

# **The Havi Tangsas of Tirap Valley : A Historical Study of their Origin and Migration**

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Changlang district the abode of Tangsa, Tutsa, Singpho and a host of tribal communities is located in south-eastern corner between the latitude 26° 40' N - 27° 40' N and longitude 95° 11' E - 97° E of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> The district shares international boundary with Myanmar (Brahmadash) in the east, Lohit and Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh in the north and south respectively. To the north-west of Changlang lies plains of Assam.<sup>2</sup> The area was once ruled by Raja Bhagdutta of Pragjyotishpur.<sup>3</sup> This region is also referred as Sri Lohit and Mong-Kula by the Tai Ahom chronicles.<sup>4</sup> At present the district comprises of 12 circles viz. Changlang, Khimiyong, Namtok, Nampong, Niao, Kharsang, Vijoyagar, Bordumas, and Yatdam.<sup>5</sup> Total population of the district was recorded as 95530 persons (1991) and the total area of the district is stated to be 4662 sq.km.<sup>6</sup> The district is largely in the Patkai mountain ranges with the altitude of 200-1800 metres from the msl. The average annual rainfall is above 2000 m.m. The minimum and maximum temperature ranges between 8.6 C° to 31 C°. Besides the rugged mountainous tract there is a narrow strip of plains watered by Nao Dihing, Buri Dihing and other tributaries of Brahmaputra river. Tirap river which originates in the Tirap district, enters in Changlang area in Khimiyong circle and finally moves towards plains of Assam to effect junction with Brahmaputra river. The availability of numerous passes (*duars*) in Patkai hills have rendered this region strategically and economically every important. The great strategic highway passing from Assam plains via Pangsao Pass to Myanmar and South-East Asia have facilitated the expansion and promotion of Indian culture in South-East Asian region.<sup>8</sup> In the Mahabharata and post-Mahabharata period large number of people (Hindus and the Buddhists) migrated to South-East Asian countries. Similarly people from South-east Asian region migrated towards India after 600 AD and this migration to India continued upto the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> Small scale such migration is still continuing in the border areas. Thus the close proximity to South-east Asia and large scale migration to and from SE-Asia have considerably influenced the socio-cultural life of the people of east Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>10</sup>

Due to socio-economic and political crises in the South-east Asian region large number of Tangsa clans migrated to the Tirap valley. The migration of Tangsa clans started after 1200 AD and continued upto 1947 and in certain cases even afterwards. Yong-kuk, Tikhak, Nokja Thamlai, Longchang, Nuklom, Jungli, Nossang, Ronrang, Havi, and several other group of the Tangsa Tribe moved towards Tirap valley by using Pangsao Pass. Today Tirap valley is an abode of Tangsas. In this paper an attempt is being made to study the origin and migration of the Havi Tangsas, and some aspects of their socio-cultural and political history. This paper is largely based on oral historical literature collected from Havi Tangsa villages located in the interior areas of Khimyong circles on India-Myanmar border.<sup>11</sup>

The Havis also referred as Hawat constitute an important sub tribe of the Tangsas. At present there are five Havi villages in Changlang district, namely Tongthung Havi, Sunkho Havi, Jongji Havi, New Jongji Havi and Namchik Havi. The last one is located in the plains of Nao Dihing river whereas the other four villages are located on the Patkai Hills in Khimyong circle of the district. The total population of this clan in the district is approximately around 1000 (according to the Census of 1971 population of this clan was 743 persons). A section of the Havis have migrated from Khimyong circle and they have settled a new village called Namchik Havi in Kharsang circle of the district in the recent past.<sup>12</sup> According to Havi tradition the early man originated at Tekhong Tongrang, the cradle of human civilization, located somewhere in the east where the sun rises on the earth. In the beginning the human beings and animals lived together, used common language, shared same food, shelter and even co-habited with each other. The Lord Rang-Frah descended from heaven and through his messenger in the guise of a bird announced that those who would get dagger from Lord would live separately and they will be called as human being. Thus with the help of dagger (Yantung) people constructed houses, and cultivated land. But in absence of fire, life was quite difficult. Fortunately one day a bear succeeded in inventing the fire. The bear took out a dry wooden object, and a rope of bomboocane and started churning the wooden object by putting it on a wooden log. This ignited fire, and everyone wanted to take it to their home. But, the bear who invented the fire refused to share it with human beings and climbed on the top of a big tree. The people ordered small insects to climb the trees and bite the bear in such a way that animal gets disturbed and the pot full of fire fall down on earth. But these insects when they reached

