

Kom

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Kom, also known as Kom Rem; a scheduled tribe of India. Classified via Ethnologue as Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Sal, Kuki-Chin-Naga, Kuki-Chin, Northern. Kom speakers fluent in Meitei (mni). Kom also understood by Aimol (aim), Koireng (nkd), and Chiru (cdf) speakers. Kolhreng may be a dialect or a distinct language. [1] Kom Rem people have a common language known as *Kom-tong*, or Kom language. [3]

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

kmm

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

The Kom have 22 villages in east and central Manipur, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, and Senapati districts. [1]
(24.817°N 93.95°E, 24.3000° N 93.1500° E, 24.9667° N 93.5500° E, 25°16' N 94°01'E, 25.267°N 94.017°E

1.4 Brief history:

According to Kom researchers, they entered Burma between 100 B.C. and 100 A.D., and sometime in 200 A.D., they had moved towards Arakan Hills and Bay of Bengal. Then the Kom people entered Tripura and from there they entered Manipur as the Soktes ousted them. According to their folk tales and tradition, it is believed that they originally might have come from Mongolia passing through China, Burma and settled at Tripura, Assam, and Manipur. It is also believed that they were the second community to have arrived in Manipur, only after the Meiteis.

According to the Royal Chronicle of Manipur, the five tribes were first identified in the 14th century in Manipur, when they were known by the villages they settled in rather than by their tribe's name. [3]

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

The Kom are a Christian society. [1]

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The climate of Manipur is mostly tropical with alpine climate. The northeastern region has an amiable climate and is very cold in the winters. The temperature in the summer is 32 degrees C and in the winters it falls below zero. The rains last from May till mid-October. The average rainfall experienced is 1467.5 mm. The state experiences a summer, winter, and rainy season. Manipur is basically a hilly region and valley that comprises of around 60% of the total area of the state. The flat plains comprise of around 40% of the area. Most of the population lives in the hilly region and agriculture too is carried on in the hills. There are also ethnic tribes that reside in the forest areas of Manipur. [6]

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Total population 14,602 according to 2001 census. [5, 4] The survey report of the Komrem Students Union in Manipur places the total population of Kom at 21,858 individuals. [2, 7]

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

The Koms are farmers, practicing mainly shifting and wet cultivation. Rice is the staple food. Also they produce potatoes, millets, maize etc. [4]

Their staple food is rice supplemented by vegetables, *chatani*, and *anbut* (boiled vegetable without salt). They also drink *waiju* a kind of rice-beer, and *jukha* a type of country-made liquor. [2, 17]

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Kom tribes domesticate several animals like pigs, fowls, goats, cows, buffaloes, mithun etc. [4]

The Koms hunt various wild animals for their delicious taste and some to ward them off from their crops. Birds are also killed using catapults for consumption. [2, 11]

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The hunters use bows and arrows and the arrows are laced with poison using lactations of wild trees and the glands of some highly poisonous snakes. [2, 11]

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Villages have a labor organization called *lawm*. It consists of the village men and women of every age group. All the men and women who are able to work join the *lawm*. Any household of the village can hire the *lawm* to work for them during cultivation and harvest. [2, 20]

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

Most of the Koms are non-vegetarians. Their custom and their religion prohibited them from consuming animals that are sick and dead. Their custom also forbids eating of birds like crows, vultures, etc as they are regarded as unclean. People who practice magic are more conscious about their food habit as there are many prohibitions required to be maintained for practicing magic. [2, 17]

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry – N/A

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Monogamy is mainly practised in the Kom community though some are found practising polygamy too. The reason for the polygamy is said to be due to the barrenness of the spouse. [2, 13]

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

Paying the bride price called *Jorman* is regarded important and is being practiced strictly by the Koms. The bridegroom's family pays bride price to the family of the bride while fixing the marriage. It is practiced with a strong social motive. Traditionally, there were four kinds of bride price, which has been practiced from generation to generation.

The first bride price is called *Alukhong-Akangk* or *Man lukacing*, which is the biggest bride price. This bride price consists of *Sum* (a brass gong) and well-grown mithun.

The second bride price is *Sum-Kharpruk* or *mithun*.

