



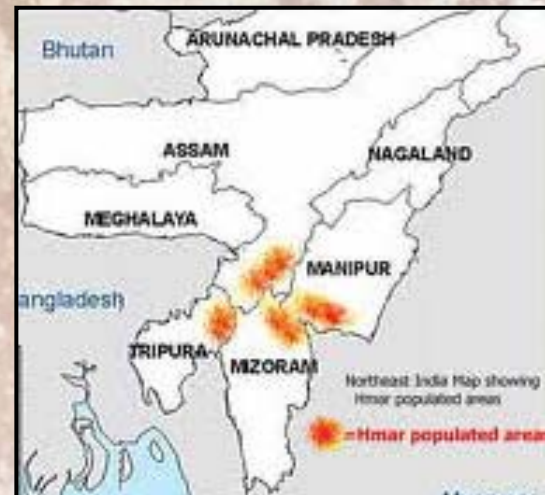
TRIBES OF INDIA

The Hmar Tribe

North- East India



The Hmar tribe are believed to have originally been from the Sinlung Civilization who lived somewhere in South West China during 221-207 BCE. But these people were pushed southward into the Himalayas by the Chinese, till they finally settled in parts of Mizoram, Assam, Tripura, Manipur and also in Burma. Hence the word 'Hmar' means North and refers to those who live to the north of Mizoram. The Hmars are divided into 21 clans.



They were an oral society before the Christian missionaries helped develop a common dialect and spread literacy through them in 1910.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Hmar people are generally short, strong and muscular. They have broad round faces with high cheek bones. Their skin ranges from dark brown

to light yellow.

DIET

Rice is the most integral part of the Hmars who are non-vegetarians. They eat brinjals, tomatoes, potatoes etc.



Also important is Ricebeer or zu.

CLOTHES

The men traditionally wear a loin cloth called Darkai, the Paihar which is a cloth that wraps the whole body, the Podom which is a striped shawl and on special occasions a turban.

The Women wear a striped chadar called a Tanlaupon, a Ponkerne or a cloth tied around the chest, Tharlaijom or a colored shirt.

SETTLEMENT

The villages are fenced with either bamboo or timber and have two to three entrances which are kept shut at night.

Each village has stock rooms which are maintained by the younger Hmars. It is used to store agricultural produce.

Hmar houses are built in rows and are elevated with the help of stilts. Each house has 4 rooms, the *Sawngka* or the porch where the family relaxes and is visited by guests, the *sussphuk* or the veranda where they take part in husking, pounding and threshing grain, the main room where they sleep and live and the *namthlak* which is a narrow platform and is used as a waiting room for guests. It is customary for each house to have a small kitchen garden attached at the back.



The youth of the village stay in dormitories which are looked after by the elders. Here they are trained in conduct, behavior, hunting, wrestling, art etc. It is only when an boy becomes a father that he stops being a member.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Hmar families are based on a patrilineal structure which means that the father is the head of the house. Joint families are common and couples tend to stay with their parents till they have at least 2 children.

MARRIAGE

Boys can marry almost any girls they want except those who are his close genealogical relatives.

Marriage is generally decided and put together by the parents. When the match is decided. parents of the groom present the bride's house with rice beer, cloth and hoe which are meant to signify



happiness and peace between the two families. A bride price is paid by them to the bride's father, this consists of around 4- 15 pigs. On the day of the wedding tradition states that the father of the bride must hunt and kill a pig which is then prepared into a feast. The wedding is held at the boy's house. A bride should never fall on her way to the venue because this is considered a bad omen.

POLITICS

Hmar villages are administered by a village chief or the *Lal* along with his council of ministers or *khawanbawls*. These men help solve disputes and ensure the smooth functioning of the village. The position of the Lal is hereditary and goes to the youngest son of the chief. Traditionally the chief was supposed to protect the village and all its property belonged to him. His ministers were in charge of distributing the land among the people for cultivation.

In 1956, the system of governance changed, it reduced the chief's powers. He now simply assists the village authority. The second most important person is the *Theisspu* who is the village priest.



But even today any criminal who seeks refuge in the chiefs house cannot be harmed while in his protection.

SLAVERY

Slavery was practiced among the Hmars in four ways:

- Inpui Suok- when widows and infants would take shelter in houses of rich families
- Chemsen Suok- When criminal refugees would look for protection in the chief's home
- Taklut Suok- When people would voluntarily enter slavery in times of emergency and calamities
- Sal- when enemies were captured during war and made into slaves

With the modernization of society, slavery has come into decline.

LIVELIHOOD

Hmars are primitive agriculturalists and generally cultivate through slash and burn/ Jhum agriculture. The main crop sown is rice, other important crops are Red chili, corn, beans, potatoes etc. Even though families own their own land, cultivation is generally done in cooperation with other families. To add to this they also take part in blacksmithy, basketry, animal husbandry etc.



