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## Heritage Tourism of the Khampti Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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### Abstract

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#### Keywords:

North East India;  
Cultural Heritage;  
Tribes;  
Buddhism;  
Tourism Destination.

Northeast India, which has been known to be home to myriad tribes, is also the scene and platform for many types of tribal culture and customs. Some of the tribes migrated from outside Indian Territory have a very diverse cultural background. One such tribe is the Khampti of Namsai district in Arunachal Pradesh which is culturally very much similar to Southeast Asia. They follow the religion of Hinayana Buddhism. It was the oldest form of Buddhism in India during the historic Buddha period and spread throughout South East Asia. The paper attempts to study the potentiality of the Khampti tribe in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh as a heritage tourism destination. The destination has immense potential to be considered as a cultural heritage site in India which can attract many tourists from all over the world. However, it has been observed that the Khampti tribe lived in isolation for many decades, and, developing it into a tourism destination needs proper planning and direction with the support of all stakeholders viz. International Organisations, Government, NGOs, community.

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### 1. Introduction

Heritage tourism has been growing substantially over the past several decades and the word heritage has been a buzzword in tourism industry since the late nineteenth century [1]. Heritage Tourism as defined by [2] refers to “travelers seeing or experiencing built heritage, living culture or contemporary arts”. The resources of Heritage tourism are

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tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage are all assets that includes a degree of physical embodiment of cultural values [3]. For example: historic towns, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, artifacts and objects that are significant to community. [4] define Intangible heritage as “traditional culture, folklore, or popular culture that is performed or practiced with close ties to ‘place’ and with little complex technological accompaniment.”

India is generally known for its diversified culture and traditions. There are, however, areas such as the country’s north-eastern states whose culture, socio economic scenarios and ethnicity contrast with the rest of the country. Arunachal Pradesh is one of these states that is culturally more similar to South Asia [5]. Arunachal Pradesh belongs to different tribes with their distinct culture and traditions. There are twenty-six major tribes and more than hundred subtribes in Arunachal Pradesh [6]. Austro Asiatic, Dravidians, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burmese and Aryans have penetrated north-east India in different points of time. In this migratory wave, the Khamptis of Arunachal Pradesh (Tai Race) are a subgroup of Shan people migrated from Bor-Khamti or Mung Khamti in the Irrawady valley, Burma and settled around the Tengapani river in 1751 which is presently located in Namsai district [7]. The Khampti tribe is now recognized as one of the major tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

Various communities in North East India have a rich cultural and religious tradition. Among them, the Khamptis of North - East India have a great Buddhist tradition of the Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism [8]. The Khamptis are part of the Tai Burmese traditions of the Theravada or Hinayana sect. Every village has a chong, also called Buddha Vihar[9]. Vihar is adorned with Lord Buddha’s images. The monks live in the monastery and receive food from the villagers known as dana in sanskrit language. The monks give religious lessons to the villagers and perform the rituals of birth, marriage and death of all the rich or poor families [10]. Writing in 1872, Dalton describes how the priests of Khampti tribe amuse themselves in their hours of relaxation by carving in wood, bone or ivory, where they are very experts. When they make ivory weapons handles, they show great skill, taste and fertility of invention, twisted in high relief [11].

The rich Buddhist tradition and culture of the Khampti tribe gives immense opportunity for the tourists to experience the unexplored destination. But tourism is not an appropriate activity for some religious communities, religious beliefs sometimes present challenges to the development of tourism. The dimensions of religiosity of the residents can lead to different reactions to negative effects, which can have more sensitive meanings [12] & [13]. For religious destination, this discussion is more problematic as the spirituality of religious destination shapes the development process [12]. But religious assets and spirituality add value to other tourism products, and the religiosity of the destination has a positive impact on tourism development. The reaction of local people to costs and benefits is the main determinant, and the roots of their reactions and attitudes depend on how local people perceive the development of tourism. If the local people get benefit from tourism, the perception of the local people will be positive [14].

## 2. Research Method

This paper consists of exploratory as well as explanatory research. Exploratory research has been conducted to know the tourism potential of the destination as a religious tourism destination with primary data collection, such as observation and interviews with key informants. Participant observation has been implemented for the study. The interviews were also taken from key informants like head of the village, administrator, Head Monks. The Interview context was constituted of 8-10 questions related to observations about current tourism development and residents’ reactions to tourism.

Explanatory research has also been conducted in analysing the culture and tradition of the Khampti tribe especially in religious perspective. Secondary data has been collected through journals, publications, books, magazines of various authors.

