

## Khoibu Tone

Laishram Bijenkumar Singh, M.A., NET, Ph.D.

### Abstract

The present paper entitled “Khoibu Tone” is a description of the tone system of *Khoibu*, an undocumented and endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken by the Khoibu tribe. The literal meaning of this tribe is derived from ‘*khoi*’ and ‘*pu*’, where ‘*khoi*’ means ‘bee’ and ‘*pu*’ means ‘owner’. Thus the term refers to the speakers of this language as the ones who own ‘bee’, ‘beehives’ and ‘honey’ in the indigenous land of Khoibu territory. *Khoibu* is also known as *Uipo* and it belongs to the Naga Kuki group of Tibeto-Burman family (cf. Grierson LSI, Vol.-III, part-II, 1903). *Khoibu* is mostly spoken in Chandel district of Manipur. It is spoken by approximately 2800 speakers in the Machi sub-division of Chandel district, Manipur and there are eight Khoibu villages which are confined to Chandel district of Manipur which is the area where this language is spoken.

*Khoibu* is a tonal language and there are three tones in *Khoibu*, viz. rising (´), level (˘) and falling (ˋ). /ná/ ‘leaf’ /na/ ‘baby’ /nà/ ‘nose’ ; /lá/ ‘song’ /la/ ‘fragment of a yarn’ /là/ ‘a small piece’ ; /mā-tí/ ‘seed’ /mā-ti/ ‘tender tissue’ /mā-tì/ ‘salt’. In most of the cases the vowel phoneme of the first segment is level tone in disyllabic words like /kə-ná/ ‘to wear a necklace’, /kə-na/ ‘falling ill’, and /kə-nà/ ‘lacking behind’. In the case of monosyllabic words, if the syllabic structure is CV, all the vowels are long in level tones. Sandhi phenomenon in relation to tones also has been discussed illustratively with examples. Tone sandhi occurs when pronominal markers /kei-/ , /nei-/ and /a-/ are added to the monosyllabic nouns. There are three types of sandhi rules in *Khoibu*. The three sandhi rules will be illustrated with appropriate examples.

**Key words:** Tone, Khoibu, Tibeto-Burman, Tone Spreading, Tone-Sandhi

## 1. Introduction

The present paper entitled “Khoibu Tone” is a description of the tone system of *Khoibu*, an undocumented and endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken by *Khoibu* tribe. The literal meaning of this tribe is derived from ‘*khoi*’ and ‘*pu*’, where ‘*khoi*’ means ‘bee’ and ‘*pu*’ means ‘owner’. Thus the term refers to the speakers of this language as the ones who own ‘bee’, ‘beehives’ and ‘honey’ in the indigenous land of Khoibu territory. *Khoibu* is also known as *Uipo* and it belongs to the Naga Kuki group of Tibeto-Burman family (cf. Grierson’s LSI, Vol.-III, part-II, 1903). It is spoken mainly in the Machi sub-division of Chandel district which is 64 km. away from Imphal and lies in the south-eastern part of Manipur at 24°40' N Latitude and 93°50' E Longitude and its neighbors are Myanmar (Burma) on the south, Ukhrul district on the east, Churachandpur district on the south and west, and Thoubal district on the north<sup>1</sup>. According to a native speaker (our language respondent) the total population of the Khoibu is around 2800. By religion Khoibu is totally Christian. Before conversion to Christianity, Khoibu prayed to their forefathers.

The following analysis is based on a lexicon containing around 1000 words which I elicited from Mosyel Syelsaangthyel Khaling (50 years), a native speaker of Khoibu from Khamsing village, Chandel. The present paper is structured into two sections as follows: At the very first part the paper discusses the word structure, segmental phonemes and syllabic structure of Khoibu. There are 18 consonant phonemes, viz. /*p, b, t, d, c, k, p<sup>h</sup>, t<sup>h</sup>, k<sup>h</sup>, m, n, ŋ, s, l, r, w, y, h* and six vowel phonemes, /*i, e, a, ə, o, u*/. The second part deals with the tone analysis at the distinction level of high, level and low, tone spreading and tone sandhi.

