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# FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

The North- East Indian states which are widely known as eight sisters (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura) share international borders with the countries like Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The region is the repository of a pulsating socio-cultural mosaic which is both vibrant and promising. The region has become strategically important from the point of view of society, politics, economy, language and history. According to the 2011 census, there are 45486784 people inhabiting in the states of North-East India. The population strength constitutes about 3.75% of the total population of the country. The people of North-East India belong to various ethnic groups like Australoid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid. They are essentially the speakers of Tibeto-Burman, Siamese-Chinese, Austroasiatic, Indo-Aryan and Tai groups of languages. Socio-culturally as well as linguistically, the region exhibits a huge diversity having a distinct lifestyle, separate languages and ethnicity aspiring for individual socio-political / socio-linguistic identity. Despite their individualistic differences and distinctness they also exhibit commonness in terms of their ethnicity and cultural heritage. Though the communities of North-East Indian states contribute to the formation of the composite culture and history of the country, they (mostly tribal communities) are still underrepresented and the region is still underdeveloped in terms of health, education and economy. The reasons of such underdevelopment are varied. A wide range of problems like poverty, poor health condition, lack of connectivity/road ways, dearth of power supply, unemployment, illiteracy, border insurgency, drug trafficking, identity crisis are a reality of the day. The program for the development of the communities of North-East India started with the inception of the First Five-Year Plan (1951-56). Provisions have been made in the Indian constitution for the implementation of the developmental programs of the communities, especially the tribal communities of the region. But the proposed developmental program is yet to touch the fundamental /basic rung of the social hierarchy till date, even after six decades of the formulation of the plan. The different measures/policies that have been taken into account for the developmental purpose have turned out to be partial in practice and in most cases, to counter insurgency only. It is a matter of grave concern for the country that until and unless the true development of the communities of the region can be attained, the country will continue to suffer from lack of peace and security which will ultimately hamper the development of the nation as a whole. Therefore, exploration of the potential of the region in respect to natural wealth, culture, language and heritage across time and space needs to be considered fundamental to the welfare program of the region. A sustained program should aim at reviewing the existing system adopted for the development, the lacunae therein along with an integrated effort to adopt new methodologies to deal with the issue. Practical findings /observations need implementation within stipulated time period. The maintenance of equanimity or equilibrium with man and nature should be considered integral to the efforts.

In order to meditate upon a single topic, i.e., North-East India, the present volume combines two issues of the journal (2016: June & December, Vol.2: No.1&2). This special issue is an outcome of the two events— a one-day Seminar on 'North-East India: Different Windows on Interdisciplinary Aspects' held on March 8, 2014 followed by a two-day Conference on 'Aspects of Community Development in the North-East Indian States' held during December 10-11, 2014.Therefore, the present volume is an attempt to present some of the selected deliberations carried out on these events by different scholars, addressing the issues of under development of the region and highlighting positively the required developmental activities for the communities of the region. Both the strength and weakness of this part of the country have been discussed with importance. It is believed that the present document will be able to make us understand the relevance of the sustained developmental activities for the communities (especially minor communities) of North-East India in the days to come.

The eminent scholars like Shyamal Dutta, Gautam Neogi, Swapan Kumar Banerjee, Lipi Ghosh, Dilip Coomer Ghose, Shyam Sundar Bhattacharya, Ranjana Ray amongst other well known scholars shared their rich experience and understanding of North-East region (henceforth NER) of India essentially from the social, historical and linguistic perspectives.

Rajat Kanti Das in his valedictory address *Understanding North-East India from People's Perspective: The need for a Concerted Inter-disciplinary Approach* focuses on the importance of cultural diversity and bio-genetic variation of the region. The discussion highlights the importance of inter-disciplinary approach to understand NER in respect to time, space and identity in the context of growing national consciousness.

Soumen Sen in his special lecture entitled *Ecobalance, Growth Strategies, Ideal Past and Transformed Future: The North-East Indian Response* points out the necessity to investigate the means for uniform development in the context of ecological and cultural diversities. The significance of folklore to understand the 'ideal past' and 'to design a transformed future' is highlighted in the essay and an ethnographic understanding is claimed to be the most pragmatic approach for the developmental aspects of NER.

In his paper *Material Aspects of Folkloric Traditions and Knowledge at the Face of Modernization: Some observations from Arunachal Pradesh,* Jayanta Sarkar discusses the traditional technology of the tribal communities like Adi, Nishi and Tagin of Arunachal Pradesh and points out how the traditional knowledge and wisdom are losing ground with the influence of modern mechanical technology and changing social structure.

Satya Brata Chakrabarti in his key-note address *Situating Tribes in North-East India: A Discursive Note,* draws a brief contour of the evolution of the social formation of NER keeping in view the historical, political and socio-economic perspectives of the region.

Swapna Bhattacharya (Chakraborti) in her valedictory address *Importance of Studying Myanmar Culture and History to Understand India's Northeast Region with Special Reference to Arunachal Pradesh of India,* discusses the Indo-Myanmar cultural continuum and the importance of studying the history of the communities across the border— a requisite for the development of NER.

Samir Kumar Das in his inaugural speech *Being Face to Face with Reality: Evolving Research Strategies for India's Northeast,* suggests the necessity for transcending the boundaries of the disciplines in order to understand the grass roots reality of NER.

Amlan Jyoti Biswas in his paper *Level and Pattern of Consumer Expenditure in Buffer Villages of Nokrek and Manas Biosphere Reserve* examines the consumption pattern of the villages of Nokrek and Manas Biosphere Reserves and compares it with that of the rest of the country. The study reveals an interesting observation that the pattern of consumer expenditure of these villages is higher than average rural India, probably due to their close association with the forest, subsistence agriculture and economic diversification.

In his paper *Disease Ecology and Morbidity Pattern among Forest Dwellers in North East India,* Sumit Mukherjee traces the relationship of ecological and cultural dimensions of major diseases evident in Nokrek Biosphere Reserve and Manas Biosphere Reserve of Meghalaya and Assam respectively. Disease ecology has been correlated with anthropogenic variations.

Gorky Chakraborty in his paper *The Look East Policy and Northeast India: Rubric, Rhetoric and Reality* critically examines the nature and extent of implementation of 'look east policy' from the socio- economic viewpoint in the context of the South-East Asian countries.

In his paper *Community Development in North East India: Issues and Challenges,* Tarun Bikash Sukai examines the socio-economic profile, human development index, movements, GSDP, trade performance and Government initiative, etc. in relation to NER and attempts for a comparative assessment with the rest of the country. The study speaks of the suggestive measures to facilitate governance, implementation, co-ordination, learning and quality enhancement in this connection.

Sumahan Bandyopadhyay in his paper *Perpetuation of Folk Craft and its Development in Sikkim: An Investigation into the Role of Monastery* studies the role of ideology in cultural production, the role of religious institutions in craft and its significance in the community development with reference to Sikkim. The investigation also focuses the need for balancing the perpetuating tradition and market realities.

Srijani Bhattacharjee in her paper *Man and Nature: The Place of Forest in Pre-Colonial Adi Society* traces the importance of forest in the life and culture of the communities of North-East India with special reference to Adi community. The exploitation of forests during colonial and post colonial periods and the imbalance created thereof in the ecology, hindering the overall development of NER, have been dealt with significantly.

In her paper *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Galo: A Preliminary Observation of the Oral Narrations and Folk Songs,* Bina Gandhi Deori discusses how the oral narratives, the indigenous knowledge and values of the communities of NER can be viewed analytically to develop an account of the history of these communities of North-East India.

In her paper *Role of Indian Museums in Safeguarding Intangible Heritage of North East India: A Proactive Approach,* Shilpi Roy highlights the importance of preserving the intangible heritage of NER in the museums and urges the need for proper identification,

documentation and dissemination of the cultural heritage of the region. While discussing about the strategy and planning required for the museums, Roy provides us with a list of Indian museums holding rich collection of intangible heritage of North-East region.

Garima Sarkar in her paper *The Story of Women in the Northeast versus India: Lessons to be Learnt from Each Other* attempts to analyze the status of women in two states of NER, Sikkim and Manipur and compares the situation with that of the rest of the country. Change of the mindset in order to bring gender equality in the country is significantly highlighted.

Shiladitya Basu traces the socio-historical journey of the Tai-Ahom community across the time period in his paper *Tai –Ahom Community of Assam: Historical to Contemporary*. The revivalist attitude of the community in relation to language and culture is discussed at length.

Sriparna Pathak Raimedhi in her paper *Prospect of Tourism Promotion and Revenue Generation in North East India: A Lesson Learnt in Yunnan, China* deals with the importance of learning from the mode of promotion of tourism in Yunnan both for cultural exchange and for revenue generation as a part of development of NER. While discussing, she highlights the lacunae in the Indian history (which is taught to the Indian students as a part of their curriculum) regarding the ignorance of the socio-political history of NER of India.

Shreyashi Chaudhuri and Kuntal Narayan Chaudhuri in their paper *The Apatanis: An Insight into the Cultural Heritage of a Unique Agrarian Community of Arunachal Pradesh, North-east India* investigate into the culture, language and belief systems of the Apatani community and the role of women in the traditional micro culture. It is pointed out that gender inequality which is equally prevalent in this society as in the societies of the rest of the country stands as a hindrance to various aspects of social development.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention that the book —— Ghose (Roy), Archita. 2015. *India's "Look East" Policy: The China Tangle*. Kolkata: Minerva reviewed by Samir Kumar Das is incorporated in this volume by virtue of its topic.

The present volume is a humble attempt to bring into light some relevant issues of the much discussed NER of India. We would like to conclude with a hope that our endeavor will be able to enthuse about further exploration and development in the context of North-East India.

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# UNDERSTANDING NORTH-EAST INDIA FROM PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE : THE NEED FOR A CONCERTED INTER-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH*

RAJAT KANTI DAS

For a long time North-East India was tagged with the Eastern Zone of India. Now it is treated as a separate Zone. The bifurcation, accentuated by the formation of states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh is significant as it underlies the importance of North-East India as a separate entity having a viable social, political and economic representation in the context of the whole country. North-East India has always been a happy haunting ground for the natural scientists, population biologists, social scientists including anthropologists and scholars from the fields of language and literature, because of the rich diversity of cultures and languages on one hand and a considerable degree of bio-genetic variation on the other. Since North-East India manifests a considerable range of diversity in terms of human populations and social formations, it can be visualised as variations across time. In order to have a clear understanding of these variations, taking an ecological view may be necessary, where adaptive interactions among bio-cultural and environmental variables could be properly assessed. North-East India provides ample opportunities for carrying out such an exercise.

At the cultural level, North-East India may be looked at from two angles - cultural multiplicity and cultural specificity. The region is characterised by multiple cultural expressions which contribute to a mosaic of cultures forming a pattern. Again, every culture is specific and each demonstrates the 'broad general principles of selecivity and ordering' in clear terms. As cultures are understood as historically particular, the relations between different cultures become a matter of inductive generalization rather than deductive reductionism, which implies a commitment to *relativism*. When cultures are treated as systems of socially transmitted behavior pattern, they serve to relate human communities to their ecological settings. Indeed, a geographical-ecological approach is needed to understand the ecological dimension of cultural existence. It is also time to review the role of culture in the changing socio-political situation. In this exercise one has to go beyond seeing culture from a purely social structural principle. Rather, an approach built around inter-community communication system is called for. After all, the very concept of society as a discrete, structurally bound, independent unit is becoming increasingly problematic. With it, culture

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* The Lecture was delivered as valedictory address in the one-day Seminar on "North-East India : Different Windows on Interdisciplinary Aspects" held on March 8, 2014 organized by Kolkata Society for Asian Studies.

as a separate entity conditioned by socia1 structure has not found much favour. Arturo Escobar's (1995) observation seems to be relevant here.

> "Societies are not the organic wholes with structures and laws that we thought them to be until recently, but fluid entities with structures on all sides formed by, migration, border crossing and economic forces; cultures are no longer bound, discrete and localized but deterritorialized and subjected to multiple hybridization; similarity, nature can no longer be seen as an essential principle and independent category, and independent domain of intrinsic value of truth, but as the object of constant reinvention, especially by unprecedented forms of techno-science; and finally, nobody really knows where the economy begins and ends."

The distinctiveness of a particular tribal culture assumes, meaning for the concerned group to the extent that it uses culture for a specific purpose and, more often than not, the original purpose turns into a political exercise. That culture is a spontaneous, almost unconscious expression of collective feelings and sentiments may sound rather unreal. Even in the case of tribal people concentrating only on a cultural pattern formed by the ethos or sentiments of moral nature may not be a profitable exercise. If we accept that the interaction between "life" and "culture" is basically unequal, then the question of its real life exposition is rather limited. In the present situation culture may simply be viewed as a *medium* or an *environment* of the constituting dynamic of human purpose. In North-East India, political representation of cultural values has a justification far beyond the limits of a society, the correct assessment of which necessitates adoption of an approach marked by participation of all social science disciplines.

The role of culture in political representation needs to be properly investigated. These days the dictum of 'culture of politics' is frequently invoked. This, however, does not mean that culture as such has no social relevance today. Contrary to that, the political representation of cultural values assumes a social justification, which sometimes calls for reinterpretation and revival of old values. But these actions are far from spontaneous ensuring of wholehearted participation of all members of the community. Reinterpretation of tribal customs and values is the handiwork of a select group, who could be equated with an emergent elite group. For all practical purposes, the same group assumes the character of a class simply because of the fact that its members are politically active, educationally well-equipped and economically better off. Social stratification of some form has now entered into the core of tribal social structure. The politically dominating section among the members of a tribal group might not have crystallized into a 'ruling class' as envisaged by Marx, but it has certainly imbibed some of his ideas even if it is conceded that they have not consciously taken such a stand. Incidentally, the Marxian ideas of 'ruling class' focus on 'the class which is ruling *material* of society', which is 'at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force'. It also signifies 'the class which has the means of material production at its disposal', and 'has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production, are subject to it.' Whether the

tribal elitist group in its present form could be considered as the 'ruling material force of society' is debatable, but in the social action turned political action the group demonstrates unmistakable sign of authoritative control. They could mobilise support for pursuing an ethnic line and in this exercise they rely more on 'political, material and territorial appeals for self-determination'. What is apparent is that a form of ethnic stereotype has started working in the consciousness of different groups of people in North-East India. Such a stereotype goes a long way 'in anchoring themselves within a conventional and secure social landscape' (Cerment, D. 2002). Of course, the social landscape today is far from a secure one, but the passion for pursuing an ethnic line persists, in some cases with renewed vigour. One has to look into this emerging phenomenon from different perspectives.

