



## **JINGHPAW PEOPLE: THEIR RELIGION, HISTORY AND CULTURE**

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### **Abstract:**

The Jinghpaw ethnic group is one of the primitive tribes of the world. They are known as ‘Kachin’ in Myanmar, ‘Jingpo’ in China and ‘Singpho’ in India. In different parts of planet, they are called by varied names; although the word “*Jinghpaw*” is commonly used by majority in written literary form. The Jinghpaw of Myanmar largely inhabit in its northernmost state called ‘Kachin State’ and its hilly areas. In China, they live in western ‘Yunnan’ province of ‘Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture’. In addition, they live in the north-eastern parts of India called ‘Arunachal Pradesh’ and ‘Assam’ state. This paper is an attempt to delineate the origin, history and unique cultural heritage of “Jinghpaw” community.

**Keywords:** Jinghpaw, Tribe, Kachin, origin, history, India, China etc.

### **Introduction:**

“A people without knowledge of their past history,  
origin and culture is like a tree without roots”

--- Marcus Garvey

According to *factsanddetails.com* article “*JINGPO MINORITY: HISTORY, RELIGION AND FESTIVALS*”

“The origin of the Jingpo is a matter of some debate. It is widely believed that they originated in the southern part of the Tibetan Plateau around the sources of the Irrawaddy, Mekong, Yangtze and Salween Rivers and began slowly migrating southward along the aforementioned rivers about 1,500 years ago into the northeastern part of Yunnan in areas west of the Nujiang River. In the 16<sup>th</sup>

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century they moved in large numbers to thickly forested Dehog area. Many settled along the Burma border because there were lucrative jade mines there. The first solid records of the Jingpo date back to the Tang dynasty (618-907). They became incorporated into China after the Mongols conquered Burma in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. After that the Jingpo were largely under the control of Dai overlords in accordance with Chinese Tusi system. Oral histories relate that the Kachin originally arrived in Yunnan from the southern part of the Tibetan Plateau from a place called “MUZHASHENGLABENG”, which means mountain with a flat top. These histories describe a place where there was snow year-round and even corn and barley could barely grow. Approximately 1,500-2,000 years ago the Kachin gradually migrated south along the Lancang (Mekong) and Jinsha (Yangzee) rivers before settling in their present locations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the northwestern part of Yunnan, west of the Nujiang River. After that, they split up into two parts, the eastern Kachin lived to the east of Lancang River and Jinsha River. And the western Kachin distributed in the area of Magulang and Gangfang, which in history was called Xunchuan, and in Han Dynasty was under the jurisdiction of Yongchang County the local people, together with the newly-arrived Kachins, were called “Xunchuanman”. They lived mainly on hunting. The ancestors of The Jingpo are related to the ancient Di and Qiang on Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. In the Tang dynasty, they were described in historical records as the “Xunchuan” and “Gaoligong”. Through the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties until the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, they were called “Echang,” “Zhexie” and “Yeren”. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, they were formally named the Jingpo group. In the Yuan Dynasty, the Xunchuan area was under the jurisdiction of the provincial administration of Yunnan, which was set up by the central government. During the Ming Dynasty, two big alliances, Chashan and Lima, gradually came into being. They were headed by hereditary nobles called “Shanguan”. And Shanguans of the Jingpo people were pointed as local administrators by the Ming Court. In the Qing Dynasty, the Jingpo area was under the domination of county offices established by the Qing court. Beginning from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, they migrated in large numbers to the Dehong area. During the World War II the Kachin earned high marks as fighters. They were skilfully ambushers and had a cruel streak. They cut off the ears of the Japanese they killed as trophies. Their territory remained largely unoccupied by the Japanese.’’

Besides, Jingpo people had a tradition to send message with particular things. For example: in the old days, if someone sends “a piece of meat with hair” that is a symbol of declaration of a war or meant death or victory of a person. And if a young person wanted to express his love for a girl, he sends her a leaf with tree roots, matchsticks, peeper and garlic in it. That leaf is a symbol of innermost thoughts and feelings of him, the tree roots mean that he missed her incessantly; peeper depicts his ardent love; and the garlic symbolizes that the man is waiting for her approval. Moreover, if the girl accepts him, then she sends things back. But if she refuses, she puts charcoal in it to express dissent. The Jinghpaw people live in two stories and it is built out of wood and bamboo. Most houses are oval form; the first floor serves as a storage and stable while the second is used for the living quarters. Broadly speaking, the framework of the house is made of massive tree