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<sup>1</sup> There are eight Khoibu villages in Manipur viz. Khoibu Khullen, Biyang, Yamolching, Nungourok, Khamsing, Salemram, Thalle and Thawai. All the villages are confined to the Chandel district only. Among the villages, Khoibu-Khullen is the oldest village. Some amount of Khoibu population is also found in the pockets of Imphal city, Manipur.

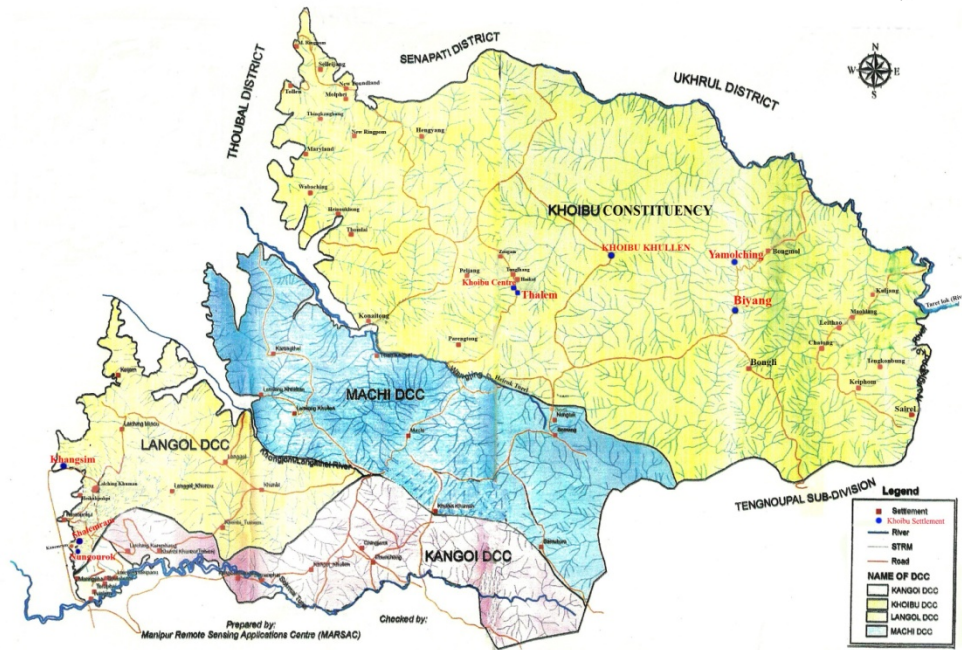


Map of India showing Manipur



Map of Manipur Showing Chandel district

DISTRICT COUNCIL KHOIBU CONSTITUENCY MAP IN RESPECT OF MACHI SUB DIVISION 2010



## 2. Word Structures

It will be worthwhile to understand first how the Khoibu words structure looks like to understand the tone in Khoibu. Here, I can give a distinctive outline for the two level of representation for Khoibu words and Khoibu morphemes. Morphologically, Khoibu morphemes are bound in nature, which means morphemes cannot be pronounced independently with a recognizable meaning and they cannot stand alone. On the other hand, Khoibu words are morphologically free; they can be pronounced meaningfully, and can stand alone. Khoibu words consist of single monosyllabic morpheme; *lù* ‘head’ is an example of Khoibu monosyllabic word. As a matter of fact most Khoibu words are made up of more than two or more morphemes forming disyllabic or polysyllabic words. This will be helpful in the analysis of tone in Khoibu as the tone bearing unit in Khoibu is the morpheme. As I have mention above, the morpheme in Khoibu are bound in nature, it is not possible to determine the tone of a Khoibu morpheme in isolation.

## 3. Segmental Phoneme and Syllabic Structure

Before I proceed directly to the Khoibu tone analysis, it will be interesting to have a look on the segmental phoneme and syllabic structure of Khoibu. Eighteen consonants are found in the five places of articulation in Khoibu as in table 1 and Khoibu has six vowel systems as in table 2.