In a pluralistic situation as is prevalent in North-East India, distribution of political power at the community level, or the access to the sources of political power involves the question of size and numerical dominance as also creating a 'political culture' of their own, emphasising their distinctiveness in the lifeways and organizational pattern. Again, within the framework of 'tribe' there has been a marked increase in the number of polities, which cut across the whole range of tribal system. There is also a contradiction between the domestic units represented by villages or village-based social groups and the overall tribal system of control. The problem of representation often gets complicated because of trans-border connections. As a result of direct intervention of politics in determining the conditions of social reproduction, there have been indications that the tribal system is probably heading for reproduction of class relations. But ethnic conflicts which have been sweeping North-East India for quite sometime cannot be explained only in terms of antagonistic class relations. In the context of 'Secessionist Ethnic Conflict in South and Southeast Asia', David Carment (2003) states,

> "With respect to policy it can be said that policy options on managing secessionist ethnic conflict depend on the explanations we accept for the cause of conflict. If one emphasises root causes (for example, mass mobilisation, intra-elite competition, primordialism or relative deprivation), the list of solutions would include partition, power sharing, democratisation, constitutional entrenchment of ethnic and minority rights, proportional division of key offices, mutual vetos and so on. On the other hand, if one emphasises dynamic interactions within a given conflict, then for finding solutions focus would have to be on first evaluating those processes (primarily the constraints and opportunities available to leaders in using force against minorities) and then taking early and preventive action."

While both the approaches have their justifications, they tend to give an impression of oversimplifying the root causes of conflicts in a manner suggestive of the stand taken by some specialists in the field that conflicts are very much amenable to management in the ordinary sense of the term. Ethnic conflicts call for deeper understanding and probe since they are an inseparable part of a group's existence. Suppession or containment of an ethnic conflict does not actually signal the end of it, although a nation's interest will be safeguarded

as long as there is no external outburst of it. For a systematic understanding of North-East Indian situation efforts should particularly be made to identify the category of societal variables in the study of ethnic group relations of which power, access to societal rewards and the political nature of the society are the key components. The situation prevailing in North-East India has to be linked with the dynamics of change. To understand the process of change, more emphasis is now given on formal institutions and consequently, social behaviours and cultural experience of the individual community members are rather neglected. While analysing culture, social organization and Asian identity in Urban East Africa, Campbell (1999) makes a valid point. He observes,

> "an emphasis on formal institutions also ignores the manner in which the various traditions and social identities have been reproduced, particularly the struggles which individuals are engaged in to ensure personal survival and cultural continuity."

Here the role of ideologies deserves mention. Though ideologies contribute to cultural constructions, these are not to be taken as 'timeless creation'. With regard to culture, there has now been a shift from 'psycho - social perspective' to 'constructionist' design. The interpretative part of cultural description reflects the deliberate attempt to develop a pre - conceived design on the part of the cultural analyst. The larger question of group identity is involved with it. Often, studies in North-East India follow a pattern where a number of' issues are taken together in an integrated way with a view to see their cumulative effects. For example, environmental issues and rights of indigenous tribal peoples are seen together, suggesting that the two are very much interlinked. As Tiplut Nongbri (2003) maintains,

> "The tripartite connection between development, environmental degradation and ethnic - cum - environmental conflict has raised pertinent questions about the relevance of our development policies and the neglect of ecological issues in social research."

A detailed analysis of the issues raised demands adoption of an inter-disciplinary approach of a bigger scale.

It is generally understood in some quarters that social analysis brings to bear the conceptual and research techniques of non-economic social science and it should be employed to clarify the social and behavioural mechanisms of development and change. But there is also a need for good and quantifiable social analysis for development and it arises from the nature of economic development itself. From the behavioural point of view, people's economic behaviour is not solely determined by their economic rationality, profit-making, markets, or macroeconomic parameters, but also by a host of socio-cultural variables and political aspiration level of different groups. North-East India provides an ideal platform for combining the economic and non-economic social science methods of enquiry, where economic sphere cannot easily be delinked from the spheres of culture, society, ethnicity and politics. So ultimately social analysis is to be added to economic analysis and by doing so it may be possible to reveal both the potential of development in a specific locale or context and the means of realizing this potential into practice. The specific context may refer to a specific local group,

a community, a tribe, an ethnic group, a village, a peasantry, an urban enclave , a migrant population and even an alienated group. All these forms make their presence in North-East India in unmistakable terms. Undoubtedly, there is a wide range of variation in this region both in the form of geographical or physical landscape and socio-cultural formations. The historians working here now take cognizance of the local and regional formations. For the elaboration of new concepts of time, space and identity, all the social science disciplines should join hands together for a comprehensive understanding of the fast changing situation. Let me give just one example. Contemporary migrants are now described in terms of border theory, transculturation, transnationalization, historical contact process, creolization, hybridity, diaspora and diasporic communities, to name just a few. A number of perspectives are involved here, which will require the participation of disciplines like economics, history, sociology, anthropology, demography, political science, geography and even linguistics. There is another dimension added by literature. The novelist Forster (1984: Quoted from Rapport and Overing) once said that only the novelist appeared determined to accrue a fuller knowledge, and seek out 'the hidden life at its source'. In a highly sensitive, culturally conscious and ethnically surcharged North-East India it may not be easy for a social scientist to penetrate, into that 'hidden life'. Still, the argument of the novelist that the methods of social science touch only 'the exterior surface' of social life may not always hold true. Not only anthropologists, a number of social scientists coming from different disciplines have taken recourse to participant observation, close living and symbolic communication to come nearer to the people. Novelists may add another dimension to the whole exercise of exploring various expressions of individual mind. Cohen, A.P. (1994) even goes a step further. According to him, in some respects novelists in the past could deal better than social scientists with 'the subtleties, inflections and varieties of individual consciousness which are correlated by the categorical masks'. By 'categorical masks' Cohen actually refers to masks of membership in social and cultura1 groups. This particularly applies to North-East India. It offers an opportunity to narrow down the gap between idyllic idioms and empirical realities. The common focus is on social life, which includes its processual nature, its perspectival and plural quality, and the part played in its constitution and reconstitution by the individual agencies. These are concerns of all social science disciplines including those carrying a literary tradition. North-East India is probably the ideal place for all these disciplines to share their experiences and knowledge base to unfold the real life situation and to get a feel of the ethos that serve as the motivating force in the social living of the peoples of the region. The justification for such an exercise rests on the people's quest for economic development vis-à-vis the heterogeneity of ethnic identities amidst growing national consciousness.

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# ECOBALANCE, GROWTH STRATEGIES, IDEAL PAST AND TRANSFORMED FUTURE: THE NORTH-EAST INDIAN RESPONSE*

SOUMEN SEN

The ecological movement, with increased public awareness of environmental issues, is distinctly a contemporary agenda. These movements, based on anxieties for the loss of environment-friendly existence and habitat, share a disenchantment with the priorities of modern societies that seek to master nature in the interest of increased growth, expanded market and profit. This agenda of growth has been expounded well by formar Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohon Singh, in his vision 'North East 2020': "Full advantage may be taken of the Look East Policy of the Government of India. ASEAN markets provide big opportunities for NER, particularly in areas such as promotion of horticulture, floriculture and medicinal herbs. Affinity in the cultural background will make our products acceptable and saleable once the connectivity is improved."[1] Interpreters find in this 'vision' a suggestion for exploring the possibility of producing commodities easily marketable in ASEAN markets and building infrastructural support for the purpose. Cultural affinities are seen only as a means to an end and add to the 'acceptability' and 'salability' of North east's products…. Human movements are not envisaged as a means of addressing some of the tangled ethnic and identity problems..." (Das, S. K. 2008: 152)

The anxieties seem to be almost similar to those responsible for the agitational movements calling for eco-consciousness. Sharing a 'disenchantment' with priorities in the growth strategies looking for expanded markets and profits, eco-conscious movements began to develop. The movement-leaders were apprehensive of increasing global damage that might be brought by mindless destruction of eco-balance following the fast pace of the so called 'growth'. The floating of Green peace or Green Parties, the save Narmada movement, etc. are the few examples.

It all began with an initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural Organization (UNESCO), when it invited Sir Julian Huxley to head a programme of reviewing and making recommendations on the wildlife sanctuaries in eastern and central Africa. Stuart A. Marks gives us a graphic report[2] on the initiative of Huxley to identify the problems and the possible solutions. "Huxley mentions the 'alarming increase in organized poaching, (and) the equally alarming increase in population.' These factors, together with state-of-the-art methods for controlling tsetse flies and diseases in livestock (removing

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wild life from vast areas through shooting), administrative inclinations toward technological and agricultural development over practical endeavors with wild animals in their natural habitats, the monetization of 'tribal' economies, were adversely stacked against the survival of the continent's natural endownments of fauna and flora… Huxley sought to frame this problem in objective terms : 'The ecological problem is fundamentally one of balancing resources against human needs, both in the short and in the long term. It must be related to a proper evaluation of human needs, and it must be based on resource conservation and resource use, including optimum land use and conservation of the habitat.' Ecology was 'the science of interrelations.' For Huxley and others like him the balance in those relationships was oriented towards the past, …the 'original ecosystem', which 'has suffered vast damages at the hands of man" (Marks, 1994:113-14).

Huxley might have made his observations on African experience, but it was realized soon that the problem was global. By the fourth quarter of the last century, thinkers and activists alike have shown themselves adept at adopting a Green agenda and developing alternative sources of power, for the possibility of lesser damage to the ecosystem. They felt that a global problem needs a global response. Being conscious of the connections across ecological, economic and political orders, they preferred discovering a language and strategy that will "make radical ecology true radical".[3]

The drive of these demands and movements has been well explained by Peter Brooker, "Ecology derives from the Greek, *oikos,* signifying the unity of NATURE (including human, animal and plant life) and science. Arguably, environmentalist and ecological movements are concerned to make good this original meaning in a condition of harmony and equivalence when nature in its different senses will be free of the alienation and exploitation wrought by the abuse of science and technology" (Brooker : 83)

But how? That is a grave question. One answer will be found, as environmentalists envisage, in re-investigating the paradigms and postulations for ' uniform' development irrespective of both environmental and cultural diversities. What should be done is designing the policy and strategy of 'development' in terms of the "Kinds of Society"[4] or "The Total relationship between man and the world around him"?[5]

Even with these perspectives, the questions 'how', remains unsolved. The idea is not new; the ancient had also understood it well and prescribed strategies in myths and tales. But can adherence to those principles be operative, to day? For instance, the myth, the most significant narrative the ancients had produced, by tracing mythically a relationship between the cosmos and the world around, "are reflections not so much of how things came to be, but how they should be, or how they should remain" (Csapo, E. 2005:143). Investigators, therefore, defined a myth as a 'charter of beliefs', what we get from the noted anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. His classic statement of the function of myth in his short book, *Myth in Primitive Society* (1926), claims that "an intimate connection exists between the word, the mythos, the sacred tale of a tribe, on the one hand, and their ritual acts, the moral

deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities, on the other" (1954:96). He maintains further that "myth, in fact, is not an idle rhapsody… but a hard-working, extremely important cultural force"..., "a narrative told in satisfaction of practical requirements", which "contains practical rules for the guidance of man", and " a vital ingredient of practical relation to the environment". (97,101,147).

Myths, to the ancients, were, "the lore of essential core"[6], a belief system, the ideology based on a world view, that taught people to adjust and establish " a practical relation with the environment." Folklorists know that myths, legends and tales, the three major catagories of folk literature, though fantastic or fictional, release the suppressed tensions in the society. So the researchers search for the context as well as the text. Calling attention to various functional roles of folklore, folklorists find, as William Bascom found, that "A tale is not a dictated text with interlinear translation, but a living recitation delivered to a responsive audience for such cultural purposes as reinforcement of custom and taboo, release of aggressions through fantasy, pedagogical explanations of the natural world, and application of pressures for conventional behaviour." (Dorson, R. M. 1972:21).

All the tales, are, therefore, socially relevant narratives, and contain prescriptions for appropriate acts to negotiate with nature and surroundings, through customs and taboos. Tales, specially the mythical narratives, present metaphorical graphs for building the abacus to act as the base for the architrave, the social frames, for a sound structure. These can be described as social ideology or philosophy for planning a sound future, regulating the present, with lessons from the past.

This has been successfully pursued to counter aggression from outside, and subversion from within till large scale aggression had happened in the times called modern. Globally this had happened in a fast pace with colonization. The independent states, following the throwing out of the colonial baggage, began suffering from a paradox, both political and developmental. For instance, as K. C. Baral, rightly points out, "A tribal from Northeast India struggles to find his/her moorings being caught in the conflicts between multiple structures of power and authority. If the Indian state with its avowed policy of democratization of the tribal polity and promotion of protective discrimination and economic empowerment through development makes efforts at integration of the people with the mainstream, the militants resist strongly such moves propagating separateness, promising the people the possibility of romanticized sovereign tribal homeland." (Baral, K. C. 2006 : 5).

