

**A Sociolinguistics Study of Aimol**  
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**1. Introduction**

Aimol is the name of the language as well as the community that speak the language. It is a recognized tribe of Manipur. It was recognized in 1956 by government of India. The present total population of Aimol is 4600 (According to Chairman Aimol Literature Society, Manipur) The Aimol tribe is found in Chandel, Churachandpur, and Senapati district of Manipur. The Aimol occupied mostly in the plane or valley of Manipur. Their living standard was mostly influenced by geographical situations. In the entire state, there are fifteen Aimol villages, of which eleven in Chandel district, two in Churachandpur district and another two in Senapati district.

**List of Aimol Villages in Manipur**

Chandel	(1)	Khullen	(2)	Chandonpokpi
	(3)	Khodamphai	(4)	Ngairong
	(5)	Tampak	(6)	Chingnunghut
	(7)	Kumbirei	(8)	Khunjai
	(9)	Satu	(10)	Khudengthabi
	(11)	Unapal		
Churachandpur	(12)	Kha-Aimol	(13)	Luichunbung
Senapati	(14)	Tuikhang	(15)	Kharam-Thadoi

The distribution patterns certainly show that the tribe doesn't occupy a well-defined territory and that they have shifted their settlement sites from one place to another. The ethnic affinity of the Aimol has been placed amidst of the neighboring tribes of southern part of Manipur bordering Burma and the Lushai and had classified as one of Kuki-Chin-Mizo (Lushai) group. Linguistically too they are classified amongst the old Kuki branch of Kuki section, Burmic division of Sino-Tibetan Language. However the Aimols prefer to live independent of any affiliation and prefer to maintain a distinctive identity of its own.

**2. Origin**

In the years, about 1500 A D there lived a man named *Khoichungtepa*. This man had a dream in one night. In his dream, he saw a *meiwar* "a lightening fire" at the centre of his courtyard. He used to pluck the fire and plant in another place. He nourished the fire by pouring *jutui* "wine". In the long run this fire became a *doi-ai* "a magic power". The man possessed this power and used to cure different kinds of sickness. Most importantly, he even fixed the power on his door. He even used to predict future events by this power. Many people of the place came and visited him for the different kinds of their problems. So the place became very popular and called it as *muolhui* "comfortable slope place". So, etymologically Aimol is derived from these words *doi-ai* and *muolhui*.

According to Lt.-Colonel J. Shakespear 1912, Aimol is the name of a village site probably *Aimual*. “*Ai*” Lushai name of a berry and also means crab and appears in Ai-zawl, the capital of Mizoram or Aijal. “*Mual*” is the Lushai name for a spur of a hill. It is a very common and almost a universal custom to call a new village and originally *Aimual* would be found in the centre of Lushai Hills.

According to oral tradition (unwritten history) the ethno genesis of Aimol traced to uncertain cave at khweps from which the people had been believed to have emerged from the earth. As they came out of the cave, a tiger blocked their way despite many attempts. Two clever persons named *Pukorthangpu* and *Korthangpi* weaved a cloth named *Laijiak* having the same print as the tiger. Taking help of appearance of the woven cloth, *Pukorthangpu* convinced the tiger that they were of the same kind and made friendship. The tiger did not eat him. The tiger was then killed with spear while it was tamed. From there passing many places of Tripura, they went to Burma where the advancement was checked by Kabow shans. According to Shakespeare in Lushei Kuki Clans the appearance of the Aimol in Manipur is marked in 1723. They are said to have come from Tipperah, the present Tripura state, but at that time the eastern boundary of Tipperah was not determined, and the greater part of the present Lushai hills district was supposed to be under the control of the Rajah of that state. A short distance to the east of *Aijal*, the present Aizawl there is a village site called *Vai-tui-chhum* i.e. the watering place of the Vai which is said to commemorate a former settlement of the Vaiphei. It seems probable that the Aimol and Vaiphei left their former homes in consequences of the forward movement of the Lusheis.



**An old Aimol man with musical instrument**

### **3. Social Structure and Organization**

The indigenous term for clan in Aimol is *phung*. The Aimol tribe has seven clans. They are: *Chaithu*, *Chongom*(2sub-clans), *Lanu* (1sub-clans), *Laita* (2sub-clans), *Shialloa*, *Shongthu* and *Ruijom*. The Aimol society is a patrilineal society where the descent goes to the male line. In this patriarchal and patronymic feature society; monogamy is common form of marriage. A young man has to serve his future's wife for three years during which he works as if he was a son of the house. When the girl becomes enceinte the marriage ceremony is performed. The bride's eldest brother gets Rs.6 and each of the others one rupee less than his immediate senior. The paternal and maternal uncle receive Rs.2 each, the aunt and the elder sister also receive Rs.1 each as *niman* and *nao-puan-puk-man*.