### 3. Results and Analysis

#### 3.1. Potentiality of Khampti Tribe as Heritage Tourism Destination

##### Buddhist Monuments of Khamptis

Architecturally, Khampti Buddhist temples also known as Chong or Kyong have similar style as any other Shan temples in south eastern countries [15]. To be a full-fledged Buddhist monastery, some of the essential structural requisites within a monastery compound are temple (chong or kyong), living quarters (kuti) for monk (bhikkhu or baante), novices (samanera) and temple boys (mong-yang) number of rest houses (sarap) for male female devotees (upasaka and upasika), chedi or chedi kong-mu (chetiya or stupa), Bodhi tree (tun-pothi), boundary stone (sima or simaghar) a flower garden (chunbok-ja) a make shift altar for Buddha (chongtra or kyangfra) used during the time of Sanken festival etc. [16]. The temples in Namsai village have the presence of the image of Upagupta (PhraUppakutta) sitting in the shrine in the water. The Khamti call Upagupta as Chao Sang UkPuk. Also in Um-pong village, there is an Upagupta (Uppakutta) shrine situated by the river. The Khampti tribe believed that Upagupta (PhraUppakutta) is the God of Protection or a protective guardian. The same belief is found in other South East Asian countries like Thailand, Myanmar, Laos [17].

##### Buddhist Ceremony and Festival

The festival of Sangkaen which the Khampti tribes call it Shan New Year ceremony is practiced. It is reported that during the New Year celebration [18], people would sprinkle clean water over the Buddha's image to evoke his blessing for protection from evil spirits. People also pour water to monks and elderly people to get blessings.

##### KhamptiChaofa Political System

The Khampti tribe has a unique political system called Chaofa. [19] reported that the Khampti live on the land of KhamtiLuang in northern Shan State of Myanmar. KhamtiLuang is composed of 7 towns also known as muang e.g. Muang Kong, Muang Meed, Muang Yang, Muang Sua. According to the myth of Khamti, these muangs have been created by chaofa brothers. These brothers were thought to be Chao LuangSua Khan Fa's descendants, the great king of Mawk Khao Mao Luang kingdom. People in the country of KhamtiLuang are also believed to have migrated from Muang Mao and to have continued their political chaofa system. And when the Khamti migrated to Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, each town had chaofa as its head, dividing its territory into towns. Chaofa's position is transmitted through their sons. This is how the political system of chaofa has persisted wherever Shan lives. Accordingly, Shan in Shan State, Myanmar, Dehong Prefecture, Yunnan and Arunachal Pradesh are governed by the chaofa system in their political structure. UmPong, Kherem, Mo Mong and Chongkham are located in the Namsai district also follow the same political structure at village level [15].

During my research work at Chongkham which is located in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh I met the chaofaluang, Chao Khamune, the king of chaofa. He has his own temple. I observed the respect they get from the village people. Thus, although the

Khamptis migrated to Arunachal Pradesh more than 200 years ago, they maintained their political system of chaofa and respect the royal blood of their Chaofa.

### Language and Scripts

A very unique characteristic of Khamptis can also be explained by their language, because they are the only Tai-speaking tribe in the Indian Territory. The Khampti language and the alphabet scripts owe Shan as their origin. However, due to centuries of geographical separation, some different characteristics have developed in the language. The Lik Tai script also gets a different feature from the traditional Shan Script claiming that the Khamptis are the only tribe of Arunachal Pradesh to have their own alphabetic script [20]

### 3.2. Heritage Tourism Management

Heritage sites provide the tangible connections between past, present and future[21]. A good heritage management should focus on connecting conservation with tourism. It helps to maintain the balance between the need of the resource and need of the visitor.

The below figure shows conservation and tourism complementary agents in the management of heritage tourism destination [21]:



The findings from the above figure through review of literature advances to the conservation of environment while developing a destination as heritage tourism. We also need to be aware that the tourist that is catered in heritage tourism destination will have the qualities like curiosity, educational knowledge and interest in learning. So, skilled and attentive tourist guides are an important player in selling the heritage tourism destination.

### 4. Conclusion

The study leads to the conclusion that the Khamptis residing in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh have a rich tradition and culture of Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism which is similar to the other South East Asian countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Laos etc. and it gives immense opportunity to be developed as a heritage tourism destination.

The potentiality of the area are the lifestyle, traditions, attractions, culture and religion of the Khampti tribe which they have preserved since many years. Apparently, the policy makers and stakeholders need to care some grievances which may become a barrier for tourism development such as low community participation, perception of local people towards outsiders, lack of skills and knowledge, short duration of inner line permit. Furthermore, if these are well organized and facilities for the visitors are provided, it will attract many tourists every year, not only the domestic tourists, but also the foreign tourists all over the world.

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