It is true, the tales and customs of a community, big or small, tell of distinct ethno-cultural identity and it is not only the militant groups but many intellectuals share the anxieties of losing their distinct identity base in the face of possible damage to both the natural and social environment due to the changes brought in the course of so-called development. This anxiety seems to be real to them when, as Kobena Mercer puts it, "something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (1994:259). This doubt is expressed, in very clear terms, by an Ao Naga poet and academician

Temsula Ao in one of her essays, "The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities they embody, the loss of distinctive identity markers does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become more brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. Globalization in this sense will eventually reduce identity to anonymity" (2006:7).

And, with this anxiety, Temsula Ao wants to revisit the world of ancient lore, "the lore of essential core", "To redraft history", in her poems, called " Songs from the Other Life";

These songs
From the other life
Long lay mute
In the confines
Of my restive mind
Unrelenting in their urging
For new vocabulary
To redraft history
They now resonate
In words of new
Discernment
To augment the lore
Of our essential core. (2007.b)

What Temsula Ao calls "The Lore of Essential Core," or the 'lore' received from the ancients, is in essence the knowledge system, both cognitive and prescriptive. It once prepared a people for building a society with a distinct identity. It told all – the history, science, social norms, etc., and prepared the members of the group to know of an 'ideal past' and the method for designing a blue print for a 'transformed future'. In simple words, this knowledge is a set of constructs, however imaginary they may appear, that a society gives to itself to grapple the problems of survival, everyday living and future build-ups.

Thus, a strong literary tradition has emerged in North-East India which poignantly articulates the contesting trends between development and environment; those essentially intersect with each other. The ecopoetic/ecocritic genre of literature shows anxiety about the loss of folklore tradition and changing landscape with diminishing forest and natural resources. At the same time, they cast their gaze at 'development' with the hope that it would not alter the surrounding in an undesirable manner. (Taken from the concept note for a seminar on Ecology and Progress in North-East India, held in North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, September, 2014). There is equally a strong concern for the possible loss of cultural identity of a group.

If ecology signifies the unity of nature- human, animal, plant, and all other environmental life, from cosmos to earth – science and society, then it comes ultimately to the knowledge system, defined as 'lore'. After all, ecological science would dictate "the proper approach to the problems involved"[7]. The same purpose is served by 'lore'. It formulates a vision, as well as a programme for determining the patterns of everyday living drawing inspiration from 'the ideal past', and coding the strategies for a 'transformed future'. I have written elsewhere that "It is a cognitive system that has its own dynamics of knowing and making known. Lore, as knowledge, appears as a discourse and its structure reflects the structure of the society which produces it and whose needs it satisfies. Such forms of discourse generate a kind of social authority to ensure social well-being and spawn all the sectors of the knowledge system called folklore. This approach, however, does not negate altogether the claim of 'science', the empirical observation of natural phenomena, in order to use the multiple natural resources to the advantage of the people and the society." (Sen, S. 2010 : 14-15).

I intend to place here only one example. It is a myth obtained from the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, a state in North-east India. This is a narrative that tells of too many things, such as history of settlement, kinship and social norms, administrative arrangements, environmental facts and ritual system. The story runs as follows : Once upon a time four wandering sisters and their men arrived at a spot near a river at Jowai, in Jaintia Hills. The four sisters Ka Bon, Ka Tein, Ka Wet and Ka Doh – and the men decided to stay there overnight. In the dead of the night, Ka Bon heard a sound and woke up. She was horrified to see a stone dancing. She called out everybody and were about to flee with them. The stone stopped dancing and said, 'Oh, children of God, do not run away. Stay with us here. I assure you that no harm will come to you. My brothers and I shall guard you from all evils. We shall watch the four corners. Our maid servant, the river Ka Myntdu, will serve you faithfully[8].

The name of the stone deity was Mukhai. He and his four brothers, U Mushiang, U Muralong and U Mulong as is believed guard the four corners of Jowai where the progenies of the four sisters (*Saw Kpoh* – four wombs, families), live. These stone deities who guard the four corners or gates (*saw duar*) are venerated with sacrifices during a ritual of the annual Behdienkhlans festival as the four mothers, who mothered *Saw Kpoh* are also propitiated in another ritual during the festival. *Saw Kpoh* or the four clans, whose forefathers were the children of the four sisters of the myth, are believed to be the original settlers in the area and are vested with all the administrative powers and functions, both secular and religious. The myth is ceremonially narrated by a teller, consecrated by the *Dalai*, the chief of the area, in a ritual event during the Behdienkhlam festival, when the sisters of the myth are venerated. This practice indicates a principle of ancestor worship. Other rituals of the festival signify nature veneration. A sacred tree called *Khnong,* brought from the nearby forest, tree branched atop all the residential houses, logs representing the mythical sisters,

the four protector-brothers of the myth, the river myntder, are all venerated in different ritual event. The practice of erecting megaliths is also a part of the religious activities.[9]

Out of this complex of socio-religious system also grew the practice of sacred groves, designated as the adobe of gods and protector- spirits. All these practices reflect a nature-man-spirit-god complex. The ideology is based on the eagerness for adjustment with environment and reflects a sound eco-consciousness. The socio-religious customs and taboos, associated with these cult-practices are constructs with such references. Any violation or subversion is considered a sacrilege. All these ideas and practices show how the social network plays a vital role in the sensitive understanding of ecology and its linkages with social welfare.

For all practical purposes, narratives of all kinds, specially the myth, with associated ritual system, are designed with a functional temper, to include what is emphasized today, as the ecological awareness, to "dictate the proper approach to the practical problems involved, … (since) the ecological problem is fundamentally one of balancing resources against human needs… based on resource conservation and resource use, including optimum land use and conservation of the habitat." (Marks, S. 1994: 112-13)

The message is clear : development cannot be done at the expenses of ecobalance, which is both environmental and social. It is true, the prescriptions of the ancients, expressed in myths and other elements of folklore, will not hold now, though it was necessitated in their times. The current problem is simply a problem of adjustment between an ideal past and the requirements of current living. To many as seen in Temsula Ao's concern, it is also an issue of cultural identity. To them a programme for socio-economic development, without any care for preserving cultural distinctiveness will be disastrous. They cry for a careful handling of the problem of adjustment between the need for (modern) development and cultural heritage.

Agreeing to the fundamentals of the issue, some, however differ from an attitude of absolute protection. If we remember the debate sparked by Verrier Elwin's 'national park' policy and Nehru-Elwin *Panchasheel* for tribal development[10], it would be clear why today a Mizo academician Margager Zama, cautions against too much of ethnocentrism which may encourage cultural myopia. Her view is : "After all, culture and tradition are alike in that they are both created by human beings and human experience. They are subject to change with the passing of time." (2006:11)

Anil Boro, a Boro scholar, is more emphatic when he says that progress or development, even the forces of globalization, is not always unwelcome : "We should take up the challenge and see to it that instead of clamouring for unique identities, which are not out there turning the advantages of globalization to our benefit" (2006:15).

The ultimate (and desirable as well), course is, therefore, the course of adjustment, Reciting Julian Huxley we can confidently argue that, "The ecological problem is fundamentally one of balancing" (quoted in Marks 1994:112). Equally important is the approach that I maintained in an essay that the "Development programmes and blueprints

for social engineering are likely to fail, without an assessment of ethnographic data and contours of tradition of an ethnic group." (Sen, S. 2010:52).

A wonderful poetical expression of a Nyishi poet Yumlam Tana from Arunachal Pradesh may be quoted (in Ao, T. 2007 (b) : 106) to highlight the statement above to reach, to the history of change, or transformed future.

I write in English, which is not my language
You see, I am a Nyishi
A tribal claiming to be a man
I am all humanity
(Yet) Nothing to divide me
From my fellowmen.

Perhaps, there can never be an attitudinal approach more pragmatic than this.

## Notes

[1] See, for detail, Singh, Manmohon, 2005 : 3-4.
[2] Marks, Stuart A. 1994 : 112-14.
[3] David Harvey, quoted in Brooker, P. 2003 :84.
[4] Raymond Williams, quoted in Brooker, P. *ibid.*
[5] Lyndon Johnson, quoted in Hufford, Mary 1994:1.
[6] An expression used by Ao Naga poet and scholar Temsula Ao. See, Ao, T. 2007 (a).
[7] Sir Julian Huxley, quoted in Marks, 5:112.
[8] See, Sen, S. 2010 :112.
[9] See, for details, Sen, S. 2004,See. II.
[10] See, for a detailed discussion on the issue, Sen 2010 : 123-33.

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# MATERIAL ASPECTS OF FOLKLORIC TRADITIONS AND KNOWLEDGE AT THE FACE OF MODERNIZATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM ARUNACHAL PRADESH

JAYANTA SARKAR

Abstract : It is a common notion that the population living in the relatively remote geographical areas having practically no interaction or maintaining insignificant contacts with the neighbouring populations, generally lag behind in respect of innovative knowledge and thinking. It is an established fact that populations living in close association with their immediate ecology develop skill of close observation in understanding the behaviour of the nature. Such understanding results in cultivating knowledge that helps them towards their survival. In order to negotiate with the specific ecological niches, these populations usually fall back to the natural resources available in their immediate surroundings to procure items of their subsistence. The present exercise examines a few such material culture produced and resources used by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The ways they use these resources intelligently are the testimony of extra-ordinary innovative traditional knowledge of their ancestors. Consequences of infrastructure development in the region on the traditional knowledge have also been discussed.

Key Words : Resources, Tribes, Traditional, Ecological

## Introduction

The word "folklore" has enormous and deeply significant dimension of culture. Folk traditions encompass traditional believe, practices, knowledge, arts, crafts, songs, tales and other aspects of culture that pass from generation to generations through oral communication and behavioural example.

Since early stage of evolution human being remained a close observer of the nature. In course of struggle to survive human being learnt many aspects of usefulness of natural objects and their functions. Through systematic observations, he could understand the principles working behind many happenings of nature. Knowledge acquired on the principles and functions of natural objects through close observation used to be applied in creating many artifacts of use in the life.

With his constant endeavours he invented the techniques and acquired knowledge and skill to produce such implements artificially for his purpose. The knowledge thus acquired used to be transmitted from one generation to another generation through their traditional way of learning. Even today, there are a number of tribes who have been living in different stages of social development where such scientific knowledge is being inherited from their forefathers through practical experience and practices through traditional learning.

In order to negotiate with the specific ecological settings in which these populations live and also to produce items of their subsistence, they fall back to the natural resources available in their immediate surroundings. Irrespective of their different ecological settings and various mode of subsistence, we find them to apply traditional knowledge in order to continue with the unique aspects of material culture, which their ancestors once had invented.

In the present endeavour I shall take up such innovations from three economic categories of tribes namely the shifting cultivators, the terrace cultivators, and the settled wet-cultivators from high mountainous region, plateau, and the foot hills of Arunachal Pradesh.

**The tribes selected**

The tribes like the Adi/Nishi/Tagin encompass a number of groups who originally lived in the high hills of Siang and Subansiri districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Traditionally they are the shifting cultivators. Of recent, many of them have left their original settlements at the high hills and settled down in the foot hills of Arunachal Pradesh and have adopted wet-rice cultivation (Sarkar 1987).

The Apatanis are well known tribe of Arunachal Pradesh who inhabit in a bowl-shaped plateau in Lower Subansiri district. They are known for their wet-rice cultivation in large terraces through well controlled indigenous irrigation system.

The Khamtis live in the foot hills of Lohit district in Arunachal Pradesh. They originally migrated to the present place of their habitation from Irrawati valley of present Myanmar in the 18th century. This tribe is well known for their wet-rice cultivation, supported by controlled irrigation.

Let me now describe a few specific material cultures, those which illustrate the technological know-how of these tribes transmitted through generations.

**Shifting cultivators**

In the mountainous region of Arunachal Pradesh we find a specific type of hanging bridge used for communication between two sides of a river. This is a glaring example of technological know-how of the tribes like the Adis, Tagins and the Mishmis living in the high hills (Sarkar 1987).

For construction of any bridge on a river we know that an engineer would first examine the site in order to ascertain load bearing capacity of the soil. The engineer would also prefer to have a site with minimum breadth so as to minimize length of the bridge for its durability. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh while constructing a hanging bridge also follow the same procedures. They select a narrow place where the soil is firm with a number of boulders. The place should have tree with strong trunk so that when both sides of the hanging bridge are tied with the selected trees, the bridge can sustain the load and also remain

usable for a longer period. A particular species of cane is selected. The canes are joined with great skill and perfection.

Around these long canes, tied with the trunk of the trees of the two banks of the river, a number of cane rings are fixed in order to increase the strength of the bridge. The rings are fixed in such a way so that the bridge can sustain the load of a number of persons on it at a time. The joints of the cane rings are also of special nature that requires special knowledge to make. This technical know-how is being handed down in their society generation after generations (Roy 1960). The skilled persons in the village do not take much time to construct such a hanging bridge, sometimes even within a day or two they can install such a unique bridge.

**Terrace cultivators**

The Apatanis, living in a bowl-shaped place in Lower Subansiri district at an altitude of 2438 meter have skillfully utilized the available land for cultivation. The bowl-shaped land is not suitable either for shifting cultivation or for settled plough cultivation as practiced by the tribes in the high hills and foot hills respectively. They have taken to terrace cultivations in large sized terraces.

Situation of the bowl-shaped plateau surrounded by high hills is not suitable for controlling flow of water from the hills to the plateau. The ancestors of this tribe must have observed the strength of water flow that occasionally submerged the valley for a considerable period. They must have also observed how the big boulders, trees, and forest in the periphery of their habitats restrict force of water flow from the hills. In order to negotiate the problem of uncontrolled water flow they opted for preventing and protecting the dense forest around. In this effort burial grounds of different clans distributed at different locations play significant roles. Cutting trees near a burial ground is prohibited in their custom. Also to prevent decay of forest through collection of fire woods or construction of house they adopted a custom of raising at least one bamboo groove situated on the high ground adjoining the villages or on a neighbouring island. Forest and well maintained bamboo groves automatically prevent flooding the valley and soil erosion. The water thus coming out through these obstructions is tapped and diverted through different sizes of small channels to the terraces.

Slopes in a bowl-shaped land are not uniform. Terraces in the upper region experience rapid flow of water and thus cannot hold the water required for growing all varieties of crops. With a view to have control on water flow in each terrace, the tribe places different sizes of bamboo ducts that control water flow as per the requirement to grow a specific crop.

The indigenously invented irrigation system suitable in a particular ecological setting is a glaring example of the intelligence as well as understanding of nature together with technical

skills of the forefathers of the present day Apatanis. This indigenous knowledge is inherited through generations and is still applied in cultivation in this plateau.

**Settled cultivator**

*Husking machine:* Water current of river is being used now-a-days for generating hydraulic power with the help of developed technology. In order to install a turbine, the engineer at the first instance mechanically ascertains the power of the water current that is naturally produced due to sudden fall of water from a height suitable to operate the turbine at a desired speed required for generating electric power. The Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh act on the same principle while setting their husking machine. They are well known in the northeastern region for their paddy collection in the foothills; a tradition that they had brought from the Irravati valley of Maynmar. As in case of other tribal populations, the paddy is husked daily by the women folk in their house. To have a large scale husking the tribe had invented a unique device in which they clearly utilize power of water current available near the villages. Incidentally, the Khamti villages are located on the bank of rivers where fertile lands are available. The machine they invented, known as *kookjhak,* is an example of their wonderful innovative mind, power of intimate observation of the nature of the river and its water current. The rivers coming down from the mountains flow here in great velocity. The current is not uniform here due to undulating nature of the terrain.

The wooden make *kookjhak* has two parts. One part consists of wooden planks of a required shape and size, fixed in a specific direction which makes a wheel shaped structure. This part of the machine is placed inside the water current so that the current of the water can rotate the wheel uninterrupted. A long wooden axis is fixed at the center of the wheel. The other end of the axis has more than one levers fixed in it for husking. The wooden machine is installed in a place on the riverbank where the water current remains almost uniform throughout the day. At the same time the current should not be very strong. The nature and velocity of the current in such case is ascertained not mechanically, instead the human factor is involved here. The experience and traditional knowledge are the two factors that work behind it. The uniform flow of water current facilitates rotation of the wheel immersed in the water, which in turn operates the levers in a controlled manner. The tribe can thus husk a large quantity of paddy utilizing water current without inputting much physical labour. The *kookjhak* and its mode of installation prove beyond doubt the intelligence of the ancestors of the Khamtis and continuation of such scientific knowledge in their society through ages ( Sarkar 1987).

**Discussion**

What I am trying to emphasize upon is that the necessity of the tribes, irrespective of their distribution pattern in some geographical areas force them to observe intimately the

natural resources available around their habitation, their characteristics, and utility. With their day- to- day experience and observation over the time they have developed an intimate understanding and knowledge of such resources and make best use of their requirement. When one looks at such age-old non-formally learnt scientific knowledge of these tribes against the backdrop of modern advance science and technology of the 21st century, one may consider these as insignificant. But if we try to understand the stages of social development in which they had invented all these devices out of their quest to know many natural phenomena, these emerge as most significant achievements in the history of development of knowledge.

Rapid changes in the habitat areas of these tribes together with several measures taken up by the neighbouring communities are making a number of alternatives of such inventions easily available to these tribes.

As a result of the regular exposures to the outside populations and also due to infrastructure development, use of these indigenously developed material cultures is gradually declining.

As a part of the programme of increasing communication through infrastructure development at many places such suspension cane bridges are getting replaced by concrete bridges. At some places, cane and bamboo of the traditional suspension bridges are replaced with steel wires provided by the government. The experts in construction of a traditional cane suspension bridge are not acquainted with the new techniques and therefore, they are unable to take part in the construction of modern suspension bridges. This is likely to result in losing their expertise and skill and also the indigenous knowledge of the local tribes about the properties of many natural resources those were used in preparing suspension bridge of traditional type. Such a bridge always functions as a symbol of the community pride and self respect that displays togetherness of a community. Replacement of traditional suspension bridge may thus, loosen the community pride.

The examples of innovations discussed here, clearly indicate that the basic principle that works in the invention of a particular type of object remains the same in case of the tribes or the people having developed technology. However, in case of the tribes who even today live in relatively secluded geographical areas, continuation of the basic principle related to traditional knowledge and wisdom through ages still directly depends on the human factor. Such process of handing over *'parampara'* through human factor fades as and when the geographical isolation breaks and advanced mechanical knowledge enters in the society.

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# SITUATING TRIBES IN NORTH-EAST INDIA : A DISCURSIVE NOTE*

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A serious student of North-East India Studies is automatically committed to an understanding of the region based on an intellectual exercise of multi-disciplinary discourses. In order to grasp the broad subject being proposed for the present discussion one reasonably prefers to refer to a longer time frame. The complex historico–political and socio-economic contexts of the social formations in this region evolved during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods before taking the present shape. A quick overview could also appear to be inadequate in fulfilling the task in hand. In this wide spectrum one is naturally expected to delimit his domains of discussion under a time constrained compulsion. Therefore, in view of all limitations imposed, I will very briefly try to draw a rough contour of the whole range of diverse factors entailing history , economy, polity and society including culture of the region and its people.

To start with, we may refer to some meaningful observations made by a geographer Joseph Swartzberg in a discussion on Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies. He observed, " The word 'region' has significantly different meaning in various contexts. It is most important that scholars understand these meanings when dealing with regions in an area like South-Asia, where such a remarkable degree of regional diversity exists, where so many old instituted boundaries have been swept away in the wake of independence, where people's perceptions of what constitute the new regional order are so often at variance and still in a state of flux, and where regional sentiment often runs dangerously, if not suicidally.'' We may now juxtapose another set of equally meaningful observation made by Nirmal Kumar Bose, an acclaimed anthropologist cum social historian, while guiding an All India Survey on Culture Traits. He found that "the spread of material cultures of the people of rural India cut across the linguistic divides of the existing geographical regions and there is more unity in India's variety than one is likely to admit in moment of forgetfulness''.

The historical, political, geographical, economic and socio- cultural realities of the region that we know of as North-East India today perhaps can be fruitfully captured between the two sets of germane observations of two very renowned scholars cited above. People in general and scholars on North-East India in particular, by and large, know how the present eight administrative state units have evolved by stages since the rule of the Ahom Kings for about 600 years beginning in the early thirteenth century. The annexation of Assam was

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done by the British colonizers in 1826. Assam initially became a non-regulated province of the Indian empire in 1874 with the Chief Commissioner as the Head. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was thus relieved of his duties. Lord Curzon decided to combine eastern district of Bengal with Assam by renaming it Eastern Bengal and Assam which was reversed in 1912. Following the Govt. of India Act, 1919 Assam was granted the status of a Governor's province. The colonial rulers experimented in many ways through a policy of 'Non-interference' and proceeded through a 'Forward Policy' till the taking over of full economic and political control over the region between 1865-1914. After the enactment of the Govt. of India Act 1935, there remained virtually three spatial enclaves in the whole region, namely Brahmaputra-Surma Valley, excluded and partially excluded areas, such as some outlying hilly terrain of Assam and North-East Frontier region, and the two princely states of Manipur and Tripura. Later, the Constituent Assembly following the recommendation of the Cabinet Mission set up an Advisory Committee in 1946 under the Chairmanship of Sri Gopinath Bardoloi, the premier of Assam to look into the question of the tribals and the excluded areas. This subcommittee's recommendations formed the basis of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, 1950, which provided the safeguards of economic and cultural autonomy to the hill tribes of the region. This phase was not always very smooth, and had witnessed turmoil and violence of different magnitude. The Naga movement initially preferred to remain independent of India and rejected the adoption of the Sixth Schedule. Subsequently, the agreement between the Naga Peoples' Convention and the Govt. of India virtually laid down the formation of full-fledged statehood to Nagaland in 1963. The beginning of separating hill states from Assam followed through the decades via Autonomous District Councils, Union Territories and finally reached a stage of granting separate statehood. Thus came Meghalaya in1972, Mizoram in 1986 and Arunachal Pradesh in 1987. The princely states of Manipur and Tripura were acceded to Indian Union in 1949 and upgraded to statehood in 1972. In the meanwhile the official identity of North-East Region came into being in 1971 with the establishment of North Eastern Council under the Home Ministry, Govt. of India. Sikkim, which attained the status of a state in 1975, was added in the conglomeration of the earlier seven sisters, namely Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh in 2002. This is in brief the history of emergence of hill states in North-East India.

To a general observer remaining out of North –East India, the region primarily presents two archetypal dichotomies. One, the beautiful landscape with diverse flora and fauna, a place of colourful people with cultural excellence and community bond, unique and favourable land-man ratio, distinctly identifiable indigenous family based art and craft and so on and so forth. And second, a politically disturbed region with lot of insurgent activities and drug trafficking, low level of technology, poor communication network and the resultant isolation and so on.

In the earlier administrative reports of the colonial rulers (for example, Alexander Mackenzie's History of the Relations of the Govt. with the Hill Tribes of North-East Frontier of Bengal, 1884) Assam and its entire strength of hill areas in the east were known as the land of jungles in blanket term and its people as savage, primitive and uncivilized and virtually isolated and backward till 1930s. This ethnocentric value loaded assessment of the people by their colonial masters interestingly got reflected even in the debates argued out by the non-tribal members of the Constituent Assembly during 1947-49 while discussing about granting of autonomy to the hill people. What remained apparently unemphasised are: a section of the same so called savage and uncivilized people met the Simon Commission in Assam in 1929 and placed their grievances before a Royal Commission. The level of their consciousness and intellectual preparedness would be revealed from the memoranda submitted by them to the Commission; this region on account of its having 4500 miles of international boundary with Tibet, Burma (now Myanmar), East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) already created a vulnerable trade zone ; the existence of silk road would bear testimony to this fact which provided a channel of commodity transfer from one area to the other from East to West Asia starting from China to Mediterranean Sea involving areas like Tibet, Bhutan, Burma and Indo-China and their people; further, this region accommodated a number of migrant transborder communities linking a social network based on kin and clan affiliation extended to South- East Asia apart from the large scale exodus from the neighbouring countries due to the enlargement of huge cultivable land and plantation areas in Assam. The other formidable reason of later migration of people was the partition of the country in 1947.

Various dimensions of the great diversities and divides of the present day North-East India such as, historical, economic, ecological, social, political, cultural and religious, inter-stitch a unique human mosaic in space and time. It is here that we get about 200 of India's 635 tribal communities and about 175 spoken languages out of 325 Indian languages with a dominant trend of Mongolian strain and variants of Tibeto-Burman speech. We get even now patri-matri structural pattern in social relations; clan /community ownership over basic resources like land and forest, traditional political governance and ideally opposed parallel authority structure in the traditional political institutions vis-à-vis the modern political institutions and so on. A geographical space of 2,55, 037 sq. km. occupying a total of 8% of the country and having 4% of the country's total population bearing a vibrant history and rich cultural heritage, certainly warrant our attention not only for an academic research but also for its important bearing on the country's all round development. This is a region which has produced extra ordinary excellence in almost all aspects of life – art and architecture, culture, performing arts, academics, politics, literature, human liberty and so on.

Considering the importance of the region, the Govt. of India instituted a separate Ministry in 2001 for the Development of North–East India (DONER) with liberal financial allocations

from time to time . The initiation of the Look East Policy since the early 1990s was another massive venture in these directions. In its dynamics , the present North-East India has been exposed to all the emergent global forces of the 21st century in the midst of a segregation-integration syndrome, a popular debate on the status of the tribes between Verrier Elwin on the one side and G.S Ghurye on the other. The region has been undergoing a phenomenal transformation – both slowly in certain socio-cultural aspects and rather rapidly in secondary and tertiary aspects of the economy in the face of a politically charged insurgency infested occasional outbursts. This is not only limited to the so-called terrorist outfits among the hill tribes alone, but gradually strategized by the plains tribes of the region as well with the trend of internalization of the external issues and externalization of the internal issues.

The eastern region of the country being the gateway and contagious to the North-Eastern region should play its part in analyzing these changes with a comprehensive understanding based on a multi-disciplinary exchange of notes. Some efforts were already initiated at the Asiatic Society long back. A few more academic bodies are gradually coming up with this objective in view. Late Pannalal Dasgupta and a few others took initiative in 1966 for a dialogue with some hill leaders, spokesmen of some underground groups, scholars, administrators across the table in a seminar organized in Calcutta University. It is time that we pick up the thread in a real follow up orientation. Therefore, the present venture of the three collaborating institutes is the most welcome step for which they deserve our deep appreciation. Personally, I remain beholden to the organizers of this seminar for very kindly providing me this rare opportunity to share my concern this morning with all of you.

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# IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING MYANMAR CULTURE AND HISTORY TO UNDERSTAND INDIA'S NORTHEAST REGION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ARUNACHAL PRADESH OF INDIA*

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## I. Myanmar and Northeast India

The present writing is based on some of the observations that I made in my valedictory address in a Two-Day Seminar "Aspects of Community Development in the North-East Indian States", organized by the Kolkata Society for Asian Studies(KSAS) on 10-11 December, 2014. A plethora of literature is available on Northeast India, a part of India, which is often considered as unique, different from the mainland. The term "Northeast India" was however not used and known when we were young. Indeed, so far my memory goes— during early 1950s and 1960s at Santiniketan we were often entertained with performances of Manipuri and Naga dancers and Assamese singers. This was also the time when India and Myanmar (then called Burma) were in close contact; Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu, Prime Ministers of our two countries, were closest friends. For the British, Assam and the eastern frontier with Burma appeared strategically most important, and at the same time vulnerable due to the region's proximity with China. The vast area covered by deep forest and partly inaccessible terrain were source of economic opportunity. At the same time also source of unknown trouble; thus, they followed the "Policy of Exclusion" , according to which special rules and regulations were to be formed and applied for this region. The Hill-Plains dichotomy corresponding the Tribal-non Tribal one was just a myth. This myth was created to actually exploit the Hill people, and to isolate them from the mainlanders. The post- Independence Indian State was challenged by the Naga insurgency. The formidable legacy of this revolt is still keeping the policy makers busy and the common people suffer. During 1960s-1970s and early 1980s, Mizos - also known as Lushais- took to arms. Indeed, from 1980s onwards all the states were facing the problem of insurgency in some form or the other. The post-colonial scenario in Myanmar was also not a happy one. The similar kind of challenges, indeed, even in greater intensity, rocked the country along the border with Thailand and China in particular. So far the western frontier along the Indian states were concerned, the situation was somehow of low intensity. Yet, there is no way to ignore the role that Myanmar could play to bring peace and stability in Northeast India. Through various joint endeavours Myanmar and India have made remarkable progress in maintaining peace and tranquillity along the border; the future days will see more economic movements and easier connectivity. Yet, people to people contact is far from satisfactory. It can prosper only through studying of each others' history, rich in

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continuity and plurality. The Sagai state and the Chin Hills of Myanmar may be less developed than our Nagaland and Mizoram. Yet, linguistic and cultural plurality and wealth are remarkable in both the countries.

This essay deals with little known history of Northeast region within the context of migration of various ethnic groups from Myanmar. This migration itself is a result of yet another massive migration of people from further up, precisely, from China on the one hand, and Thailand on the other. In either case, a country like Myanmar with an old civilization of its own had to be crossed over. And, here lies exactly the importance of studying the history and culture of Myanmar[1] in the context of eastern and north eastern parts of India. Leaving aside those up-hill areas of Kachin dominated northern, Karen dominated eastern, and Chin dominated western parts, bordering respectively with China, Thailand and India, the valley dwellers like the Mons, Rakhines (Arakanese) and the Bamars (Burmans) quite often than not got involved in conflicts having its spill over effect on various parts of south eastern Bangladesh and north eastern India.

Contrary to the popular notion of Sinitic dominance, a number of ethnic groups (tribes) from north eastern states of India prove within themselves presence of a strong Austric element; the Khasis of Assam and Meghalaya for example. Certainly, the Austric people absorbed Sinitic migrants, though such absorption might not always been without conflict over land and water. As will be shown below with the example of the Khamtis, Theravada Buddhism played an extremely important role in this process of acculturation. Buddhism being an open domain, adopted worship of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. This was not only the case with Mahayana faith; even Theravada followers, as will be shown below, were attracted to worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Trade, pilgrimage, migration of craftsmen, demand for experts in Hindu rituals, astrology, alchemy etc. for the royal courts or for common masses brought the two countries, India and Myanmar, together.

Extremely rich archaeological sites scattered in various parts of upper and lower Myanmar speak for this unique story of confluence of ideas[2]. Of all the states of north eastern India, it was Manipur which stood in closest contact with culture zones in upper Myanmar. Manipuri Brahmins were revered across the border for their scholarship in Sanskrit, especially in astrology.

Volumes of ethnographical literature written by the British administrators in major part is a rich source for understanding of the life and culture of the people of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Yet, few authors spoke of this cultural kinship between India and Myanmar (Burma). This is quite understandable: the discipline, called 'Anthropology', divides the people of India into three categories: Hindus, Muslims and Tribals. More important appears to me to look at Myanmar and India as a single cultural-linguistic domain. Both have adopted elements from the Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, and Indo-Aryan or Sanskritic culture and civilization.

## II. A Short Profile of History and Culture of Myanmar

Myanmar is the country with which the people of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Manipur share common heritage in terms of ethnic affiliation, material and spiritual culture, as well as other assets of civilization. The above mentioned four states share a boundary of

about 1600 km. with Myanmar. Myanmar, an ethnically diverse country like India, has seven states and seven divisions. The seven states are ethnically arranged, though there are many divisions within the single ethnic group, after which the concerned state itself is named. On both sides along the border of the two neighbouring countries live linguistic groups like the Nagas, Lushais (Mizos)[3], Kukis[4] (called Chins in Myanmar), etc. They speak common languages, follow similar social customs and traditions maintained through generations. Above all, they possess hereditary skill in the fields of material culture: basketry, handloom, metal work, etc.[5]

The Chin Hills of Myanmar, Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the Lushai Hills of India have shared many common experiences in course of their process of state formation at the bottom. In Bangladesh, the Marmas and Chakmas follow a number of social norm and tradition which have their origin in Myanmar. Myanmar shares a common historical legacy; the vast domain of Hindu-Buddhist cultural realm stretching from *Brahmadesh* (Prome in Upper Myanmar) down to Bengal— is rich not only with myth and legend, but with archaeological, literary and other sources. A student of Asian history should not be misguided by the myth of isolationist Indo-Mongoloid "otherness", but should try to go deep into the paradigm of "History from below". Only multi-disciplinary approach with intensive field research can reveal the true rhythm of Indo-Myanmar cultural continuum. The true story of mutual exchange of thoughts and intermingling have not been told yet.

The political history of Myanmar is full of struggle for supremacy within several ethnic groups over the most fertile land, precisely, the Irrawaddy valley. The rivers like Sittang, Salween and Kaladan too attracted various ethnic groups who were desperately looking for fertile river valleys to get permanently settled. Lucrative appeared also the trade routes; to monopolize the overland trade from China to India meant a great deal in terms of economic empowerment. Major groups involved in this process of state formation from below were the Bamars (Burmans), the Shans, the Rakhines (Arakanese) and the Mons. The ethnic groups like Karens, Kachins, Kayas, Chins, Nagas, Lahus, Was and others contributed to make the frontier all around strong. Buddhism remained the common faith of the Bamars, the Shans, the Rakhines and the Mons, while a large number of Karens, Kachins, Chins and other groups remained faithful to their original animistic beliefs until a major part got converted to Christianity.

The classical period of state building in Myanmar found a systematic beginning with the rise of Pagan Empire in the heart of Myanmar. The most powerful king Anawrahta (1044-1077) is credited to have successfully defeated the Mons (also called Talaings)[6] of Lower Myanmar, thereby laying the foundation of a Bamar dominated empire, situated exactly at the crossroad between China and India. These Bamar people, (also known as Burmans) which make the majority group, are the same, whom, we see coming down from China in waves towards the Brahmaputra valley. Another important group was the Shans. The name "Shan" is derived from the Sanskrit word *shyam* (dark), which ultimately relates them to the Austric people of Asia. After all, Thailand or *Shyamadesh*, together with Lower Myanmar once made the Dvaravati kingdom.[7] This was part of the *Suvarnabhumi*, peopled by the Austric Mons, rather than Sinic Bamars. The Pagan empire, though mostly projected as predominantly

Bamar empire, owes a great deal to the Mons. After all, the Bamars got their Theravada Buddhism from the coastal Mons of Lower Myanmar. But, no less important were the earlier Pyus. The Pyus were basically Sinic in origin, but embraced Buddhism which was highly accommodative towards Hinduism. A visit to the museum in the Pyu archaeological site in Prome in the year 2009 convinced me of this highly mixed nature of the Pyu civilization. Later, the Pyus got somehow lost, or mingled, as the Mranma (Burman) people emerged as the most dominating. The greatest king of Pagan Anawrahta (Sanskrit : Aniruddha), himself was believed to have been converted to Theravada faith by a Mon monk, called Shin Arahan. Thousands of temples across the Pagan site speak for the affluence of the ruling kings and elites. Yet, such a mighty empire was destroyed around 1283 A.D. by the invasion of the Mongols from southwest China. The Mongol army was led by none other than Kublai Khan. The invading army of the Mongols however had to retreat, most likely, due to excessive heat and shortage of food supply. The Shans, a formidable rival of the Bamars, went on increasing their strength, though the Mons were not sitting idle. The Mon king Dhammaceti (1472-92), seeing the decline of Buddhism in India, strengthened relation with Buddhist Sri Lanka. He is remembered for a rigorous reform of Theravada Buddhist order, the details of which is inscribed on the famous Kalyani Inscription. Buddhism thus remained the central faith, through which every ruler struggled to legitimize the right to rule over.

On the other hand, the post Pagan Toungoo period saw supremacy of the Shans. As Ava declined slowly, Arakan and Pegu rose; the glory of the Rakhine (Arakanese) kingdom reached its zenith in the 16th-17th centuries.[8] Yet, the North-South Divide and conflict remained as ever; the King Tabinshwehti of Toungoo dynasty in 1538 marched towards Pegu, for, Pegu was strategically most important centre in view of the trade towards East (Thailand, Malay), as well as towards the West, the Indian Ocean. Facing humiliating defeat, Mons of Pegu fled to Prome in Upper Myanmar. The Shans, however, supported the Mons; Shan *Sawbwa*s (Shan chiefs) came down with huge army to Prome to help the Mons to recapture their kingdom.[9] King Tabinshweti and his General Bayinnaung of Toungoo dynasty were inspired by the Ottomans of Turkey and the Mughals of India.[10] Inspired by these two great Muslim empires, they too wanted to expand their sphere of influence emanated from the Buddhist ideals of emancipation. Thus, during that time we see modern Thailand, Laos, Manipur, Kachar and Jaintia Hills under the impact of Myanmar. Lower Myanmar was important for the sea route and trade through water, while Upper Myanmar was important for trade going on overland between China and India. Here, precisely lies the importance of Assam and other states from the Northeast. Constant war within the groups, as has been mentioned above, caused huge emigration of people from Upper Myanmar towards Assam and adjoining areas on the one hand, and towards Chittagong Plains and Hills via Arakan on the other. The steady rise of the Bamars (Burmans) marginalizing the Mons and the Shans went on and on. However, the most significant turn in the history of Myanmar was visible with the rise of the Alaungpaya dynasty in the 18$^{th}$ century. The Buddhist identity became so very vital for this dynasty that this first founder- king's name was chosen in such a way as to legitimise his rule as a divine one: the word Alaungpaya means "embryo Buddha".

Alaungpaya's son Bodawpaya put his claim to rule not only Myanmar, but also all lands on both sides: Manipur on the West and Thailand on the East. Conflict over occupation of

royal thrown of Manipur gave the proper opportunity. For example, when Chaurajit and Marjit, two sons of the Manipur king Jai Singh, were caught into conflict over capturing royal power, Myanmar king Bodawpaya's (1779-1819) intervention was sought. This reconciliation did not last long; from 1812 for about six years only Manipur and Myanmar kingdoms passed peaceful and prosperous time. In later days too, the Myanmar kings remained engaged in Manipur.[11]

War, conflict, peace- making and reconciliation are things universal; history of many countries have the same story to tell. Such events caused transportation of ideas, cultural assets including dance, songs, musical instrument etc. This was exactly the case between Upper Myanmar and Manipur. Also, this happened between Ayuthia (old capital of Thailand) and Ava. The kings of Myanmar enriched their courts with dancers and musicians from Manipur and Ayuthia. On the other hand, astrologers, Brahmin Pundits and various knowledge bearers from India adorned the courts of the Myanmar kings. Any visitor to Myanmar today, especially in big cities like Mandalay and Yangon can see descendants of such royal guests. They are known with the name *Ponnya*. They are quite respected among the ordinary people, though they do not mix up otherwise with Myanmar people, and are very conscious of their racial "purity". I may just mention that all sections of Myanmar people have high regard for Sanskrit and Pali scholarship, and look at India, eastern India in particular (Manipur, Assam, Bihar and Bengal in particular) as the land of knowledge and culture. The knowledge road between eastern India and Upper Myanmar was stretched from Navadvipa in Bengal via Manipur to Mandalay. In view of this, it is no wonder that the Upper Myanmar region, the so called dry zone ( *Tattabhumi*), was known as the heartland of *Brahmadesh*.

## III. Immigration, Geographical Distribution, Linguistic Ramifications and Cultural Exchange between Myanmar and India

The Sino-Tibetan linguistics is a subject over which I have, but only limited command;[12] yet, one finds, so far linguistic world is concerned, a common phenomenon between India and Myanmar, correspondingly, Sanskrit and Mranma/Myanmar language. In both the cases, spontaneous accommodation of non-Sanskritic and non- Myanmar ( non-Burmese) elements is visible; this could not have been otherwise, as those minority linguistic groups were indeed once the dwellers of the river valleys and were in possession of the fertile lands and rich natural resources. No other work has better demonstrated this with the example of the Kachins as *Edmond Leach's Political System of Highland Burma*. In this book Leach has successfully broken the theory of "perceived comparative superiority" of the Shans against the Kachins. With examples from two different kinship system, *Gumlao* and *Gumsa*, Leach has shown cases of overlapping. The category " Gumsa" being hierarchical, was able to integrate linguistic plurality of several groups in favour of a higher ranking language group. The *Gumlao* system's more republican character made the language groups exist side by side, precisely, horizontally with their identity at local level. [13] Here, with a mood of drawing parallel I could only mention that such a myth of "perceived cultural superiority" also exists among the Ahoms against Bodos, Nagas etc. However, this linguistic identity and individuality among all the cross border tribes, cutting across national boundaries of India ( in this case N.E. India) and Myanmar, is common. In each of the states of Northeast India, there exist

numerous languages; for each of the language, the speakers carry a history that binds them with Myanmar; in the case of the Tai-Ahom community, to Thailand. In the present section, with the example of the Khamtis we will see how the Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh brought back from Myanmar, cultural and linguistic assets which actually went from coastal India through early trade.

