

More than 80,000 Khamti people live in the area where the three countries of Myanmar, India and China meet. The name *Khamti* means 'a land full of gold' (*kham* means 'gold' and *ti* means 'place'). Most Khamti—approximately 70,000—live in Kachin State of north-western Myanmar, having first settled along the Chinwin River in the 12th century AD.¹ They formed 'three small Khamti Long Thai States and developed a highly advanced civilization. Those who escaped enslavement by the

Burmese settled in their present location in the fertile triangle of northern Myanmar, between the Mali and Nmai rivers.² An additional 8,000 or more Khamti people live across the border in north-east India's states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, where they are recognized as a 'scheduled' (official) tribe. In Arunachal Pradesh they inhabit the plains of Lohit, Changlang, Lower Subansiri and Tirup districts, as well as the Dibang Valley.³ Additional numbers of Khamti inhabit Assam State, especially the Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Cachar districts of Assam State.⁴

Historians say that the Khamti migrated to India from the Irrawaddy valley, Myanmar, in 1751.⁵ They settled along the Tangapani river.⁶ They later moved and now inhabit the 'lower regions drained by the Tangapani and Noa-Dihing rivers. . . . Their territory is surrounded by dense forests of the tropical moist deciduous type.'⁷

The Khamti are one of only a few Tai-speaking people groups found within India's borders. Their language is related to Shan, but after centuries of geographical

separation Khamti has developed its own characteristics. They have their own script, called *Lik-Tai*, which resembles the script used by the Mon in southern Myanmar.

Due to the almost complete lack of ethnographic material available in Myanmar, most of what is known about the Khamti comes from India. One researcher there found that 'though the Khamti are Buddhists, they eat a variety of fish. They consume the meat of fowls, pigs, goats, bears, deer and tigers. Beef is a taboo.'⁸



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Khamti society is hierarchical, with the village chief at the top, followed by the Buddhist monks, the common people and the former slaves at the bottom.

When a Khamti couple gets married, 'a mediator accompanies the groom's relatives (barring his parents) to the bride's house in a procession. The groom's party offers a basket of dried fish and rice beer to the bride's parents. When the entertainment is over the mediator negotiates with the

bride's father, whereupon he hands over his daughter to the groom's party. On its way back with the bride, the groom's party is stopped by the boys and girls of the village demanding a price for the bride.'⁹

Theravada Buddhism is the religion of almost every Khamti person. Each village has its own monastery, where proud parents send their sons to study the teachings of Buddha.¹⁰ In India, out of the 6,181 Khamti people surveyed in the 1981 census, 6,143 stated that they were Buddhist, 28 Hindu, two Muslim and two Christian, while six people did not state their religion.¹¹ Few Khamti have any awareness of the Son of God who died that they may have eternal life.¹²



Population:

86,800 (2000)
97,900 (2010)
110,500 (2020)

Countries: Myanmar, India, possibly China

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: 30

Overview of the Khamti

Other Names: Khamti Shan, Khampti, Hkamtai, Khampti Shan, Khandi Shan, Kam Ti, Tai Kam Ti, Tai Khamti, Kham Tai, Khantis, Tai Kham Ti, Bor-Khampti, Moonglair Khampti, Kmajang, Phakial

Population Sources: 70,000 in Myanmar (2003, Myanmar Faces and Places)

6,181 in India (1981 census) possibly also in China¹³

Language: Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central, Northwest

Dialects: 3 (Assam Khamti, North Burma Khamti, Sinkaling Khamti)

Professing Buddhists: 99%

Practising Buddhists: 95%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

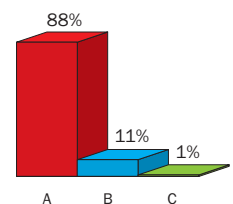
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Khamti

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: KHT

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity