformly as either Chin or Kuki or Mizo. Loyalty is divided into Chin, Kuki and Mizo. As such Chin is more or less retained and used in Burma, Mizo in Mizoram. Kuki has been putting

to various tests for acceptance without success in Manipur. The Thadou and speakers of Thadou are accepting the term Kuki in Manipur. None of the terms like Chin, Mizo and Kuki binds the people together as the term Naga can bind all the members and tribes of the Naga. As a result of it, the communities under the Chin-Kuki group feel the need of having a commonly accepted nomenclature. Various associations like student body, social groups, religious bodies etc. feel the inconveniences of not having a commonly accepted nomenclature for them by which they can be identified them collectively while retaining their tribal identities. They are grouping for a common name. We have earlier discussed that the terms like Chin, Kuki are at the threshold of rejection. These terms were not born within but were imposed on the people by outsiders. Hence they are not acceptable for their group identities. Mizo is also now taken to mean the Lushai speakers in the Paite point of view to which the Paite of India and of Burma do not subscribe the term Mizo for their generic name. As a result of non-accepting the generic terms like Kuki, Chin and Mizo, a dormant term which remained buried in the socio-cultural milieu is gaining momentum among the Paite of India and of Burma as well as among the cognate tribes like Vaiphei, Zou, Gangte etc. as their collective identity. However, the tribes belonging to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group know that they belong to the same stock of people. The only problem is that there is not a single term commonly accepted for their nomenclature. Hence a poet sung that they belong to one set of people as in the following couplet:

*Ei teng khawlkhawm a tuam, omlou,
 Vannuai chiteng khuul a piang;
 Tuunsung khat a piang hi ngeingei,
 Tuunsung khat a piang hi ngeingei,
 Suahpih sanggam,
 Laizom khat hi ngeingei hang e.*

[We, people who are in aggregation are of one stock,
 Every one of us under the sun is born of a cave (khuul);
 And born of the same mother.

Being born of the same mother,
 We are all born together as siblings;
 We are really descendants of the same siblings].

Theme of the Book

The theme of this book is social structure of the Paite. Household council, called hereinafter, *inndongta*, has been selected for the topic of discussion in order to have a full view of the Paite social structure. In order to understand the social structure of Paite community it is a *sine qua non* to know the working system of the corporate *inndongta* institution. All activities of Paite socio-cultural life hinge on the *inndongta*. It is the hub of Paite social structure. All activities operate through and revolve around the *inndongta*. For understanding of a social structure, anthropologists select models of either descent or filiation as the focal point of their studies. They delve deep into the marriage or clan system and lucubrate the materials to fit into the social structure by putting the parts together. Paite society is unique and distinct from the majority of the anthropologically known societies in *having aga mous* marriage. Descent alone does not give full understanding of the social structure. Affinity alone also cannot give full view of the Paite social structure. Each two types of anthropologists—descent theory anthropologists (Fortes, Gluckman, Goody) and alliance theory anthropologists (Levi-Strauss, Leech, Needham) advocate their theories to determine social structural system. The descent group and alliance group together with residential groupings work together through the mechanism of *inndongta*. It is for this reason I choose the corporate *inndongta* for the focal point in order to understand the social structure of the Paite of the Indo-Burma border areas. *Inndongta* is a by-product of descent, and affinal relations backed and hemmed in by local group members of a village. All the recognizable categories of persons in relationship of a man are represented in the *inndongta*. There are representatives of one's descent group, affines, matrilineal kin and outsiders. Traditional values and norms attached to the *inndongta* have been still strongly operating as motivating factors responsible for arranging activities from birth through marriage to death among them living in a village as well as in big cities like Rangoon and Imphal.

It has been observed that a household is an economic

and social unit. A household is a universal unit. So is the *inndongta* in Paite society. The household and its *inndongta* always associate each other and an object has its shadow. Under the ecological environments the Paite live in the Indo-Burma border areas, a Burmese type of *taungya* cultivation is the sole means of livelihood in the hilly terrains. A household is treated individually as an economic unit. It is such a unit of a household to which a right to exploit a forest area for jhuming is given (Cf. Goswami & Kamkhenthang 1974: 3). Different families living in the same household, under the same roof and sharing the same hearth and a barn are not given different and individual rights of jhuming area. All members of the same household farm on the same plot of jhuming land. A household is primarily responsible for managing its affairs and agricultural pursuit. The mode of livelihood is an exercise between the ecological environment on the one hand and the human beings on the other. Households having better equipment have better adaptation to the environmental pressure. This process in quest of food is an arduous one. Procurement of sufficient food and sound health are not always assured in this uncertain world. Difficulties and uncertainties loom large for a household. The *inndongta* is multi-faceted. It is the projections of social, economic and cultural aspects of the people in response to the needs of the community. The environment, if not exploited, will not by itself come to the relief of the needy people. On the other hand, all the Paite villages in the Indo-Burma border areas are marked by the absence of wage labour. It is the members of the kin group or the village who alone can come to the rescue of the needy households in respect of supplying the extra labour that is demanded during the peak period of jhuming cycle and during various civil and ritual occasions. To get necessary assistance from different sets of relatives each household arranges to tag in several households and get them affiliated to it in a corporate *inndongta* organisation. Households assume certain responsibilities towards one another to back up one another. So each household has this *inndongta* organisation consisting of several households at its back. The same household may be affiliated to several

households on different capacities to exchange help, meat and drink. The position, a household shall hold in the *inndongta*, is structurally determined by kinship position. How we shall pass on to the formation of the *inndongta* and other complicacies in order to see the structural arrangement of persons in the kinship universe.