The third bride price is *Rangam*. This bride price is given to the eldest man of the groom's clan usually the eldest among the grandfathers of the boy, that is, the groom. This bride price is paid in cash around six rupees in olden days. The fourth bride price consists of a traditional shawl and a sum of rupees five. This bride price is given to the grandfather of the girl. *Sakamak-serjor* (son-in-laws and daughters) of the boy's father are each presented a traditional shawl. There had been changes though in the bride-price value nowadays. In modern days the bride-price is payable in cash without kind, equivalent to its value.

Nuchen or Nushik (mother's share): to show love and respect, the son-in-law gives a grand feast to the mother-in-law. On this day, all the friends and relatives of the mother and the daughters are invited for the feast. They dine together and spend the day with great enjoyment. A traditional shawl is presented to the mother. This tradition has been followed from ages and is still regarded as very important.

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Since Kom society follows patrilineal heritage, the youngest son of the family acquires the property. [4]

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Society of Kom tribes is exogamous. [4]

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

For a male member, his mother's brother's daughter (*Hlodei*) is the preferred bride by the community. Parallel cousins marriage is forbidden in Kom society. Marriage within the clan is prohibited and marriage between sub-clans of a major-clan is also prohibited. [2, 13]

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

In Pre-Christian days and even to these days in some cases, marriage of a son or a daughter has to be arranged by the parents. The groom had to serve at his father-in-law's house for three years (**no longer practiced**). This practice was known as *Numhei-hlo*. The alternate form of acquiring a bride is *Jorpui*, or love marriage. The third form is through elopement. At present, the practice of acquiring a bride or a groom is done through mutual consent of both the parties. Today, arranged and love marriages are the two most common forms. [2, 13]

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

According to Karun¹, Koms were and are peace loving people even though they took offensive operations but always took a defensive position. However, if their enemy were cruel they would flay the enemy and dry the skin in the sun. They plan their strategy with the help of *thempu* (the magician) who wears magic gear called *shonrei*, which will make him and his force invisible. [2, 11]

4.31 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.32 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.33 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.34 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.35 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

The clan system among the Koms is the most important aspect of its social system. The clan system still exists in the Kom society. The members of the clan believed that they are descendants of a common ancestor. The Kom believe that the clan and its sub-clans are closely related. The Kom society is divided into social groups, which are again sub-divided into smaller stratum. The clan is the biggest social group and it reflects familial and filial relationship.

The village is the highest political unit of the Kom tribe. The village chief called *Sawang* or *Khullakpa* and his council members govern each village. The village chief and his council regulated the village administration. The chief's consent is necessary for any immigrants in the village. The chief and his council are responsible for the administration of justice, enforcement of executive functioning, maintenance of social practices and customary laws.

The office of the chief is mostly hereditary if one individual or family founded the village. The chieftainship is passed on from the father to his eldest son. In the absence of any son, the eldest son of the chief's closest relatives inherits the chieftainship.

The administrative system of the Kom is simple. The *Sawang* or the village chief is usually the founder of the village and is the supreme authority. According to McCulloch² he mentioned that the chief of the Kom villages who are elected does not have great powers or perquisite. The *Sawang* (chief) rules the village and runs the affairs of the village assisted by his *Semang-pachong* or the council members. Each council member is assigned to discharge a duty in connection with the village. The sawang appoints a minister on consensus with the villagers at the general meeting of the village.

The Kom village council usually consists of five members though the number depends on the population of the village. The council comprise of the following members:

1. Khullakpa: Village Headman.
2. Mantri (minister): 2 *mantries*, or ministers.
3. Tlangva: the announcer or messenger.
4. Thempu: the priest/magician
5. Thirkasupa: Blacksmith

The *Khullakpa* or Chief is assisted by two *mantris* in the administration of the village. However, in some villages there is a post of *luklakpa* (the assistant chief). The chief and his council fulfill their responsibilities within the traditional customs of the community.

Each household honours the service of the *Khullakpa* or Chief of the village with five tins of rice in a year. However, his council members do not enjoy any such material benefits. The chief is the honored guest at all village functions. He is given the privilege of the first meal in community feasts or festivals. In matters concerning the state government, the chief represents the village.