trunks, and the walls are of spilt bamboo, as is the floor, which is raised two or three feet from the ground, leaving a place underneath for the chickens and pigs. The thatched roof projects many feet in front to form a large porch; where farm implements and baskets are kept, women prepare rice, men do its odd jobs as well as oxen and buffaloes are stabled at night. In addition, a rough stairway leads up to the house itself, easy to walk up for the barefooted. The house is also divided into fireplaces. The separate room system does not exist in their society. Therefore, sometimes the fireplaces are not partitioned off. There is a fireplace for the parents, for each married son and for the young people. And these all are one side of the house. And the other side of the house is reserved for kitchen and visitor's room and the room sacred to the household deities, or nats, into which no stranger is allowed." According to facebook page "*Kachin Traditional Culture*" article '*SOCIAL LIFE OF KACHIN*':

"The Kachin is also revengeful, and considers it his bounden duty to avenge every wrong done to himself or to his family. If a murder is committed or a man even accidentally killed, then blood-money is payable, though the amount varies and is assessed by the village elders according to the circumstances of the case. If the culprit cannot or will not pay the amount of the fine, then a blood feud is declared and carried on for generation after generation until vengeance is satisfied. If his goods or his crops or his cattle are stolen or damaged, if his daughter elopes or bears an illegitimate child, compensation must be paid him. If the offender accepts the terms and pays up the fine, the matter is ended. But if not, then there will be reprisals, and a feud will be declared. While the feud is being carried out, the Kachin is not particular about his methods so long as he is successful. All is fair in a blood feud. The great trouble of a blood-feud is that a whole community, a whole village, may be involved. If a Kachin is killed or murdered in the village, then his relatives will take vengeance on any person belonging to that village, even though he is perfectly innocent and may not even heard of the incident. There is no limit for the vengeance. One little incident may illustrate the dangers of these feuds. A British expedition on its way from Burma to China was adjudged by the Kachins to have inflicted some wrong on them; what it was forgotten in the years that elapsed. Twenty years later a party of missionaries travelling along the same road were attacked and robbed in revenge for the old "wrong" just because they were "British". No one could ever be safe in Kachinland if these feuds were permitted to continue."

Animism was widely practised by the Jinghpaw people in ancient time. But with the passage of time, owing to various circumstances; they converted into Buddhism and Christianity. But despite conversion and embracing new rituals, the influence of animism can be found in every walk of their life. Presently, Jinghpaw people of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam state, India follows "Theravada Buddhism". Some Jingpo people of China follow "Christianism" and the rest follow Buddhism. On the other hand, the Jinghpaw of Myanmar categorically follows "Christian faith (Catholic & Protestant)". The Jinghpaw community also believe in spirits, called "Nats". They consider nats are superiors to human beings and were once human being themselves. Nats can be found everywhere, even the individual villages and clans have their own nats. On the top of that, the Jinghpaw ethnic people celebrates "Manau Poi" colourfully. As stated in Kachin Mythology,

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Manau (dance) was first performed by Nat, spirits and birds. Aftermath, nats and spirits invited living creatures from land to participate in the manau dance in heaven. Then only birds had participated. Consequently, the birds came down to land and they taught human beings to do Manau. According to another legend, there were nine suns appeared on earth. Human beings were suffered infinitely from that appearance. Then they decided to send birds to heaven for kindness and mercy. Birds performed Manau in heaven and sang for Nat and spirits. They got elated by the bird's performance and approved this act to be done on earth. It is believed that human beings emulated the Manau (dance) from birds and tried to worship spirits through it. However, Manau is observed only on the five most important occasions:

- 1) To celebrate victory in war.
- 2) To gather the clans to meet and settle accounts, make plans for the future.
- 3) To commemorate the death of an elder.
- 4) For a housewarming.
- 5) To bring good fortune to new farmlands and cultivation.

