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A SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE
KUKI-LUSHAI TRIBES :

ON THE
NORTH-EAST FRONTIER
(DISTRICTS CACHAR, SYLHET, NÁGA HILLS, ETC., AND THE
NORTH CACHAR HILLS),

WITH
AN OUTLINE GRAMMAR ✓

OF THE
RANGKHOL-LUSHAI LANGUAGE

AND
A Comparison of Lushai with other Dialects.

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A NOTE

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PREFACE TO ACCOUNT OF THE TRIBES.

IN this short history of the people, commonly grouped under the head of "Kuki," the writer has classified the different sects under two main heads, though four tribes are named:—

- (a) Rângkhôl, co-tribe Bêtê, sub-tribes Sakajaib, Liang-rong, &c.
- (b) Jansen, co-tribe Tâdôi, sub-tribes Kôtâng, Slûk, &c.

The writer's authority for this grouping is briefly this:—The Rângkhôls and their co-tribe and sub-tribes have so much in common, both in language, manners, customs, and system of internal government, as to render it absolutely necessary to take them together. The Jansen's co-tribe and sub-tribes in the same manner are shown to be closely connected.

It then only remains to show cause for the separation of the two main tribes, and why they should not be grouped under one common name. The following conclusive reasons have been given in the "Account of the tribes." First, the Jansens are ruled over by hereditary Râjas, with well-defined rights, whose powers are despotic, and who cannot even intermarry with commoners, while the Rângkhôls have a self-government, the post of "headman," "galim," not being hereditary, and the said "headman" being merely the spokesman of the community. Secondly, distinction in language. Thirdly, distinct social laws and customs.

The official terms "old" and "new" Kuki should not be used. The term "Kuki" itself is too well established to be given up, but the writer considers that a far more appropriate title might be assigned the two tribes by designating the one "Rângkhôl (Kuki) Lushai," and the other "Jansen (Kuki) Lushai." The old term "Kuki" would be thus retained, and at the same time a large race of people properly classified for ethnological purposes.

Researches undertaken on the Burmese watershed would greatly facilitate the classifying and grouping of tribes of whose history (except within comparatively recent years) we are entirely ignorant.

An almost boundless field for ethnological research exists on both the Burma and Assam frontiers, and it is to be hoped that each Government officer or private individual, whose opportunities are such as to enable him to ascertain anything of the history, manners, or customs of any particular tribe, will endeavour to note at once the principal linguistic characteristics. By this means, in the course of a few years, tribes now more or less distinct will be traced back to the parent stock and satisfactorily classified.

The various Kuki laws treating on marriage, rights of succession, &c., will, the writer trusts, prove of value to officials in frontier districts, who are often called upon to decide cases in which the tribal customary procedure can be the only guide to a correct decision. In this short account, the writer has only attempted to note the *principal* manners and customs of the tribes. In the course of time, from contact with outsiders, old manners and customs, and even the language, will slowly but surely change, and means by which connecting links between tribes can be established will be lost for ever. It is while the customs handed down from father to son are still intact that a history, however brief, is of value.

Subsequent to the writing of the above, the compiler joined the Burma Commission, and is at present posted on the frontier north of Bhamo (the Mogaong sub-division). Here he has been thrown in contact with Kachyens, Shans, and other tribes bordering the Irrawaddy Valley, but has not seen enough of them to speak with any great certainty on their manners and customs. A few remarks on the people themselves and their movements may, however, be of interest in connection with this work. On the North-East Frontier of India (Assam) it is difficult to trace any of the tribes back to remote date, the people having been much broken up, and, in addition, the country through which the exodus which brought them to the borders took place almost unknown.

The most that can be done is to note manners, customs, modes of internal village government, &c., and to draw up vocabularies and outline grammars while the dialects are still comparatively pure, trusting that further investigation and research on the Burmese borders will produce links enabling the

tribes to be traced back to the parent stock. While writing on the Lushais and Kukis, it has been pointed out that some tribes are gradually forcing others from beyond our north-east frontier (India) into Assam, and it is of great interest to note that in Burma the very same thing is taking place on our Yunan-Chinese Frontier.

Within the last year, for example, large numbers of Shans have retreated from Yunan-China territory and settled about Bhamo.

These people speak a different dialect and are more or less distinct from the Shans in the Shan States east of Mandalay. They are temporarily settled about Bhamo, where, under our rule, they are not harassed, and are in many ways useful to Government. They are a fine, manly-looking race. It is possible that these people will settle permanently in the plains; but had the exodus from Chinese territory taken place during the Burmese rule, it is highly probable that, in preference to placing themselves under that rule, they would have crossed the Irrawaddy, and settled in the hills to the west, the watershed of Burma and Assam.