Tlangva: He is in-charge of giving information to the villagers and his responsibilities include conveying decisions of the council meetings and gatherings of the villagers. In case the village has guests, he has to prepare food and arrange a place for the guests to lodge for the night.

Thempu (priest/magician): He is responsible for the rites and rituals in the village. He is also in-charge of the health of the villagers. He would attend to the villagers in times of sickness. He also performs sacrifices during religious festivals. He is highly regarded by the people for his important function. The person or the family concerned pays him for his service. However, nowadays the role of the *thempu* is almost nonexistent.

Thirkasupa (blacksmith): He is the village blacksmith. A man can be elected as a blacksmith only if he possesses the highest dexterity in black-smithy. He is responsible for making war weapons, like arrows, guns, swords, etc. He also make agricultural tools like hoes, axes, spades, etc, for the villagers. Besides the above functions, the village council has its song leader called *Lhapu* and a traditional musician called *Sampu*. *Lhapu* is in-charge of leading the songs and dances in festivals of the village. His presence is very important at special feasts and festivals in the village. *Sampu* and *Lhapu* have to lead the youths in singing and dancing in festivals and gatherings. [2, 17-21]

5.4 Post marital residence:

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death*, puberty, seasonal):

Historically, having baby twins was not preferred. Therefore, in order to avoid twins, a pregnant woman should not use certain materials used by a mother who had given birth to twins. Besides, a pregnant woman also avoided any doubled fruits or twin-fruits. It was also believed that the husband of the pregnant woman should not kill any living creature. The belief is that the child might not live long.

When a child is born, the mother is not allowed to walk out of the house for five consecutive days. She is allowed to do so only when the baby is brought out of the house on the fifth day for name giving ceremony. This is called *Naiteso*, which means that the newly born child is brought out of the house. [2, 15]

Khuser/Khu-inthoi/Khukham is a ritual performed in the month of January every year. It is a ritual practiced by the village to sanctify the village. During this ritual, the villagers are required to be in the village and no outsiders were allowed to enter in the village from dawn to dusk. Male members of the village go for hunting and if they come with an animal, a feast and a ritual are performed in the house of the person who killed the animal. However, if they could not get one on this day, an eagle or a bird is killed and offered as sacrifice. No fire is lit in any house until midday when the priest would light a fire in his own house. The villagers would then go and get the fire from his house and light their furnaces. In the ritual, a red dog would be killed and its head and intestines are hung at the village gate. Its blood would then be mixed with a root called *Ai* and sprinkled on the walls of every house in the village. It is done in the belief that evil spirits hate dog's blood. [2, 13] **(Unclear whether this ritual is still practiced.)**

The *lungphun* festival refers to the erection of a mega-stone in remembrance of a person mainly after his or her death. It is also done while the person is alive. On this day all families and friends are invited. It is the occasion of giving tribute to the person for whom the stone erection is done. A ceremony is performed by the person as a fulfillment of obligations in one's lifetime or for the person by his family to commemorate or to remember the person. [2, 9]

*Also see death and afterlife beliefs

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

According to the traditional belief, the Kom claim to have emerged out of a cave, *khurpui* (the big cave). One of the legends says that while trying to come out of the cave, a tiger obstructed them. Nobody could come out as the tiger lay in wait to kill them. Karongpa, who came out of the cave wearing a stripped cloth, made friends with the tiger as his cloth resembled the skin of the tiger. That is why his descendants refrain from eating or killing tigers. Saichapa, after having come out, killed the tiger. Leivonpa cut out the tiger's tongue and wrapped it up in his waist. These people, in the subsequent generations became the heads of the various Kom clans, namely Karong, Saiche, Leivon, Tellein, Hmange, Serto etc. After killing the tiger, the people came out of the cave and settled in highland (Chungkhopui). All the tribes have the similar story regarding the origin of their tribes. [3]

Another story narrates that the head of this ancient Kom tribal party, Karong, killed a huge snake and also a tiger for blocking their way. After being free from the danger, all of them carried on celebration in Telenpa's house. [4]

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

With the advent of Christianity, the rituals and practices including magic (both black and white) for which they were once famous for are no longer practiced by the people. [2, 13]

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

The Kom tribe accepts death as an unavoidable event of life. They believed that the spirit of a man after death remains with the family for a year, after which the spirit goes to heaven. They also believed in the existence of place called *mithikhu*, a place where the dead people live and the belief of the existence of the spirit of the death. They follow different formalities at the time of death and for a year, till a ceremony called *lukasun*, proper dressing of the skull, was performed.