Besides, there are originally 14 types of Manau festivals:

1	SUT MANAU	8	KUMRUM MANAU
2	KUMRAN MANAU	9	NAUSAWT MANAU
3	NINGHTAN MANAU	10	HTINGHTANG MANAU
4	PADANG MANAU	11	HKRIDIP MANAU
5	JU MANAU	12	ROIDU KAPUT MANAU
6	HTINGRAM MANAU	13	HKINDU TEP MANAU
7	NINGSHAWN MANAU	14	SHA DIP HPAWT MANAU

But Jinghpaw community consider five Manau poi as their principal festival:

Sut Manau	It is celebration of wealthiness and a thanksgiving festival.
Padang Manau or Rawt Manau	It is a celebration of victory in battles.
Ju Manau	It is held after the funeral of Duwa and Dujan (Chefs)
Kumran Manau	It is held to bless families who have traditionally decided to leave their folds and build their own houses and build their land.
Sha Dip Hpawt Manau	It is held to defeat evil spirits that may exist on new grounds to be cultivated.

Furthermore, the Jingpo language is a part of "Tibetan-Burman language" of the 'Sal Branch'. The term "Jingpo language" is also referred to a group of languages spoken by various ethnic groups, like: Lisu, Lashi, Rawang, Zaiwa, Lhao Vo and Achang. On top of that, there are at least sixteen

varieties of “Jinghpaw language”. Broadly speaking, the Southern, Northeastern, and Northwestern dialects are among the well-known dialects in Jingpo language.

### **The Southern Jingpo Dialect:**

1. Standard Jingpo: it is the standard variety of Jingpo extensively used by Kachin people of Myanmar including non-Kachin ethnic minorities in Kachin state and Sagaing Division.
2. Nkhun/Enkun: it is widely and most spoken in Lianghe, Ruili, Longchuan, and Luxi counties of Yunnan, China.
3. Shadan/Shidan: it is spoken in Yunnan, China’s township of Kachang and Taiping located in Yingjiang County.
4. Gauri/Khauri: It is spoken in the Gauri Hills of East Bhamo.
5. Mengzhi: It is spoken mostly by about two hundred people in the two villages of Getong and Zhengtongyou in Mengzhi, Yingjiang County.
6. Thingnai: It is spoken near Mohnyin town of southern Kachin State.

### **The Northeastern Jingpo Dialect:**

1. Dingga: It is widely spoken near Putao, Kachin State as well as in the villages of Ding Ga, Ding Ga Gabrim, Tsa Gung Ga, Layang Ga, Dai Mare, and Marawt Ga.
2. Duleng: It is spoken near Putao, in Machanbaw, and in the Nam Tisang valley of Myanmar’s Kachin State.
3. Dingphan: Kachin State
4. Jili/Dzili: Kachin State
5. Khakhu: Kachin State
6. Shang: Kachin State
7. Tsasen: Kachin State

### **The Northwestern Jingpo Dialect:**

1. Diyun: It is highly used in Arunachal Pradesh, India.
2. Numphuk: It is spoken in Arunachal.
3. Tieng: Arunachal Pradesh.
4. Turung: It is basically spoken in the Golaghat, Jorhat, and East Karbi-Anglong Districts of Assam, India. In the Golaghat district, “Basapathar Turung Village” (Abhang Mereng) and “Rengmai Turung Village” use this dialect extensively. In addition, some nearby villages also use this dialect to communicate with its people. In the three villages of Jorhat district, Turung is used: Pathargaon (Na Kthong), Tipomia Turung Village and Pahukatia Turung Village. In addition, owing to marriage, political issues, religious rituals, business and economic communications and community meets with nearby “Tai-Aiton villages” and “Assamese” villages; many “Tai” as well as “Assamese” loanwords are found in Turung dialect. Consequently, some Turung speakers also self-identify

themselves as ethnic Tai and called themselves “Tai-Turung”. On the other hand, some regard that they are not Tai, rather they are Jinghpaw, as their “surname or ancestry including mother-tongue” is utterly same with Jinghpaw. In Basapathar Turung Village, Jinghpaw ethnic surnames like: Ningrang, Wakhet, Lagang, Umbon can be extensively found.

### **Conclusion:**

Undoubtedly, Jinghpaw tribe is phenomenal for its stupendous history, culture and heritage. The documentations as well as digitalisations must be done to preserve, spread and acknowledge the tangible and impalpable treasures of Jinghpaw tribe. With the passage of time, many precious cultural assets are lost owing to negligence and ignorance of community as well as governments. In imminent future, the researchers as well as stipulated and responsible government departments including researchers, stakeholders must take initiatives to preserve and spread these intangible heritages with proper groundwork.

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