at the top were eaten by the bear. Later on smallest variety of poisonous ants were sent up to bite the bear. This time the ants entered secretly in the nose, ear, eyes and other organs and the bear was bitten so badly that it started crying and jumping. In this situation the pot containing fire fell down on the earth and human beings readily took it away and shared among themselves. Thus clearing of jhoom field and jungle became easier with discovery of fire. The animals were deprived from possessing fire and hence they did not develop at par with human beings. Subsequently Lord Rang-Frah gave seeds of rice, kochu (arum), bankhe (topoica), ginger, chillies and taught them the science of cultivation and technique to improve fertility of the soil. Thus human civilization developed.

However after several hundred years the people deviated from the path of honesty, truth and righteousness and they started demonstrating hatred, anger, and disrespect to the elders and the poor. All these developments invited displeasure of Lord Rang-Frah. Once again in his new incarnation Lord descended on the earth by wearing a coat of dung of pigs, animals and ashes with long hairs on the head just like Lord Shiva. He wore earthworm in the left ear and paddy pods in the right ear. The God desired to stay with people to find out that whether the people are following the path of truth, honesty, and righteousness as shown by him to them. Thus to test the level of love, affection, respect and concern for each other and also the virtuous qualities of human beings on earth. Lord descended from heaven and desired to stay with the people. The Lord Rang-Frah requested one and all but everyone turned down his request for shelter and food. Finally a boy and a girl who were orphaned children, but were quite honest and strict adherents of the philosophy of Lord Rang-Frah. They provided food and shelter to God. Subsequently Lord caused destruction of the human civilization by orphaned boy and girl. The Lord commanded them to live together for revival and recreation of human civilisation. Thus through their union human civilization was recreated on the earth.

The epicenter of human civilization as per Havi tradition was Tekhong Tongrang, located in east where the sun rises on the earth.<sup>13</sup> Scholars have opined that Tekhong Tongrang is a place located somewhere in the Upper Burma.<sup>14</sup> But in absence of any concrete evidence, it is difficult to exactly locate the early home of the Havi Tangsas. According to people of Jongji Havi the Muklom Tangsas and the Havis originated at Tekhong Tongrang which is also referred as Longphok Yanrock. In due course of time Havis and Muklom got separated and

migrated towards north-west by taking different routes. The Mukloms migrated from Longphok Yanrock in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century whereas the Havi Tangsas moved into Tirap Valley by crossing Rakang Kan in 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

### **Migration from Tekhong Tongrang**

Due to scarcity of cultivable land, overpopulation and the armed conflict between the varying tribes of South-east Asian region, the Havi Tangsas also started migrating in different directions in search of a safe and secure country, having plenty of cultivable land, water, fishing ponds and other sources of livelihood. A group of Havi people left Tekhong Tongrang, arrived at Thamkhok, (in Myanmar) located in the north-west of Tekhong Tongrang. This batch of Havi Tangsa migrants lived at Thamkhok for several hundred years. When population grew rapidly in this place, Havis once again moved in the western direction, crossed Patkoi hills in the 18th century and settled a new village called Wahok. After 300 years of their stay in Wahok the size of Havi population increased and people got divided into three groups. From Wahok Havis came down from hills and settled in a village called Rakang. Subsequently, a group of Havi people from Rakang advanced further and settled a village called Sunkho Havi. Another batch of migrants from Rakang settled a new village called Tongtung Havi on the South of Tirap river and opposite to Phungsa and Changra villages controlled by Tutsas. A third group of Havi people from Rakang, moved towards Muklom area and settled in a village called Jongji Havi near Longshang village of Mukhloms. Thus most of the people from Rakang migrated and hence this village got depopulated somewhere in 1900. Today no one lives there, on the site of erstwhile Rakang village which facilitated the migration of Havis in the Tirap valley.

During the course of migration the Havi Tangsas quarreled with Juglis of Watchok (Burma) over a petty issue. Once the Juglis of this village reared buffaloes jointly with the Havis. The Juglis sold some of the buffaloes without involving the Havis. After that a group of slaves was sold by the Juglis without taking consent of the Havis. Consequently, the relationship between the two clans deteriorated. The Havis attacked Watchok village of the Juglis. One person got killed in the encounter. However good sense prevailed among both the sides and peace was restored. During the British period, the Havis wanted to settle new villages on the South of Tirap river but some Tangsas and Tutsas opposed their move to raise new villages and tried to confine Havis in Rakang, However, the British intervened and convinced the Tutsa and Tangsa clans not to

oppose migration of the Havis in the area beyond Rakang. Over the issue of the sharing of Salt-Wells near Longshang village a dispute arose between the Mukloms and the Havis. But the matter was resolved amicably.