The indigenous mode of political organization centers on the council which is known as *Pasakariat* subordinated by another association. *Pasakariat* consists of eight councilors of which the head is *Kamsakoi*. The subordinate council i.e. *Thoukalnai* consists of the same number of post. Except the *Kamsakoi* is the hereditary post. For other post recruitment is on the line of promotion. *Kamsakoi* remains the exclusive right for the eldest *Chongom* clan member. Recently when the hill areas act 1956 is affected in the village, the village authority have been empowered to settle minor cases. Trial is conducted after lodging a complaint with a fee. It is one bell (bottle) of *zu* (wine) in the past which has been substituted by a sum of Rs.1. Punishment is given by the court and may include imposition of fine, confiscation of belongings and ex-communication. For bringing forth justice oath and ordeal is employed.

The traditional house of the Aimol people is almost similar with the general look of those of Meiteis, Purum etc. living in their close proximity. It is rectangular box type with slanting crest roof. The length and breadth ratio is about 1:3 or 1:5. The number of compartments is either 3 or 5 in number. The house is basically made of wood, bamboo and mud and the roofing material used is thatch. Around the dwelling place, one will notice satellite sheds generally used as granary storehouse, cattle shed and pig stall. The direction of houses is always towards the east, facing the rising sun. Nowadays, bricks and other different types of sophisticated materials are used for constructions.

#### **4. Birth**

When a new baby is born, all the women of the village would go and greet the newly born baby. They would drink *nainei ju* (child-birth wine). Male members of child born family also join in the drinking. The newly born baby would be in the mother's arm for five days in case of a boy and three in case of a girl. The *thempu* (local physician) pour out a libation of *zu* (local wine) and herbs in front of the house and invoke the child's spirit to take up its residence within the new-born infant. The name is given at the same time, the father's family choosing the name of a son and the mother's of a daughter.

#### **5. Marriage**

There are two types of marriage in Aimol. One is engagement or arranged marriage and another one is the elopement. In the case of arrange-marriage the proposal of marriage comes from the parents of the boy. The proposal is usually associated with tea and other edible items. In the present generation arrange-marriage is commonly practice as this is sacred marriage whereby the God's will compels them to unite the two lovers. The marriage by elopement is not encouraged in this society. It is very rare but happens when the parents objected the wishes of the two lovers.

#### **6. Death**

Aimol bury the death body in special cemeteries outside the village, and unnatural death or deaths in childbirth are universally considered signs that the deceased has failed in some way, and the corpse of such unfortunates are buried outside the cemetery. They were buried separately. When the chief of the village died, the corpse of the *Khullakpa* (chief of the village) is carried round the village before taken directly to the grave. The corpse of one who has gained honors is enclosed in a rough log coffin and kept for two days amid much drinking and feasting. When a rich man died he

was buried with many cloths and when a poor man died, he was buried with one cloth only. In addition to this they normally used to put some cooked rice, wine, a dao, meat and bow and arrow on the grave.

## 7. Festivals

There are two types of festival performed by Aimol i.e. festival before Christianity and festival after Christianity. Some of the important festivals which are performed before Christianity are; (a) *Lungkam ut* (b) *Khuong-tan* (c) *Lam-jir* and (d) *Tolai-tan*.

### (A) *Lungkam ut* (stone-erection festival)

This is a big festival which is performed by a rich man who wanted to make them popular and famous. Many groups of people collected stones and the biggest and the broadest stone is selected and is erected. Therefore this festival is known as stone-erection festival. It is celebrated for two to three days. All the famous people are invited and a big grand feast is arranged. Animal like *setak* (gayal) are killed in the festival. Dances and joy accompanied the festival.

### (B) *Khuong-tan* (beating-drum festival)

Like stone-erection festival this festival is also performed for three to four days. Only the rich man can celebrate this festival. People beat the drum in the name of rich man and offer the sound of drum to the people. Dances and joys are also performed. A grand feast consisting of local wine and rice is arranged at the end of the festival.

### (C) *Lam-jir* (road-construction festival)

This festival is performed once in a year. It is a local festival. People construct road inside and adjacent of the village. A grand feast is arranged in the village after the work is over. Night entertainment like singing, dancing is done as a part of enjoyment.

### (D) *Tolai-tan* (palanquin festival)

In this festival *tolai* (palanquin) are made and give to the people. Feasting and dancing are important events of entertainment. This festival can be performed by only the rich man of the village.

The festivals which are performed after Christianity are; (1) Christmas (2) New-Year (3) Good-Friday and (4) Crop reaping festival. All these festivals are performed in a usual way. All the festival which are performed and celebrated before Aimol became Christianity is no more performed in the present generation.

## 8. Musical Instruments

There are four traditional musical instruments of Aimol. They are;

- (i) *Khuong* (drum)
- (ii) *Rosem* (a kind of flute made of bamboo)
- (iii) *Sananta* (a kind of guitar which is used as violin)
- (iv) *Saraki* (a bull horn for producing sound)
- (v) *Dangpu* (an instrument made of bamboo)

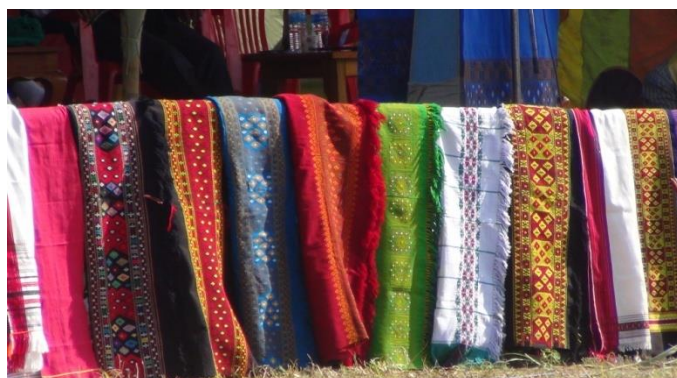
## 9. Dress

There are two kinds of dresses worn by Aimol. One is the dress worn by male and another is the dress worn by female. The dress worn by male are

- (1) Amthal (worn over the shoulders)
- (2) Ponchial (worn over the shoulders)
- (3) Rangangbuchun (worn over the shoulders)
- (4) Uikechu (worn on head as turban)

The dress worn by female are

- (1) Puonte (worn over the shoulders)
- (2) Saipuikhup (worn over the shoulders)
- (3) Sanchial (worn on the waist like dhoti)
- (4) Santur (worn on the waist like dhoti)
- (5) Khamtang (worn on the waist like dhoti)
- (6)



Different types of Aimol traditional costume

## 10. Religion

The Aimol were animistic and believed in many deities and spirits. They believed in the existence of *kho-pathian* (village deity) and *in-pathian* (house deity). They worshipped *Sailing* and *Bonglei*, protector of village, *Chahou*, god of agriculture and paddy, *Miso*, god of peace and prosperity. *Arkun*, a goddess worshipped by pregnant women for human fertility.

To cure illness and warn off diseases, *Randoi* and *Songkot* are worshipped with rituals. *Mangde* for self-protection. Success or failure in war and hunting is ascribed to the action of *Chungwan pathian* (heaven god). The clan group possesses totems of their own which is associated to the ancestry. They regarded and prayed as the gods of the clans. For instance, the god of *Chongom* is called *Jakhepshariparireng*. It is like a snake dwells in water. A goat or hen is sacrificed at the time of worship.

The present generations have adopted Christianity as its religion. It was introduced in Aimol some seventy (70) years ago.

## 11. Kinship System



The Aimol kinship network was divided into two sets of relatives that one is set through the *pa-inkuo* “father” and the other set through the *nu-inkuo* “mother”. This division and variations is replicated throughout the entire kinship down to the distant circle of the personal kindred.

The paternally and maternally related kinsman did not share equal treatment in spite of this closeness or close relation. A child is found to be closer with his parents than to his siblings, and is much closer to his close parent’s siblings. Thus relationship to the parents is much stronger than that of a parent’s siblings. The Aimol society is patrilineal i.e. the relationship is closer to the father’s line. The Aimol kinship generally is divided into three categories genealogically: *pa-insung* “paternal relatives”, *nu-insung* “maternal relatives” and *phung-insung* “close and distant relatives”.