Death is generally classified into three divisions, namely natural death (*thiphakathi*), childhood death (*naidong-a-kathi*) and unnatural death (*saar-a akathi*).

Natural death (Thi-pha-kathi): When a person dies, each and every one of the relatives, far and near are immediately informed by sending some boys among the neighbors. All the friends and relatives of the deceased bring garlands of flowers and sometimes coins for the deceased believing that the spirit of the dead is still around; those who have lost someone earlier would send messages or things to the dead person through the person who had just died.

Childhood Death (Naidong a akathi): When an infant dies, the dead body is not buried in the same way as that of a grown up person. The dead body is buried in the nearby cemetery and the body will be carried through the hollow of the wall if any or through the window. No rituals or formalities are followed.

Unnatural death (Saar-a-akathi): People who face violent death, or are killed or murdered are regarded as having met with an unnatural death. The dead bodies of such people are not entitled to proper funeral rites, as in the case of the person who died a natural death. The dead body of such a person is not allowed to be brought into the village. The dead body is taken to the grave directly where formalities are performed as in natural death. However, in present days, this practice has changed except for those who commit suicide. [2, 15]

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

Non-Christian Koms believe in *Pathen*, the supreme God. *Pathen* is the creator of all living beings and the Universe. They believe in the existence of soul after death and that the soul goes to the land of the dead *kathi-kho*. Heaven and hell are considered as the abodes of these souls. People with good deeds inherit heaven after death. The *Pathen* (God) is worshipped for good health, good harvest and the prosperity of the village as a whole by offering sacrifices, praying and performing other rituals. They also believed in the existence of supernatural powers and their relationship with humans. They also worship *Inn-lai* as their household God and make sacrificial offerings of a particular breed of hen, pig's, and dog's blood etc. to other spirits. These sacrifices were performed by the priest *thempu or maipa*, who was also an expert in black magic, which is known as *doi*.

In the past, the Koms practiced different forms of magic, which also played an important role in their religious life. Magic was considered as an art. *Doikungpu*, the chief magician, imparted certain level of this art to the interested and capable young boys and girls up to certain levels. They used their skill of magic as weapons to fight against their adversaries and even in hunting expeditions. Their expertise in magic helped them at times of hostility. [2, 12]

7. Adornment

Dresses of the Koms can broadly be classified into female clothing (*Nuhmeipon*) and male clothing (*Pasepon*). The men wear *der* that is a long thin towel and a shirt and shawl. They have *pase pon* or *saipuikhup* the shawl meant exclusively for men. Women wear sarong called *ponvei* and *Khamtlang*, *ponlak* with *Khonkhi*, a strap of cloth, are some of women's wear. Both men and women wear traditional ornaments. Koms have traditional ornaments such as bangle (*khutkhi*), armband (*bunghar*), headgear (*lukhum*), earrings (*Korkhei*) and hairpin (*Shaikhoe*). Necklace (*Thichong*), armbands of metals worn in the upper arm called *her* and the women folks wear brass ring ornaments. Men wear silver earrings, this is done ten days after birth, and necklace is worn before marriage but removed after marriage. These ornaments are mainly used during ceremonies and festivals. [2]

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Hunting expeditions are also organized on certain occasions. When the animal is killed, the hunters enter the village singing merrily, beating gong (*Shum*) and blowing trumpets (*Roshem*). Usually, the hunter who gets the first strike at the killed animal retains the head of the animal. A foreleg is given to his sister if any, the breast portion is given to his intimate friend and the rest of the villagers would share the remaining portion. Killing of tiger, elephant and other ferocious animals are regarded as a heroic achievement for which a feast is arranged. The head of the animals killed by a hunter is usually kept in the homes as trophy. A man who can kill 100 animals is highly honored in the society for which a pillar is erected in his memory. [2, 11]

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