### **Havi-Tutsa Conflict**

The Havis lived in Rakang, near Indo-Myanmar border, somewhere around 300 years ago. At that time the Tutsas of Tutnu, Nokna, Phungsa, Changra, planned an armed attack on the Havis of Raking. However, the Tutsas of Panlom were on friendly terms with the Havis, so they informed the Lungwang of Rakang about the possible armed attack on Rakang. The Havis acted promptly and evacuated their village and retired into the nearby hills to escape such an attack. When the Tutsas reached Rakang, they were surprised to see that their target village was abandoned and depopulated. The Tutsas out of rage burnt down the village and devastated the area. The Tutsas carried out the attack twice but the Havis managed to escaped both the occasions. At that time Tutsas tried to increase their influence in Tarrah valley as well as on the Havi villages. They demanded tax from the tribes living in that area. These attacks were planned by the chief of Tutnu to make the Havis to accept sovereignty of the Tutsas of Tutnu and pay tax.

The Havis were also equally determined not to allow the collection of taxes by the chief of Tutnu. They secured armed assistance form the Burmese tribes such as Sangwal, Ngemung, Nachang, Rahang and other tribes, and organized on armed attack on Tutnu. They carried away four Tutsa girls from Tutnu. The chief of Tutnu, opened negotiation under the mediation of the Tutsas of Panlom, who agreed to broker the peace treaty. The Panlom Lungwang convinced Havi Lungwang of Raking not to handover Tutsa girls to the Burmese, as they may sacrifice them on festivals and consume their flesh. The Havis returned four Tutsa girls. The Tutnu chief was also moved by friendly gestures of the Havis who returned back the girls. The Tutnu chief presented two buffaloes, four necklaces, and other items of gifts, etc. to mark the occasion of the restoration of peace and friendly relations between them.

However, the Havis headed by their chief Natna Nandok pres-surmised the Tutnu chief to fulfill other demands of the Havis or also they threatened to attack Tutnu. The Tutnu chief surrendered before Natna Nandok of Rakang. He came out upto the bank of Tirap river. The Havi

Raja also reached on the site opposite to that of the Tutnu chief on the bank of Tirap river. The Tutnu chief and his militamen brought plenty of rice beer, a dao, a chicken and other items. These were presented to the chief of the Rakang. Both the parties met each other and sort of ill feeling got evaporated and peace was restored.

### **Havi Dongs Conflict**

The Donge, a warrior tribe lives in Burma. Once upon a time a strong armed band of Donge people entered into Indian territory to punish the people belonging to Lungbo clan of the Laju community. They entered in the territory of the chief of Rakang and enroute they found several Havi boys playing music. The commander of Dongs millit iamen thought that these boys belong to the Lungbo clan, so they collected heads of three boys and returned back to Burma. Several other persons of Rakang were also kidnapped and taken to Myanmar. To avenge the killing of three Havi boys and kidnapping of their fellow villagers, the Havis of Rakang took help of the people of Yanti village in Burma, as people of the village were not on good terms with the Dongs tribe. The combined armed band of the Yanti village and the Havis of Raking attacked Donge tribe and collected heads of thirteen Dongs people. Thus the Dongs's of Burma were taught a lesson by the Havis that what will be their fate if they dare to cause harm to the Havis of Rakang.<sup>16</sup>

According to Khailiam Bongtai and other experts on Havis oral history of the Tongtung Havis village, the Havis originated at Rangsa Dongthung (point where sun rises). Their population concentrated in Tekhong Tunglong. Due to the growth of population, a section of Havis came to Thampang. However, life in Thampang became difficult as the Rangpangs, another group of the Havis from Kholak came and settled in the South-West of Longshang (Nuklom) village and thus Jongji Havi village came into existence.<sup>17</sup>