The origin of the Khamti script[14] goes back to Shan script, which should be traced back to South Indian Pallava script. The Theravada Buddhism of Myanmar model is yet another area which needs to be looked at from this perspective.[15] The Sino-Tibetan languages can be classified into two major groups: Tibeto-Burman and Siamese –Chinese. In the context of the present discussion the first becomes more relevant, as we are to deal with India, a home of a large number of Tibeto-Burman groups and sub-groups. According to S.K Chatterjee,[16] the Tibeto Burmans are divided into following subgroups:

1) Tibetan which includes Ladakhi, Sikkimese, Bhutanese etc.
2) The Himalayan Group of dialects: Newari, Murmi, Kiranti , Lepcha etc.
3) The pronominalised Himalayan dialects which show some influence of Austric, spoken in various parts of eastern Punjab Himalayas and parts of Nepal
4) The North Assam Group under which come languages like Aka, Miri, Abor , Dafla, Mishmi
5) The Assam Burmese group under which come speeches of North and East Bengal, Assam and Myanmar (Burma). Indeed, a whole range of languages starting from Garo, Kachari, Tipra, Tangkhul, Konyak, Kabui, Kuki-Chin, Lushai, Meiti, Kachin-Lolo of Myanmar, standard Myanmar come under the coverage.

The Siamese Chinese branch of Sino-Tibetan includes Chinese with its dialects and Siamese with Dai (Thai), Siamese proper, Lao, Shan, Khamti and Ahom. North eastern India was predominantly a land of the Kiratas, as they were called in our classical literature, *Mahabharata*, *Purana* etc. This is why the great linguist Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji names his book *Kirata Jana Kriti : The Indo-Mongoloids : Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*. The Kiratas were partly mountain, forest and cave dwellers, yet, intimately interacted with the people of the plains, who were early settlers in the river valleys. A large number of them were Austric who were in the process of adopting the Sanskritic culture. The Kiratas learned Hindu –Buddhist social norms from them. The Sinic people mastered the art of trade, their children got married with the Indic *(Kula*) people. Occasionally, their role was projected as fearsome, ferocious and imposing in and around the eastern Himalayas. That the Sinic people, described as *Kiratas* or *Cina*s in Sanskrit, were actually the Mongoloid in their racial affiliation—does not need to be mentioned. Driven by the cold and dry weather of China including Tibet, they felt attracted to warm weather and fertile land of Irrawaddy and Brahmaputra.[17] The Indian faith, like Hinduism and Buddhism gave the Sinic people a cultural anchor, which they needed badly after being uprooted from their own soil.

The most impressive case of Indianization of this displaced Sinic groups can be witnessed in the way the Ahoms, otherwise a branch of the Tai group of the great Sino-Tibetan family, embraced Hinduism. They established the Ahom rule in Assam in the 13th century, indeed at a point of time when Bengal saw decline in state power and fell under the political power of Islam. Embracing Hinduism, the Ahom rulers continued their authority over a large part of

Assam until the 19th century. The Ahom rule came to its end only after the British annexed Assam in 1826, in the same year when the First Anglo-Burmese War was fought. The following section will demonstrate how one of the relatives of the Ahoms, the Khamtis, continue the legacy of cultural heritage of the great Shan race of Myanmar.

## IV. Indo-Myanmar Cultural Continuum : A case study from Arunachal Pradesh

This section dealing with the Khamtis of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of India can be considered as a continuation of my earlier work on this particular Buddhist people of Northeastern India. The article 'Migration, Acculturation and Integration of Myanmar Tribes in India: Khamtis and Singhphos of Arunachal Pradesh' dealt with both, the Khamtis and the Singphos, showing their ethnic linkage with their co-brethren in Myanmar: the Shans and the Kachins respectively.[18] In this section, the Singphos appear only marginally, while the Khamtis take the centre stage along with its age-old contact with India.

Before Arunachal Pradesh was awarded Statehood in February 1987, it was known as Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA). British anthropologist, Verrier Elwin, who was a close friend of our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and an advisor on the Northeast affairs, made this state widely known through his works. In January 1972, NEFA became a separate Union Territory and was renamed 'Arunachal Pradesh', which means 'the land of the rising sun'. Unlike other Northeastern states, such as Nagaland and Mizoram (formerly Lushai Hills), this state never experienced any serious insurgency. Yet, the state remains and perhaps will continue to be one of the most sensitive states of India, mainly due to its geographical position bordering China and China's totally irrational claim over this part of India.

Arunachal Pradesh shares boundaries with China including Tibet (north and northeast boundary of 1,8080 km), Bhutan (west 160 km boundary), and Myanmar (East 440 km boundary). The state has snow mountains in the north, and goes down to the plains of Brahmaputra valley in the south. It is nearly 84,000 sq. km in area with its 20 (twenty) districts: 1) Tawang 2) West Kameng 3) East Kameng 4) Papum Pare 5) Lower Subansiri 6) Kurung Kumey 7) Kra Daadi 8) Upper Subansiri 9) West Siang 10) East Siang 11) Upper Siang 12) Dibang Valley 13) Lower Dibang Valley 14) Lohit 15) Namsai 16) Anjaw 17) Changlang 18) Tirap 19) Longding 20) Siang. There have been some changes in the arrangement of district: Lohit has been divided into Lohit and Anjaw, while a new district called Papumpare has been carved out of a single district of Lower Subansiri. The state capital is Itanagar, which is about 12 hours' bus journey from Assam's capital Guwahati.

Out of 61,400 Buddhists (1971 census) of Arunachal Pradesh, 41,430 or 67.5 per cent belong to the category of 'Tribes' of Arunachal Pradesh. This shows that the indigenous Buddhist population is still quite high; they have not been overshadowed by migrant Buddhists. Both the major schools of Buddhism, Theravada and Mahayana, are living forces in this state. While the Monpas and Sherdukpens, among others, make up a major group of Mahayanists (followers of Tibetan Lamaism), the Khamtis and Sighphos of upper Assam, Changlang, and Lohit constitute the group of the Theravadins. Other resident tribes or groups are Akas, Adis, Nishis, Daflas, Miris, Mishmi, Noctes, Wanchos, Tangas, Apatanis and a small group of Lisus. The Lisus are living in southwestern China as well. The number of Buddhist population in Arunachal Pradesh in 1981 was 86,483. According to the 1991 census, the Buddhist

population of Arunachal Pradesh[19] was 111,372. Elements of Vaishnavism visible among some of the groups should remind us that God Vishnu had a prominent presence in the religious domain of not only Myanmar, but also Thailand. The ancient Upper Myanmar city of *Beikthano* (Vishnu city) reminds us of the significant place of Lord Vishnu in the spiritual domain of ancient Myanmar. Major tribes in the regions of Subansiri and Siang worship Doini-Pole (Sun-Moon God). Nature worship is universal, and has a distinct place in the pre-classical, especially Vedic civilization. Elements of nature worship in the form of Nat cult[20] as known from Myanmar, is found among some groups, for example Singhphos, of Arunachal. Elements of marginal beliefs, like worshipping of various unknown and unseen forces which could be considered as part of the Buddhist world, are also occasionally found.

The Khamtis inhabit in about 30 villages in the lower regions, drained by rivers, Tengapani and Noa-Dihing. A few Khamtis are living in Upper Assam, in the districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar. In 2010 I had the opportunity to visit Namsai area in connection with the dedication of the Golden Pagoda to the people of Arunachal Pradesh by the Hon'ble Minister Chowna Mein and his wife, Member of the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly, Sreemati Sati Mein.

The migration of the Khamtis from Myanmar (Bor Khamti/ Mogaung/Putao), as portrayed by the British ethnographers indicate existence of seven principalities in the Bor Khamti country. They were: Mung-yek, Long-nu, Lang-tu, Lung-king, Man-nau, Man-ci, Man-ce-Khun. Those principalities were under the suzerainty of Mung-kong, a well-known Tai kingdom of medieval Myanmar. According to an oral source, two Tai princes, Khun-lung and Khun lai, established the first Tai kingdom in Yunnan of Southwest China in the year 568 A.D. The kingdom was known as Mung-ri-mung-ram or Mung-wan. Ai-Khun Lung, the eldest son of Khun-lai laid the foundation of the kingdom of Mung-kong in 608 A.D. This kingdom flourished, but faced decline in the eighteenth century with the rise of the king Alaungpaya.

In one of the previous sections I have already shown the impact of the rise of Alungapaya dynasty on Assam and Manipur. The capital of the Mung-kong kingdom was situated only at two and a half mile distance from the present railway station of Maugaung. The word *Mung* means country and *kong* means drum; meaning ' a country plain like the mouth of a drum.[21] Referring to a reliable Ahom source, Lila Gogoi [22]argues that Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam lived three years in Khamti and four years in Khamjang or Kham-yang. Thus, she argues that the Khamtis established themselves in the thirteenth century in the kingdom of Mung-kong. The history of the Khamtis during the period from the thirteenth century up to the rise of the Putao kingdom in Bor Khamti (Khamti major) in the eighteenth century must be most exciting for those who are seriously interested in understanding the history of Northeastern India and Myanmar in a single continuum.

The Myanmar people make a distinction between the Shans of Myanmar, Shans of China and Hkamti Shans. The Chinese Shans are the Shans of the Shan State in Yunnan. The relations between the Chinese and the Shans were not very cordial. For the Chinese, the Shans were the 'barbarians', living south of Yangtze Kiang. In fact, the kingdom of Nanchao, founded approximately, around 649 C.E., in Yunnan in southwestern China, was a Tai kingdom. In order to remain independent of Chinese subjugation, many Shans migrated from China to the region which is now the Shan State in northern Myanmar. According to a modern Thai

historian, Prince Dhani Nivat, Shan migration started twelve centuries ago and continued over several hundreds of years. According to him, the reasons for their migration were 'harassing tide of Chinese cultural if not military pressure'.[23] Manickavasagam[24] is of the opinion that southward migration of the Thais (Shans) had started even earlier, when the kingdom of Nanchao was powerful. However, Kublai Khan's invasion of Nanchao in 1253 intensified the course of exodus of Thai immigrants into the 'Golden land' or swarnabhumi of Indo-China.[25] Ling, one of the most outstanding authorities on Buddhism in India and Southeast Asia, also writes: 'In 1254 Kublai Khan's conquest of the Nanchao kingdom in south west of China had the effect of sending a fresh wave of Thai immigrants south of Nanchao; particularly those who preferred not to remain under Chinese rule but to be free 'Thai'.[26] The Hkamti Shans are looked upon as a sub-type of Burmese (Myanmar) Shan. On historical grounds, the Hkamti Shans showed political allegiance to the former Shan state of Mogaung (Mong Kaweng). Further there were at least four types of Hkamti Shan states

1) Hkamti Long or Putato[27]
2) Hukawang Valley Shans (Maingkawn, Ningbyen, Taro)
3) Singkaling Hkamti (Upper Chindwin)
4) Hkamti of Assam located to the east of Sadiya

Thus, it will be clear how difficult it is to designate the Hkamti as a people of a homogenous ethnic origin and ancestry and to identify the Khamtis as a unified and single political entity. This kind of difficulty will remain if we continue to use the term 'Shans' as a unified category. The elements of Shans are mixed up with elements of non-Shans in Myanmar. The Jingpaw-speaking Kachins were one of the late Tibeto- Burmans from the North during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They overran the north Burma Shans, causing the disintegration and dispersal among the Shan people of North Myanmar. In spite of various challenges, the Hkamtis or the Shan-Hkamtis continued to remain committed to Buddhism which played as the most effective integrative factor in the Shan Khamti society.

Wilcox was the first to have visited the area, called Khamti Long, or Bor Khamti or Putao from where the Khamtis came into Assam. Wilcox launched this expedition in 1825-28. Readers may be reminded that those were the years of the first Anglo-Burmese War. Wilcox was much impressed by the Buddhist Khamtis as is evident in the following lines: 'The only sign of population that we saw on our journey were parties of priests (Khamtis) moving from one village in the jungle to another'.[28] On entering Assam, Khamtis first settled by a river called Tengapani. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, taking advantage of the trouble in Raja Gourinath Singh's reign, the Khamtis pushed on to Sadiya. The Khamti chief was acknowledged by the Assamese ryots (cultivators) as the ruler, and the former usurped the title, Khawa Gohain or Assamese Governor of Sadiya. This event of impressive advance of the Khamtis has been described by almost all the scholars. The most significant phenomenon appears to be the manner in which the Khamtis subjugated the Assamese people and proclaimed their superiority.

## V. Khamtis and their Culture: Some General Observations

The Khamtis profess the Hinayana or Theravada faith after the Burmese model.[29] As early as 1841 William Robinson observed in his 'Descriptive Account of Assam' that 'their

customs appear precisely the same as those of Ava'.[30] The present generation of the Khamtis may not know all the details of the story of their forefathers' migration and such 'Myanmar connection' as we have discussed so far. Yet, through my interactions with the Khamti people, I gathered that the Khamtis in general are well aware of the fact that they possess a rich cultural heritage, which they should foster at all prices. Today, a large number of Khamti people speak Hindi as well as Assamese, while all the Khamti monks are well-versed in Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhism. I have made this realization while engaged in conversation with Khamti monks in various monasteries of Namsai area of Arunachal Pradesh. In Bodhgaya too, I had an opportunity to discuss Khamti Buddhism with Theravada monks from Arunachal Pradesh, and also with Shan monks with strong Shan Khamti background based in the Shan-Myanmar monastery.

For understanding linguistic situation in eastern and northeastern India R. Shafer's[31] article 'Classification of the Northernmost Naga Languages' deserves attention. He traces the origin of Anga, Vanga and Kalinga to Tibeto-Burmic An, Wan, Kalin or Klin. Those people of eastern India ( Ang,Van and Kalin or Klin) who were the closest to the Tibeto-Burmans were called by Shafer as 'Baric People'. These Baric people's linguistic position has been given by Shafer in the following way:

Sinitic (Chinese)

Bodic (old Bodish or classical Tibetan, in modern dialects and most closely related languages of the Himalayan region)

Baric

Burmic ( Burmese and related languages, mostly on the Indo-Burmese frontier, in Burma, in western China)

Karenic

Daic (the Thai or Tai languages)

Paul Benedict[32] divides Sino-Tibetans into two broad groups: Chinese and Tibeto-Karen. In his classification, the Tibeto-Burmans come under Tibeto-Karens. Tai (Siamese) for example, is a large linguistic group and contains various speech groups: Thai, Lao, Shan, Khamti and Ahom. Of all these, the Thai and Lao are spoken in Thailand and Laos respectively.