To make room for them, some of the Kachyen and other tribes (Kukis, Lushais) would have had to move forward westward (that they could successfully have opposed the occupation is not at all likely) pressing forward in their turn others, until the north-east frontier was reached. In other words, on the Burma side of the watershed is to this day seen the commencement of movements which take effect on the Assam frontier years later.

The Burma frontier north of Bhamo, bordering China eastwards and the Patkoi range and Singpho country north, is a most interesting field for ethnological research. The Kachyens bordering the plains to the west of the Irrawaddy bear a great resemblance in many ways to the Nágas, Lushais (Kukis), &c. Their worship is much the same and general mode of life quite in keeping with what is seen on the Assam frontier.

They are not Buddhists like most of the Shans and some Singphos and Kamptis.

This term "Singpho," or "Singphaw," it is stated, is used by some of the Kachyens as their tribal designation, and it is therefore likely that the people commonly spoken of by that name should be mentioned by some other term.

Another tribe living in the plains north of Bhamo may be said to have been more or less recently formed. These people, called "Shans," and so calling themselves, though they occasionally use the term "Phoong," have a different language from the Shans proper and the Burmese, though in manners, dress, and belief they are nearly allied to the latter. They might be described as Shan-Burmese. They occupy a number of the villages about the great plains, thirty miles north of Bhamo, near Magaong and the Endawgjee, or Big Lake.

All these tribes, in common with the Burmese themselves, are of Mongolian origin. The latter, when leaving the northern valleys and settling in the plains of Burma, had much the same species of worship as now prevails among Kachyens, Nágas, Lushais, &c. The date of the introduction of the Buddhist faith into China and Burma may aid considerably in fixing approximately the age *before* which the numerous Mongolian tribes now occupying the vast watershed of the Brahmaputra and the Irrawaddy, first crossed over from China.

From Burmese annals (Boodha Gautha) it would appear that the faith was introduced about the end of the fourth century of our era.

From Chinese annals it would seem that the doctrines were propagated in some parts of that empire in the middle of the first century of our era. At any rate, during the 11th and 12th centuries the religion as regards Burma had reached a great degree of splendour. It is, therefore, fair to presume that eight or ten centuries ago the doctrines of the faith were firmly rooted throughout Burma and China. Subsequent to the establishment of this faith in the two countries it is doubtful whether any tribe, living between the two, would remain long without embracing the new doctrine, in the same manner that the hill people, brought frequently and constantly into contact with the plains of India, invariably embrace some form of Hinduism. We have examples of this in the Shans and others lying between Burma and China, nearly all, if not all, being Buddhists. To the westward, however, between Burma and Assam, the tribes, with the exception of some Singphos (to the north-west) and the Kamtis, are not Buddhist.

From this it may, perhaps, be inferred that the tribes occupying the watershed crossed from China or east of the Irrawaddy previous to the introduction of the Buddhist doctrines, that is to say, more than eight or ten centuries ago. It will probably be argued that the mere fact of crossing from east

to west did not exempt a tribe from the influence of the faith, but this can be explained by the nature of the country. East of the Irrawaddy caravan routes have been established with China, &c., from time immemorial, and consequently influence through traders would constantly be brought to bear on tribes, submontane and others.

On the other hand, once settled in the hills to the west of the Irrawaddy, caravans would not visit them, and their intercourse with the plains would be limited to an occasional cold season trip. The Kachyens, for example, do not have much intercourse with the plains, though bordering Burma, and they are not Buddhists, yet some Singphos and the Kamptis living further north, and at present quite out of the influence of the Burmese, profess the faith. This would point to the fact that the Singphos crossed over at a more recent date and subsequent to the introduction of the Buddhist faith; there being no one tribe immediately about them now from whom they could have acquired the doctrines. Briefly, it appears probable that any tribe lying between Burma and China subsequent to the spread of the Buddhist faith would very soon adopt it, and that the fact of certain tribes not having adopted it would point to the exodus having taken place prior to eight or ten centuries back.

In matters of this kind, where there are little or no data to go on, any writer's opinion is open to argument, but still it is only by the writings of persons who have become acquainted with some of the tribes that any ethnological information can be collected. The writer of this has, in addition to the present work, brought out a Nāga Grammar and an account of that people, and, in addition, an Historical Account of the Kacharis a race formerly ruling Assam. In Burma, he trusts, to be able to gather valuable information regarding Shans and Kachyens.

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