The Aimol family is the smallest type of consanguine kin group, the members of which believed in a common ancestral origin. The patrilineal clan is traced out through unilateral descent. Even till today the Aimol tribe maintained a mutual kinship or cognitive ties and there is unity among the clans. They helped one another in any function within the same clan. They shared a strong kinship ties which helped them to maintain a firm unity.

## 12. Economic Life

The Aimol tribes live both in the plain and the hills. Agriculture is the main occupation. 60% populations are government employee. Those who live in the hills practiced jhuming cultivation. In early period, they preferred shifting cultivation. They grow vegetables, fruit and rear domestic animals of different variety, which are the main source of their income. The main agricultural products are rice, maize, arum, banana, potato, sweet potato, etc. Rice is their staple food. They rear animals like cows, buffaloes, pigs, ducks and hens, etc. of which the first three are their favorites domestic animals. The women are expert in weaving. They make cloths of various kinds. In olden days men were engaged in blacksmith works. They obtained iron from the Meiteis. Now they mainly engaged in agriculture and cutting of wood in the forest. Some people also start doing business and other contract works.

## 13. The Language

Aimol is the Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur. It has subject-object-verb (SOV) word order and pronominal marking on verb. Different word classes are formed by affixation. It has limited published books. Bible, gospel hymns have been translated into English. ‘A Descriptive Grammar of Aimol’ has been written for PhD level thesis in the Manipur University, Imphal. Some few books have also been written in Aimol language. It is informed that few speakers of the language are also found in other parts of North-East India like Tripura. The language isn’t recognized by government of Manipur for use as a medium of instruction and examination in any private and government schools of Manipur. The language has some affinities with the languages like Hmar, Hrangawl, Simte, Sukte, Malsom, Darlong, Lushai and Thadou-Kuki apart from Purum, Chothe, Chiru, Kom and Koireng. It has no script. Roman alphabet is used for writing books, hymns and journals etc. There is dialect variation from region to region. The variation is due to its geographical area. However the standard Aimol is spoken in Chandel district of Manipur. Manipuri or Meiteilon is used as lingua franca for communication with other tribe or community.

## 14. Linguistic Lineage

Sino-Tibetan

Tibeto-Burman

Kuki-Chin-Naga

Kuki-Chin

Northern

**AIMOL**

## 15. Grammatical Features

1. Gender is not grammatically marked in this language. It has natural gender.
2. Number is not grammatically significant. There is subject and predicate agreement as far as number is concerned.
3. Case relations are expressed by means of postpositions.
4. Numeral system is a decimal type. There are native ordinals.
5. The normal word order in an unmarked sentence is subject-object-verb (SOV).
6. Negation is formed by prefixation and suffixation.

## 16. Monolingualism

The monolingual speakers are not found among Aimol.

## 17. Bilingualism

Aimol is bilingual in Aimol and Meiteilon in Manipur. In addition to their mother tongue, they tend to use Manipuri, Hindi and English according to the situation or the person concerned. In this regard we can also say that they are multilingual. Fluency of English is also found among the Aimol educated person. Some can speak Hindi fluently but cannot read Hindi.

## 18. Language Attitude

The language attitude of the Aimol people towards their mother tongue is highly positive. There is great effort to maintain their language in order to preserve their identity. They have compiled a mini dictionary under Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore. They have translated Holy Bible and gospel hymns. Some of the books are also written in the mother tongue. Aimol people always try to develop their language.

## 19. Mass Media

There are a few programmes in ALL Radio Imphal. There are digital video film and album produced in Aimol language. Among the album it includes gospel also.

## 20. Language Used

Aimol people use their language at home domains and also for outside communications among themselves. When any friends or guests belonging to different language groups visit their house, they used to speak Manipuri or Meiteilon. When members of other language groups are present, they used Manipuri or Meiteilon.

## 21. Conclusion

From the study it can be concluded that Aimol is a tribe which has rich art and culture. It has proper traditional dress and musical instrument and other cultural artifacts. They have the subject-object-verb order in sentence construction. Education is also almost improved. They should try to develop their mother tongue. They have to write many books on Aimol as well as in English and Manipuri. This will enrich their literature. The most important thing that should be done for Aimol is documentation of their oral literature. It is highly in need of the hour. This will be able to preserve the ancient history of Aimol culture and this will become reference book for the younger generation of the Aimol.

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Personal Communication with Chairman, Aimol Literature Society, Manipur dated the 25th Sept 2017

Personal communication with Woman Chairman, Aimol Baptist Association, Manipur dated the 25th Sept 2017.

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