Of all the people of Northeastern India, it is only the Khamtis who have a script of their own. Like all other Sino-Tibetan languages, Khamti as well as the Singpho languages have three distinct features: monosyllabic, tonal and agglutinative. Each word has one syllable only. As readers of this journal are aware, in contrast to Indo-European languages, the Tibeto-Burman languages are tonal; changes in tone bring changes in meaning of words. Sino-Tibetan languages are agglutinative; this means that verbs are not conjugated. Tenses are formed by addition of suffixes to the verb root. Besides, a large number of loan words taken from Myanmar language are also visible in Khamti language.

Grierson says that "Ahom alphabet is an old form of that which, under various forms, is current for Khamti, Shan, Burmese and Chakma. It is more complete than those of Khamti and Shan, but not as complete as those of Burmese and Chakma. It is to be ultimately referred to the alphabet in which Pali was written."[33] Grierson also made comparison between tones as used in the Shan and Khamti languages. Khamti alphabet system consists of nine vowels and 17 consonants.[34] Burmese (Myanmar) language has 12 vowels and 31 consonants. The

number of tones in Burmese is the same as that of Khamti: short, level and heavy. According to Needham's terminology, the three tones of the Khamti language are: natural pitch of the voice, failing tone and abrupt termination.[35] J. F. Needham was Assistant Political Officer of Sadiya Tracts, which is situated between Myanmar (Burma), and India. This is the area which saw Khamti immigration in the eighteenth century. Needham wrote a book entitled *Outline Grammar of the Khamti Language*. The book was printed by the Superintendent Govt. Printing, Rangoon, in 1894. While referring to features of the Khamti language, Grierson mentioned *Cushing's Introduction to Grammar of Shan Language* . The meaning of the word 'Khamti' is 'golden land'. 'Kham' means gold and 'ti' means place. If 'ti' can be considered as a short form of Sanskrit ' asti" ( is present) then the meaning becomes 'where there is gold' or 'golden land'. Here comes the subject of *suvarnabhumi*, the golden land, to which mention has been made right in the beginning.

The Khamti society is highly stratified; each group having its own position and economic status. The highest position is enjoyed by chiefs and priests. The erstwhile slaves are at the bottom of the social strata. The Chief is called *Chowfa;* reminding us of the term *Sawbwa*, meaning 'Chief' in Shan language. The Khamtis are divided into several exogamous clans, viz., Namsoom, Nangmao, Manwai, Manpang. The social features that characterize the Khamti society include adherence to Buddhism, wet-rice cultivation, consolidated village life with a monastery (*Chaung*), craftsmanship in metal work and weaving.[36] The word *Chaung* is of Myanmar origin, and means exactly the same, precisely, "monastery". There are two categories of monks, *Chowsra* (principal monks) and *Chowsang* (ordinary monk). The first are principal monks, or *Sthavira*s or *Mahastavira*s as they are called in Pali. The second category is simply *Shraman*s or *Grihatyagi*s.[37] The word *Grihatyagi*, as we all understand, means those who have left their home and live in monastery.

While in Namsai, I utilized the opportunity of visiting the village of Chongkham and the Pali Vidya-Pith. My visit to various other monasteries in the Namsai-Chowkham area has immensely enriched my understanding of the Buddhist Khamti people with their Tai-Shan lineage. Khamtis, in spite of being formally Theravadins, have absorbed some elements of Hindu tradition. The study of Jayanta Sarkar proves the popularity of seasonal festivals by the Khamti people while celebrating the harvest; they even call upon *Brahma* and his wife Goddess *Lakshmi* [38]so that they continue to bestow their grace on the household. The influence of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* on the Khamti people has also been described by other scholars. Again, according to Jayanta Sarkar,[39] Lord Buddha narrates the story of *Mahabharata* to his disciples. In Khamti *Mahabharata,* Yudhisthir has been described as an *avatar* of Lord Buddha. Buddha has been represented up in Khamti tradition in various incarnations. The message in the Khamti *Ramayana* is to follow Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The law books of the Khamtis, *Thamasat*, are nothing but *Dhammathat* of the Myanmar people. The Myanmar people borrowed it from Manu, the great Indian law maker.[40] Thus, we can witness the full circle through which the religion, culture and civilization wandered across Myanmar and India.

## Conclusion

It is the most difficult task indeed to present a true picture with all the complexities

connected with migration and cultural identity formation, played over such a vast region comprising parts of India, southwestern China, Thailand and Myanmar. What concerns is the fact that often Myanmar does not receive the attention it deserves in this discourse. From the cultural and historical point of view, Myanmar comes closest to India. It was not a one-sided influence Myanmar received from India; indeed, what is most fascinating is the reverse movement of culture: various cultural assets, like script, religion (Buddhism), legal tradition and texts, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, *Dharmasastra* came back to India with a new form. As I have shown in this essay, the Khamti community stands very high in this transmission of knowledge from Myanmar. Indeed, other groups from Northeast too carry a rich legacy of co-sharing with the people of India's Northeast. If we continue to neglect the study of the history of our closest neighbour, we will be doing injustice to our own composite culture.

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# BEING FACE TO FACE WITH REALITY : EVOLVING RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR INDIA'S NORTHEAST*

SAMIR KUMAR DAS

The Concept Note of a recently held seminar on India's Northeast asks for revisiting our research strategies for the region, makes a clarion call for walking away from the traditionally followed practice of viewing the reality through our narrow disciplinary window and highlights the importance of multidisciplinary research.[1] For reasons to be explained below, I think window serves as an apt metaphor to describe how a discipline views the reality and with what effects. I will argue that the traditional practice of viewing the reality through one's own disciplinary window has its devastating consequences for research in general and Northeast Studies in particular.[2] Borrowing from Mao Zedong who used the phrase albeit in a completely different context, this paper makes a call for 'bombarding the headquarters' hitherto being preserved by the disciplines and disciplinary practices. Due to obvious limitations of space, I propose to confine myself to three sets of criticisms. The concluding part underlines the need for transcending the disciplinary boundaries and asks for being face to face with the reality instead of viewing it through the window.

## The Framed Vision

A window gives us only a framed vision – a vision that is governed by its own rules and protocols. A window offers us a frame through which the object of research is viewed. As such it allows us to view certain things as much as it does not allow us to view certain other things. Thus to cite an instance, the incident of a stranger driving his vehicle though a kindergarten school compound and in the process moving down four little children playing there may be described in all different ways by researchers owing their allegiance to as many disciplines. An anthropologist might be interested in highlighting that the driver of the vehicle was black while the children were whites and the incident took place in a city, a student of Law and Public Administration might be eager to inform us that traffic law is lax here and that there is not enough policemen or electronic surveillance in the city. A social historian will not miss the point that the city had a long history of racial riots. A political scientist on the other hand might find the fact that the driver and the parents of the children are hardcore cadres of two rivalling political parties. It is possible to say that (a) all of them are true or (b) even wrong or (c) one is or some are true while others are wrong. Views acquired through diverse

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disciplinary windows thus become exercises in fiction without any corresponding attempt at exchanging our notes and arriving at some meaningful conclusions.

Let us take 'tribe' as an example. 'Tribe' is a crucial concept informing most of our researches on the Northeast. Public administration and Law seek to understand 'tribe' as a community that figures in the schedule officially maintained for the purpose. For example, Rajbanshis in Assam were regarded as an OBC (Other Backward Class) until very recently. Now they have been reclassified as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) although the Koch-Rajbanshis continue to be classified as an OBC. The categories of ST and OBC are mutually exclusive, for, the Rajbanshis cannot be both OBC and ST at the same time. In West Bengal the Rajbanshis – mostly living in the six districts of North Bengal - continue to be scheduled as a caste (SC), not a tribe. In the neighbouring state of Bihar, they are classified as an OBC. In Bangladesh, Rajbanshis are recognized as a linguistic minority while in Nepal they are regarded as a *janjati* or ethnic community. The window of Public Administration and Law categorizes the object in no uncertain terms.

A sociologist will find such definitive categorizations flippant - if not naïve. Rajbanshi identity has historically remained fluid and it becomes difficult for us to put them into any of the categories suggested by the students of Law and Public Administration. Sociological research on the Rajbanshis of North Bengal may be instructive for us. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Rajbanshis hitherto classified as a tribe with a genealogy tracing them to the Koches and Koch dynasty ruling the kingdom of Cooch Behar asked for their Kshatriya status. There was the mass ceremony of Kshatriyazation at Debiganj by the river Karatoya about that time when over 10000 Rajbanshis participated in the ceremony under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barma – the pioneer of modern Rajbanshi resurgence - and started wearing sacred thread.

On 27 Magh 1311 BS, the Rajbanshis first organized the ceremony of adopting sacred thread by the river Karatoya at Debiganj in the district of Jalpaiguri under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barma. The claim to Kshatriyahood continues to be as strong especially amongst a section of Rajbanshi intellectuals. Sukhobilas Barma refers to a postcard (dated 4 August 2001) which he received from one of those who had heard two or three of his addresses to the community. The writer sharply reacted against the current attempts at conferring Dalit identity on the Rajbanshis and reaffirmed their Kshatriya identity:

> I have heard your lectures in two or three meetings. Do not bring in the Dalit context – whatever opinion you express about the Kamatapuris, Rajbanshis can never be that of the Dalits. We are the ruling race of this region. We have our political history which the Bengali Bhatiyas (people from the downstream or the Southerners) had never had. If we cry out identifying ourselves as Dalits, the Bhatiyas will hate us more. Do not go to any assembly of the Dalits, do not bring in the Rajbanshis to any context that will add to our indignity. The poor amongst us have been taking the advantage of reservation – let them; but do not enhance our ignominy by claiming us as Dalits.

By all accounts Rajbanshis' search for Kshatriyahood met with little success inasmuch as the upper castes hardly had ever accorded recognition to their claim while many from their own community were insistent on re-invoking and retaining their tribal identity. The immigration of 'the upper caste gentry' guided as they were by the Brahmanical values - from outside North Bengal – brought about some sort of a tectonic shift in the society in a way that the Rajbanshis 'failed to get a respectable position in the status estimation of these immigrant caste groups'. On the other hand, Debendra Nath Barma - an intellectual from the community - observes that Rajbanshis are 'in reality' – not Kshatriyas – but belong to the Indo-Mongoloid family of races. The followers of Manu (*Manuwadis*) have 'imposed Brahmanical culture on them' (D. N. Barma 2009:21) and the Rajbanshis were 'inspired to intensively incorporate Brahmanical values and practices for a purified social image'. By 1947 the search for Kshatriya-hood, according to Basu, 'lost its vigour and dynamism'.

**The Window Hopping**

Disciplinary windows open to those objects that are taken as fixed and frozen. For, in order that they figure within the frame of the window, they cannot or are not allowed to move. What about the moving objects that are too mobile to be captured within the frame of the window? Social objects constantly travel across windows: they more often than not come into the frame and go out of frame. Until very recently, insurgency was regarded as a subject of Political Economy and Political Science. The causes and conditions explaining the emergence of insurgencies and their perpetuation attracted a good deal of research. Besides, sociologists also focused on the social processes underlying the insurgents' construction of ethnic identity, their appeal or lack of it to the larger community they claim to represent and so forth. Now, hardly ever insurgency is considered as their subject. It has become a subject of Administration and Security and Strategic Studies. The emphasis is now on how we tackle (the menace of) insurgency and with what legal repertoire and coercive apparatus. In fact, the argument that is now gaining ground is that development can trump up insurgency and violence.

Much in the same manner one can raise the uncomfortable question: Do we see the same object as we see it from different disciplinary windows? Does not how we see determines what we see? We may remind ourselves of Sartre's famous example. A researcher interested in watching how a couple conducts and behaves may decide to interview couple inside an open parlour. But the same will behave differently when closeted in a bedroom observed secretly through an eye hole. As one changes from one window to another, one's research findings also keep changing in a way that one finds difficult to match one with the other.

**The Concept of Raij**

Let us take the Assamese concept of *Raij* or public as an example. The *Chandrakanta Abhidhan* (Goswami 2012:752) defines it as a body that is held together through some clan or kinship ties and unlike any ordinary collectivity of individuals, Raij is considered to be politically active – always in the forefront of a struggle or a movement.

Historical-Anthropological or Social-Anthropological writings on r*aij* by Manorama Sharma or Maheswar Neog, for instance, point out how the *raij* was held together through strong clan and kinship ties towards the end of the nineteenth century when Assam – particularly the Upper Assam was witnessing a series of peasant rebellions. The basis of the solidarity was traditional clans and kinship system. Maheswar Neog has done extensive research on the role of the Vaishnavite Satras in Moamaria rebellion. Histroical writings are very important at this point. The sudden change in the land tenure system led to the large scale peasant rebellion not only in Assam but also in North Bengal. Ranajit Das Gupta's study (1992) of Jalpaiguri in the nineteenth century and changing land relations underlines two significant changes: (i) Land was increasingly getting fragmented and farm size registered a sharp decline. Even the town of Siliguri witnessed fragmentation of the jots. (ii) As the market forces started penetrating into the hitherto placid agrarian economy, classes were about to replace the old clan and kinship ties. The older clan and kinship ties served as a glue in the mobilization of the peasantry. Although anthropologically rich and historically fertile field of research exist with enormous political significance, political scientists hardly found any interest in conducting research on the subject. They continue to be overwhelmed by the western categories and concepts and try albeit without much success to mechanically apply them to the Northeast. I have not come across any Political Science writing on the concept of *Raij*.

*Raij* seems to have acquired a new lease of life in a context when the neo-liberal course of development now being underway has taken a toll on the people threatening their life and livelihood across the board. *Raij* is now constituted as a body that cuts across ethnicities, clan and kinship ties and transcends ethnic boundaries.