		<i>Bilabial</i>		<i>Alveolar</i>		<i>Palatal</i>		<i>Velar</i>		<i>Glottal</i>	
		<i>vl</i>	<i>vd</i>	<i>vl</i>	<i>vd</i>	<i>vl</i>	<i>vd</i>	<i>vl</i>	<i>vd</i>	<i>vl</i>	<i>vd</i>
<i>Stops</i>	<i>Unasp.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>c</i>		<i>k</i>			
	<i>Asp.</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup></i>		<i>t<sup>h</sup></i>				<i>k<sup>h</sup></i>			
<i>Fricatives</i>				<i>s</i>						<i>h</i>	
<i>Nasals</i>			<i>m</i>		<i>n</i>				<i>ŋ</i>		
<i>Lateral</i>					<i>l</i>						
<i>Trill</i>					<i>r</i>						
<i>Semi-Vowels</i>			<i>w</i>				<i>y</i>				

Table No.1 – Khoibu consonants

	<i>Front</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Back</i>
<i>High</i>	<i>i</i>		<i>u</i>
<i>Mid</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>ə</i>	<i>o</i>
<i>Low</i>		<i>a</i>	

Table No. 2 – Khoibu Vowels

#### 4. Syllabic Structure

Khoibu syllables have the basic structure as shown in the Fig. 1. In the following Fig. 1, C<sub>1</sub> is the optional initial consonant, C<sub>2</sub> is also an optional consonant, V is an obligatory vowel nucleus and C<sub>3</sub> is an optional final consonant.

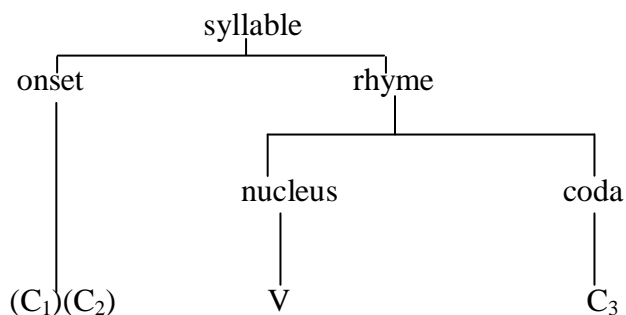


Fig. 1 - Khoibu syllable structure

Khoibu syllable can exist without an onset and coda. It means that it is not obligatory for a syllable to be well formed with an onset or a coda. There are some instances of syllable well-formed of just a vowel nucleus.

#V#	/á/	‘he’
	/i/	‘they’

The optional initial consonant in Khoibu may be a simple or a complex onset. In Khoibu there may be well formed monosyllabic words without coda which give rise to two types of syllables. It is not possible to accommodate more than two consonants on the onset position.

- 1) Simple onset (CV#)
- 2) Complex onset (CCV#).

- 1) Simple onset –

CV#	/hí/	‘blood’
	/pā:/	‘father’
	/dī:/	‘stool’

- 2) Complex onset –

CCV#	/t <sup>h</sup> rō/	‘thin’
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## 5. Tone

There are three tones in Khoibu viz. high, level and low. In order to show the three tonal distinctions, here I am providing a set of minimal pairs that demonstrate the establishment of all the three tones contrasting very distinctly.

### 5.1 High tone

High tones are marked with an acute accent ( ´ ) like /á/ in *pá* ‘father’. The high-toned vowels are articulated with a greater force of breath and are heard as tense.

#### High tone

<i>pá</i>	‘father’
<i>ní</i>	‘you’
<i>wá</i>	‘chicken’

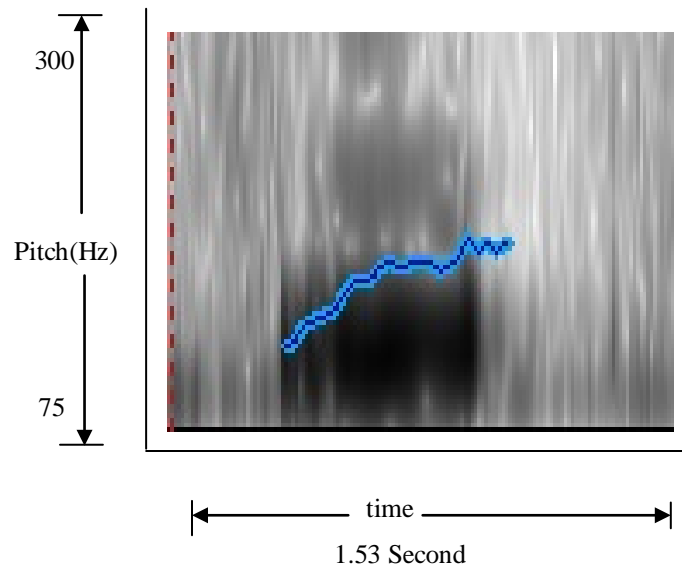


Fig. 2 - Pitch pattern of an open monosyllabic word with high-tone: *ní* ‘female-in-laws’

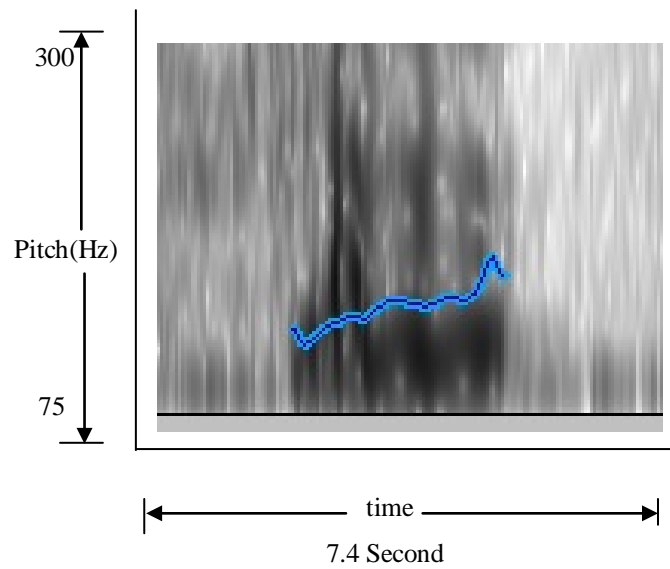


Fig. 3 Pitch pattern of closed monosyllabic word with high-tone: *lám* ‘road’

## 5.2 Mid Tone

The mid tone is marked as (˘) as /ā/ in *nā* ‘baby’. The mid tone can occur in both open and closed syllable.

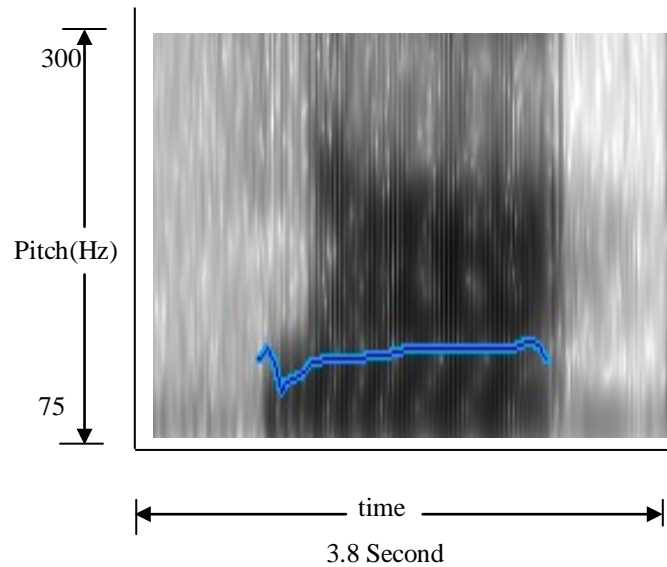


Fig. 4 - Pitch pattern of an open monosyllabic word with mid-tone: *nā* ‘baby’

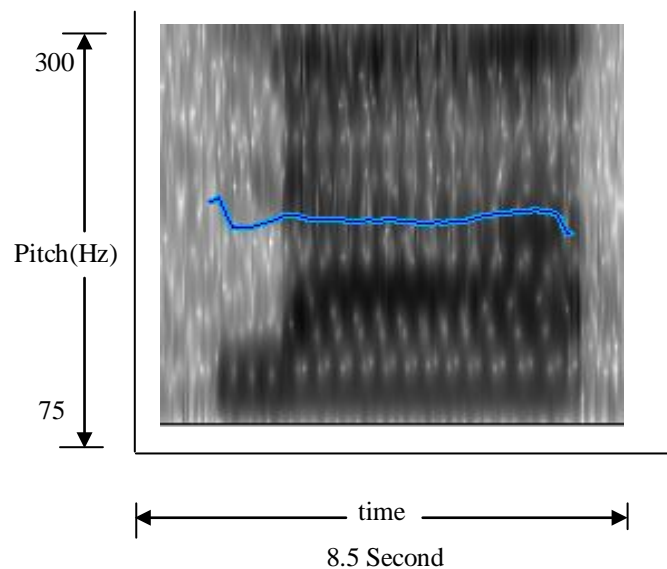


Fig. 5 Pitch pattern of closed monosyllabic word with high-tone: *kōṅ* ‘buttock’.



### 5.3 Low tone

The low tone is marked with grave accent ( ` ) as *wà* ‘chicken’. The low tone also can occur in both open and closed syllables.

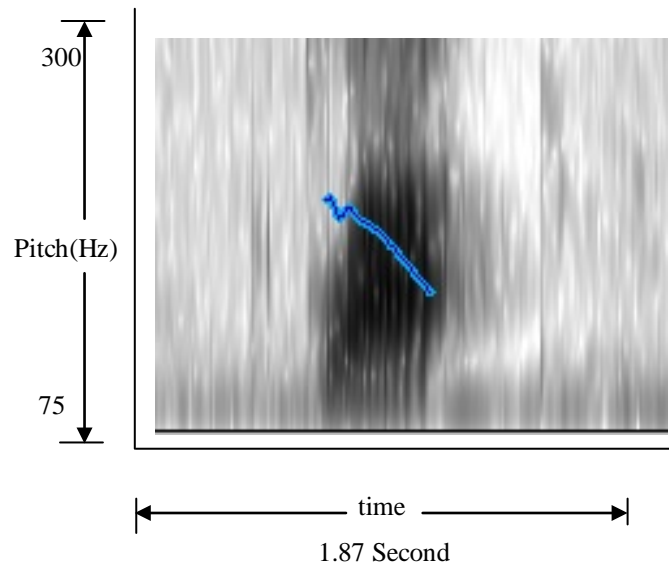


Fig. 6 Pitch pattern of closed monosyllabic word with low-tone: *wà* ‘buttock’

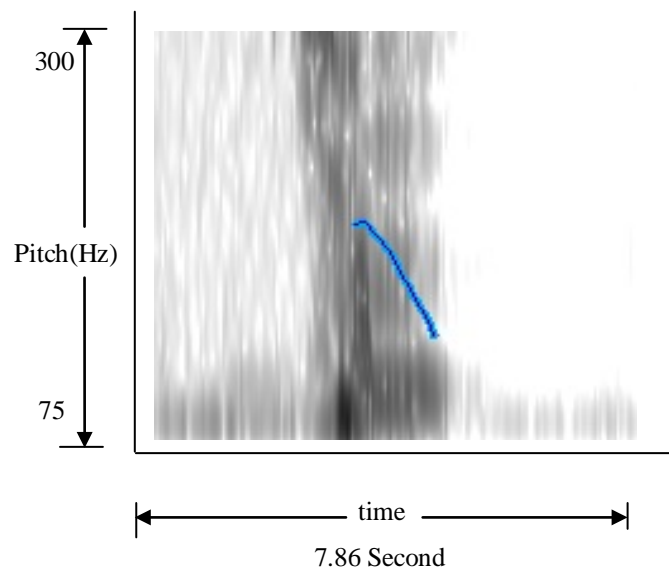


Fig. 7 Pitch pattern of closed monosyllabic word with low-tone: *sàm* ‘hair’.

## 5.4 Tone Contrasting Pairs

In order to have a clear vision on the tone of Khoibu, here I am providing sets of minimal triplets demonstrating the three tone level in the following examples.

Minimal Pairs of open syllable contrasting tone in three pitch level in monosyllabic words.

High tone	Mid tone	Low tone
/ná/ 'leaf'	/nā/ 'baby'	/nà/ 'nose'
/lá/ 'song'	/lā/ 'fragment of a yarn'	/là/ 'a small piece'
/cá/ 'child'	/cā/ 'tea'	/cà/ 'paddy'

Minimal Pairs of tone contrast in disyllabic words.

High tone	Mid tone	Low tone
/kē-nám/ 'to push'	/kē-nām/ 'filthy smell'	/kē-nəm/ 'hot massage'
/mē-tí/ 'seed'	/mē-tī/ 'tender tissue'	/mē-tì/ 'salt'
/kē-rán/ 'sporadic'	/kē-rān/ 'to stop wild fire'	/kē-rən/ 'to stop quarreling'

In disyllabic words the first segments bears mid tone in most of the cases. And the tone is decided by the last vowel i.e. the tone bearing unit in a disyllabic word is decided by the final vowel.

## 5.5 Tone spreading

If a root occurs in a word with more than one tone bearing unit, the tone of the root is spread to every unit to the right of the root that does not already have a tone. Adjacent high tones trigger downstep and adjacent low tones trigger upstep.

Lexical level -	H   <i>səm</i>	'hair'	L   <i>səm</i>	'dress'
Concatenation -	H   <i>tə səm sə</i>	'that hair'	L   <i>tə səm sə</i>	'that dress'
Tone spread -	H / \ (dashed) <i>tə səm sə</i>	'that hair'	L / \ (dashed) <i>tə səm sə</i>	'that dress'
Downstep -	H H-   \ <i>tə səm sə</i>	'that hair'	not applicable	
Upstep -	not applicable		L L+   \ <i>tə səm sə</i>	'that dress'

The minus(-) sign signifies a downscaled tone and the (+) plus sign signifies for an augmented tone.

## 5.6 Tone Sandhi

### Sandhi rule

The analysis reveals that the tone sandhi occurs in all the three tones viz. high, mid and low. The so formed sandhi will be marked in bold letters. There are three types of sandhi rules in Khoibu.

**Rule No. 1:** This rule affects open syllables with a high tone. When an open monosyllable with high tone is prefixed with pronominal markers, the high tone becomes mid tones and the vowel got lengthens in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular number, 1<sup>st</sup> person plural number and 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural number as shown in below.

**Rule: H → M**

/cá/ ‘child’

Singular

Plural

*keicá* ‘my child’

*kəyaica:* ‘our child’

*neicá* ‘your child’

*nəyaica:* ‘your child’

*aca:* ‘his child’

*ayaicá* ‘their child’

**Rule No. 2 :** This rule affects open syllables with a mid tone syllables. When an open monosyllable with mid tone is prefixed with pronominal markers, the mid tone becomes low tone in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular number, 1<sup>st</sup> person plural number and 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural number as shown in below.

**Rule: M → L**

/ha:/ ‘tooth’

Singular

Plural

*keiha:* ‘my tooth’

*kəyaihà* ‘our tooth’

*neihà:* ‘your tooth’

*nəyaihà* ‘your tooth’

*ahà* ‘his tooth’

*ayaihà:* ‘their tooth’

**Rule No. 3:** This rule affects close syllabic words with a low tone. When an close monosyllable with low tone is prefixed with pronominal markers, the low tone becomes high tone in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular number, 1<sup>st</sup> person plural number and 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural number as shown in below.

**Rule: L → H**

*/səm/* ‘hair’

*kei səm* ‘my hair’

*nei səm* ‘your hair’

*a-səm* ‘his hair’

*kəyaisəm* ‘our hair’

*nəyaisəm* ‘your hair’

*ayaisəm* ‘their hair’

## 6. Conclusion

As per the analysis made in the above sections Khoibu being a Tibeto-Burman language shows existence of tones in three level of pitches viz. High, mid and low which has been marked (´), (˘) and (̀) respectively. In the first sections it has been shown that Khoibu segmental phonemes has 24, out of which 18 are consonant which is found at five places of articulation and six vowel system. In addition to this word structure and syllable structure of Khoibu has also been highlighted. Only a single vowel phoneme can exhibit a syllable in this language. The phenomenon of tone spreading has also been shown and at the last section tone sandhi has been described illustrating with the examples inventing three sandhi rules.

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Laishram Bijenkumar Singh, M.A., NET, Ph.D.  
NTS  
Central Institute of Indian Languages  
Mysore 570006  
Karnataka  
India  
[bjenkumar1@gmail.com](mailto:bjenkumar1@gmail.com)