According to Khoktim Solting of Jongji Havi the Havis originated at Longphok Yanrock in South-east Asia. The Ancestral home of the Havis was subjected to a series of armed attack by a Burmese tribe called Thamkhok, so Havis left Longphok Yanrock and they migrated in the north- west and settled at Salriting. Subsequently the Havis further migrated to Khaloting. When population grew repidly at Khaloting, the Havis obtained these places and migrated to Chumting, Rakangting and finally to Jongjit Ravt. This village is also referred as Jongjiting.<sup>18</sup> However, Shri Thaksam Pangtha (G.B. New Jongjit Havi) states that the Havis

originally belonged to Takhong Tangrang and arrived in India via Longhang, Sangwal, Thamkhok, Wahok, and Chungting. After crossing the Patkai hills on Indo-Mynamar border, they settled down at Sunkho Kan and Watlon across Tirap river. But the Tutsas, Phungsa, Changra resisted presence of the Havis in that area, and compelled the Havis to return back. Subsequently the Havis settled a village called Rakang and later on Jongjit Havi and other villages came into existence.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the Havis traces their origin from South-east Asian region. They migrated to their present habitat due to growth of population, deterioration of law and order and scarcity of the means of earning livelihood at their ancestral home. After their migration, in to Tirap valley the Havis maintained cordial relationship with Mukloms of Tirap valley, but other clans such as the Rangpangs, the Thamkok, the Tutsas, etc. were hostile towards them. The Havis constituted a very small section of Tangsa tribes and their settlements remained confined to a tract between the area held by the Mukloms in North-east and the Tutsas in the north-west. Their villages were in close proximity with India-Myanmar border, on both sides of the Tarrah river which descends from heights of Patkai mountain, and effects junction with Tirap river near Panlom.

#### Notes & References

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10. While conducting field work on India-Myanmar border the under-signed noticed severall families in Nanmao and Nampong circle which had recently migrated to India, and settled within the Indian territory to improve their quality of life.
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13. Based on oral narratives recorded from Shri Winhon Solting of Sunkho Havi. Shri Khailiam Bongtai, Wakan Songthing, Mrs. Ponku Nokka etc. of Tongthung Havi and Shri Thaksam Pengtha of New Havi between 13/12/2000 to 16/12/2000.
14. K.S. Singh, *op. cit.*
15. Based on information collected from Shri Winhong Solting of Jongji Havi on 16/12/2000, Shri Wahat Rekhung, Tangkam Ngemu and Nokwang Yanchang of Longshang village on Oct.2-3, 2000.
16. Based on information collected from Shri Winhon Solting, Mallong Solting, Khennok Takhe, Kamcha Pengtha, Pothung Nandok and other experts on Havi oral literature of Sunkho Havi on December 14, 2000.
17. Based on oral narratives recorded from Shri Khailiam Bongtai, Waken Songthiang, Phokhom Songthing, Yangshong Songthing, Lenki Nokka, Mrs. Monnan Nokka and others of Tongthung Havi December 15-16, 2000.
18. Based on information collected from Shri Khoktim Solting, Paknung Pengtha, of Jongji Havi on 16 December, 2000.
19. Based on oral narratives recorded from Shri Thaksan Pengtha, Gaon Burrah of New Jongji Havi on December 16-17, 2000.

Shri Thaksan Pengtha states that the migration from Tekhong Tongrung was not an easy task. On the way, the Havis were given a lot of trouble by the Thamkhok tribe living in the Thamkhok were probably the Rangpangs, who were not ready to share land with the Havi. They (Thamkhok) entered in Havi villages and claimed land possessed by the Havis. In order to prove their ownership over the land they brought a head of monkey and claimed that this head is discovered

in that land occupied by the Havis. They said that the head belongs to their forefather, a Thamkhok person who died earlier and was buried there in that land. They ask the Havis to dig the land if they can discover the head of their forefather. The Havis were not ready to play a foul game and hence failed to prove their ownership over the land. Therefore, they were compelled to abandon their land in the area around Thamkhok.

At Wahok, Burmese warrior tribes created a variety of problems, and the Havis were made to leave the place and move towards India. Later when the Havis settled down at Watlom, the Tutsa chief of Tutnu demanded a variety of cesses and collections. He claimed a major portion of fishes, portion of bear. But as per their custom, the Havis used to break back portion of bear, teeth of jungles pig and major part of hunted animals so they could not deliver all such items demanded by chief of Tutnu. Thus could not get meat of the animals and other items demanded from the Havis. The Tutnu chief planned to attack the Havis at Watlom. The Havis also got information about the impending danger to their life and their quickly abandoned Watlom village and moved to the Tarrah valley and settled a new village called Rakang. From here people migrated and settled now villages in due course of time.