RELIGION

It is focused around their God Pathien who is the creator of all beings. They also worship nature like Mountains, rocks, rivers, big trees etc but they do not worship the sun and stars.

Hmars believe in various spirits evil and good.

They also believe in the afterlife, different souls

Hmars believe that when a child dies, he/she is led to heaven by an egg and this is why they bury children along with an egg.

Pietral.

Today most Hmars have adopted Christianity and Hinduism as their personal religions.



DANCE AND MUSIC

These are very important to the people and are used to express joy after harvest, ward of evil spirits and grief etc. Because these are done by the village as a whole they strengthen unit and community spirit.



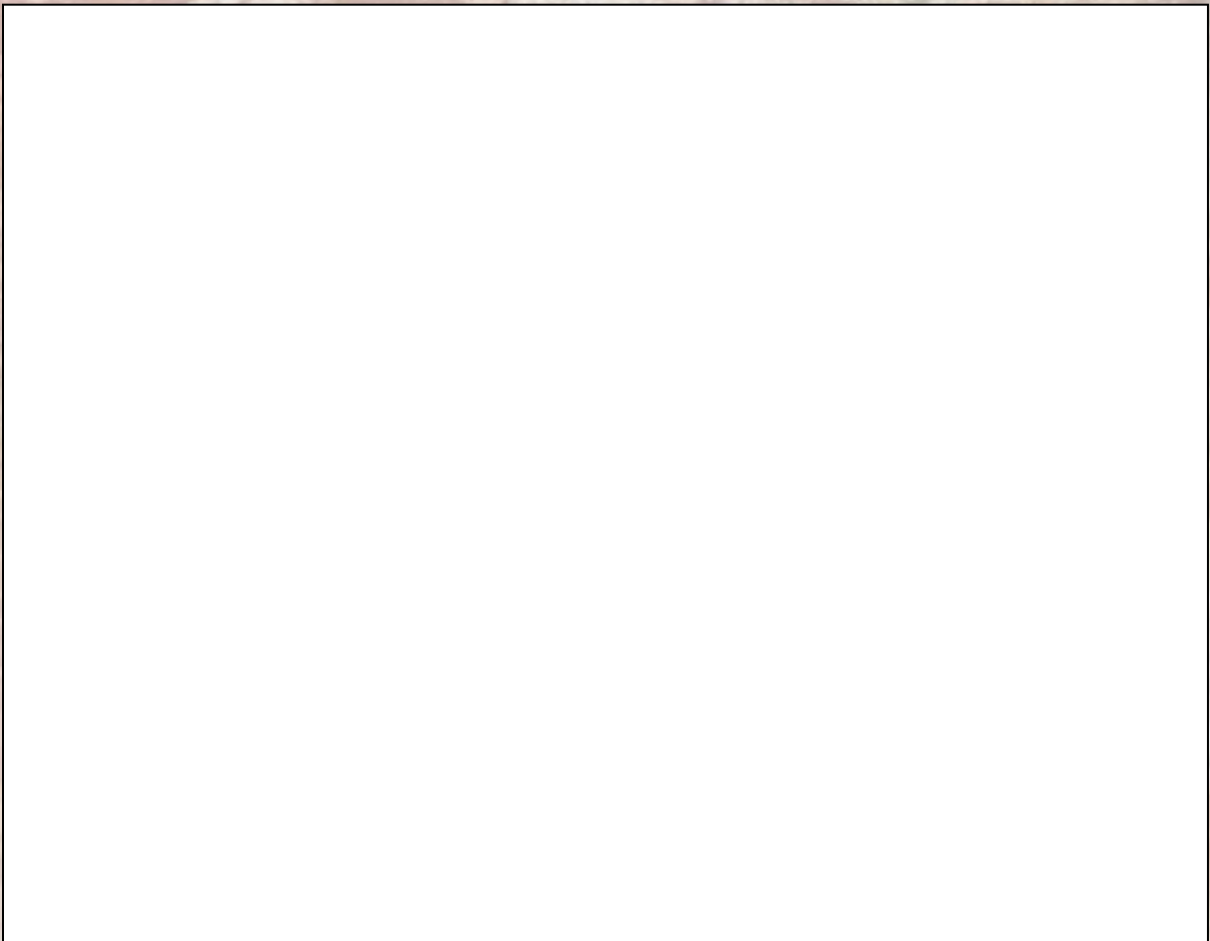
These are created around the historical legends and myths of the Hmar ancestors and are divided into five specific dances: Chawm-lam/ festival dance, Dar-lam/funeral dance, Pheipheet-lam/war dance, Hrang-lam/head hunting dance and the Tinna-Hla-Lan/ parting dance.

Activities:

What kinds of changes has Christianity brought in the Hmar society?

What is the importance of the Youth Dormitories?

Design your own map of a Hmar village to show the Hmars living together harmoniously.



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