We conducted a series of case studies and interviews in Gerukamukh area in Upper Assam – the hub of anti-dam protest in the Northeast - organized by Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) and a few other organizations. While recent violence in Lower Assam is predicated primarily on the demand for homeland - whether for driving out the 'outsiders' or against being driven out by them - the movement in Gerukamukh marks the arrival of a new subject in the wake of a series of developmental policies initiated since the early 1990s. The interviews were conducted across various age groups and communities like the Mishings, Deuris, Ahoms, Assamese, Nepalis, Hajongs, Bodos and other Tea tribes like the Kurmis etc.

Most of our respondents extend unflinching support to the anti-dam protests – although not all of them actively take part in them. When asked why they support it, all of them have been unequivocal in pointing out that the issue is integral to 'security of their life' (*jiwanar suraksha*). They argue that unless their life is not secure, development becomes 'unthinkable'. What will they do with development if they are not alive? Economic development or for that matter any other kind of development has no meaning unless there is security of life, which according to one respondent, cuts across the ethnic boundaries and is 'greater' (*brihattar swartha*) than economic development for any 'particular' community. When collective survival is under threat, it is imperative that all people irrespective of their ethnicity, creed and community identity come

together and put up a joint (*ekeloge*) resistance and collective (*umaihotiya*) struggle. It is important that 'the public' (*raij*) across ethnicities and nationalities work together as a collective (*ekgot*). Ensuring the security of life is therefore the topmost priority for them.

While a whole diversity of groups and communities constitutes 'the people of Assam', the coming into being of 'the people of Assam' as a collective entity is a complex task as envisaged by our respondents. *Thai* in Assamese is a word used popularly to refer to one's immediate dwelling place and neighbourhood as distinguishable from homeland. It is interesting to note that a distinction is made between one's identity as a dweller in a particular *thai* (like Gogamukh) on one hand and one's identity as a member of a particular ethnic community on the other. An ethnic community within an area is spread across many such *thai*s – each *thai* in effect has its own importance for those who inhabit it. While autonomy disunites people and privileges one community over another, the anti-dam protest unites all of them.

Insofar as threat is perceived as 'real' by all of them, dam and development strike at the physical body that exists as 'the tabernacle of dynamism, its potential' and is 'not yet objectified'. The body refuses to make itself available for the forms and technologies of developmental governance as it fears death and develops a stake in the practice of life. The potential of body as a living organism never completely exhausts itself by surrendering to the call of death, but constantly interrupts the forms and technologies of developmental governance. Never before in the history of the Northeast has physical body become so much of a security concern for the people as it is now. This is not to say that physical body has never been under threat in the region's history. The recent violence in Lower Assam (July-November 2012) points to how physical existence particularly of the common people was under threat. But the important point is that for every life lost, an epitaph is written by the particular community that loses its member and therefore there is mourning and pledge to revenge for her death. Processions were taken out with the dead bodies of those who lost their lives as a result of the ethnic violence. The dead is remembered as a martyr. But when a dam bursts and washes out communities and groups, there is life that is lost 'without being sacrificed' and it spares none to mourn the dead. As dams are perceived to threaten the physical survival, developmental governance does not 'realize the potential, but contradicts it'.

**The Concept of Neighbourhood**

Sociological research on the concept of *ghar* or home in Assam points out that neighbours are an extension of the family with family being the nucleus that spreads out to engulf the neighbours. The neighbours are also an integral part of the family with of course varying degree of intensity. Sanjib Baruah recalls that in the case of the bereavement of one of his family members the entire locality descended on their home. This might appear to be offending to a westerner and might be read as an intrusion into their private space. But for an Assamese living in Assam this was considered as perfectly normal insofar as the Assamese hardly make the distinction between the private and public wherever neigbours are concerned. *Amar*

*gharkhan* is the Assamese phrase used to describe both the family and neighbourhood thereby completely disregarding their otherwise western connotation.

Literary and anthropological writings dwell on how the neighbours survive even when they are divided into two or more nation-states. They concentrate on the strategies the divided people deploy while coping with the new reality of neighbous being separated by two or more nation-states. A good deal of literature in this direction points to the strategies of negotiation – if not subversion with the borders that suddenly keep the neighbours apart. This often leads one to plead for reviving the old, pre-Partition kinship and social ties that were torn asunder – thanks to Partition (1947) and consequent reorganization of international borders. In a paper based on dense ethnographic documentation, Sanjeeb Kakoty (2008) points to the ethnic ties and cultural continuities that seem to have survived the demarcation of India-Bangladesh border in East Khasi Hills in the wake of Partition. He also records in detail the continuing social and economic practices that appear to militate against the nationalist project of bringing the territory under State control and nationalization of space. Robbins Burling argues that the Garos of Madhupur, now in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, despite many of the visible differences with their brethren living in the Garo Hills of Maghalaya in India feel that the place across the international borders is the land of their ultimate refuge. Thus, when they were attacked by the Pakistan army during the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971, the 15,000 Garos crossed over to India (Burling in Raha & Ghosh eds.1998:360). While social ties and practices of this nature do not show signs of disappearance at least in the short run, the argument that we need to revive them on the ground that they predate Partition often sounds impractical and ahistorical. The reality of the post-Partition State cannot easily be wished away.

Post-Westphalian writings on International Relations on the other hand tend to point out how nation-states and international borders separating one from another are a new reality that cannot be undone. Although hitherto conducted studies in International Relations in the region cannot claim any specificity of its own, they follow the western paradigm and are busy underlining how nation-states establish their hegemony in the bordering people and how older clan and ethnic ties cutting across the borders pose a threat to national security and sovereignty of our nation. Illegal migration in the Northeast is perceived by the scholars of International Relations as a threat characteristic of the fledgling state of our nation.

Now that there is the realization that borders will remain porous, there is also the sense that nation-states will have to adjust to the new realities, by way of devising means of allowing exit and entry without any threat being posed to national security. One notices a whole range of intermediate institutions between a fully enclosed nation-state and a nation state that is fully integrated into the global economy - the latest in the series is the West Bengal Government's recent declaration that four border *haats* (periodic markets) will be opened along the Indo-Bangladesh border. International Relations in the Northeast as a discipline is likely to gain immensely by drawing on both Anthropology and History, by appreciating how the whole idea of neighbourhood has undergone a change in the discourse of the nation-state

in India, particularly since Independence. In the absence of any conversation between disciplines, International relations in the Northeast has remained perpetually underdeveloped and turned into a mere rehash of western theories and concepts. I propose to draw an outline of what a concept of neighbourhood might look like by being synergized with cognate disciplines as it passed through at least three distinct stages.

**a. Nations-in-Civilization**

The enterprise of building civilizational nation was not free from its paradox: Incessant migration, thanks to her open-arm policy during the initial years, destabilizes the demographic balance, poses a threat to the language and culture of the natives (as the large bulk of the Assamese Population felt and accordingly organized the longest ever anti-foreigners' agitation during 1979-1985) and adversely affects the democratic structure while enfranchising the immigrants who eventually turn into a majority in many of the electoral constituencies and threaten to run the Government.

Accordingly, India's commitment to civilizational nation is seen to be conveniently translated into the modest project of extending through diplomatic means safety and security to the minorities in their respective countries so that they do not have to migrate to the neighbouring country. Thus begins the era of territorializing the nation by way of scaffolding it within the given state-territorial space with the overarching assumption that the nations of Asia inhabit a common civilizational space. The newly born Indian state is thus called upon to invent its territorial particularity hitherto alien to it (like passport system was introduced vis-à-vis East Pakistan well after India became independent) and also to ensure that it is not overrun by whosoever is forced to migrate from other countries.

As Nehru observed back in 1948: "Our duty to those, who will be in peril in East Bengal, will be to protect them in their own country and to give them sheer shelter in our own country if there is no other way and the situation so demands." Nehru-Liaquat Pact (1950) is a classic example of this. The Pact signed in 1950 and named after the premiers of these two countries imposed on them the mutual obligation of providing safety and security to the minorities of their respective countries so that they did not feel threatened in their own country and have to migrate to another.

If diplomatic means fail, India may even have to fight a war in order to ensure safety and security of not only the minorities but also the majorities living within the neighbouring countries. The distinction between the majority and minority loses its meaning insofar as both are perceived as potential building blocs of Asian civilization. War is of course an extreme option but certainly not uncommon as was aptly exemplified by the Bangladesh war (1971). The Indian state was keen on protecting the people including both the minorities and the majority against the genocide unleashed on them by the Pakistani forces by fighting a full-scale war. The prolonged eight month-long genocide resulted in the flight of approximately 10 million refugees to India. In the words of Myron Weiner, 'the refugee flow was one of the causes of war, not its consequence'.

**b. Civilizational Neighbourhood**

While Prime Minister Vajpayee was right in pointing out that one cannot choose one's neighbours, it does not mean that neighbourhood policy of a nation is necessarily guided by what Derrida calls 'hospitality beyond any horizon'. Nor is it informed by any kind of radical otherness. Contemporary writings on the theory of neighbourhood gesture towards the situated nature of the relation between neighbours and the limited possibilities that such situatedness offers for framing and reframing of a country's neighbourhood policy in line with one's national interest. Civlizational framework thus gets reduced to national interest. Neighbourhood policy in recent years slowly transforms both civilizational nation and nations-in-civilization into 'civilizational neighbours'.

India's invocation of the phrase 'Civilizational Asian neighbours' (as Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the then Minister of External Affairs put it) - while making a plea for India looking east towards Southeast Asia - is by now widely known to us. The series of policies that has been under way since the early 1990s and is now generically called 'India's Look East policy' is couched in the imperative of opening up to the 'powerhouse' economies of South East Asia on the ground that we had had long and enduring ties with them throughout history and they happen to be our 'Civilizational Asian Neighbours'.

While at one level, the policy privileged the movement of goods and services over that of the neighbours meeting each other, it carefully eschews any reference to India's most powerful Western neighbour and clearly makes a preference for trumping it by the eastern ones. Very recently, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Hon'ble President of India, in his address to the legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh on 29 November 2013 reiterates the same point:

Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and important part of the Northeast region of India and a core stakeholder in India's Look East foreign policy. India has long standing civilizational bonds with its neighbours in South and South East Asia as well as in East Asia. The Northeast of India provides a natural bridge between us and South East Asia. The essential philosophy of our Look East Policy, is that India must find its destiny by linking itself more and more with its Asian partners and the rest of the world. We seek to make our neighbours partners in our development. We believe that India's future and our own best economic interests are served by closer integration with Asia.

The newly introduced concept of civilizational neighbourhood marks a realist turn in India's civilizational policy. Huntington sounds realist when he argues that civilizations – unlike the Indian perception - do not differ softly, but clash violently in our era of reckoning with disastrous consequences for mankind in order to decide who would rise over whom or maybe perish mutually. Ultimately, as he envisages, it is a zero-sum clash that decides the destiny of civilizations.

## The Researcher as a Stranger

Looking through the window implies that the researcher/observer situates herself inside a a closed space and she looks through the window from inside. The researcher is advised not

to associate herself with the observed and keep safe distance from the object being observed by her. The distance is the mark of the objectivity of her research. The positioning of the researcher is important.

Objectivity understood as a function of keeping safe distance from the object of observation poses two sets of problems: (a) observance of objectivity is likely to amount to 'objectification' of the researcher and (b) the principle has a tendency of turning live social actors into mere 'objects' of research. My experience as a researcher in the otherwise highly conflict-prone area of India's Northeast testifies that all others and not just my respondents have always been very nice and decent to me across the board as much as I have been nice and decent to all of them. Being an outsider my respondents and interlocutors often became overtly concerned about my safety and security. At a time when I was yet to pick up Assamese, many of them advised me not to take public bus where I would be required to communicate in the same and it would be possible for others to make out my identity as I would fumble over my Assamese. Now I must make the anecdotal confession that the imperative of being nice and decent to others holds me from expressing my ethical position on any of the ongoing conflicts. As I strove hard for becoming 'objective' I could realize that I was as it were exercising control over my own self in my attempt at becoming what I am not – at turning against my very being. At the end of the day I note that I become in the process a product of my doctoral work and the doctoral work is not a product of mine.

What social scientists delineate, as social reality is the product of the tools, instruments and categories that they employ in order to make sense of and/or change it. They define social reality as a 'field' that they consider worthy of their investigation and research. Thus, social reality is made synonymous with the field. There is no social reality outside the field. Social science tools, instruments and categories in other words, contribute to the construction of the field. The gaze of social science could be excruciatingly painful as it might take a toll on human life. Chuni Kotal – the first lady graduate amongst the Lodhas of West Midnapore (West Bengal) – classified by the colonial authority as a 'criminal tribe' – who took admission into the postgraduate Department of Anthropology in a state-run University in West Bengal committed suicide reportedly because of the dense research gaze that was cast on her. Chuni's brother observed in disgust: "why do they (the researchers) visit us? To see how we walk, eat, drink, dress, get pregnant or defecate?" Unable to take it any longer, as his brother writes, she perhaps took her life.

Social Science disciplines offer only a narrow window to view reality that is only a slice of the whole – not the whole - at the cost of many other realities. We as social scientists are cocooned inside our safe fortresses – never allowing us to come face to face with the reality, confront and negotiate it and most importantly foreground it in our research. While it is important to 'bombard the headquarters' that has hitherto kept us imprisoned to it, we can make a beginning not by hopping across windows, looking through all of them and blending the images thus obtained, but by simply shattering the fortress and cutting across their boundaries.

## Notes

[1] The seminar was organized by the Kolkata Society for Asian Studies on 8 March 2014 at Maulana Abul Kalam Azad College, Kolkata. I thank the members of the Society for having invited me to deliver the Inaugural Address. However, I am alone responsible for the lapses, if there are any. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from original non-English sources are mine.

[2] Northeast Studies as a separate branch of Social Science has emerged particularly since the late 1980s in such institutions as Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University. I had the opportunity of writing on the history of its emergence elsewhere (Das 1997:13-33).

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# LEVEL AND PATTERN OF CONSUMER EXPENDITURE IN BUFFER VILLAGES OF NOKREK AND MANAS BIOSPHERE RESERVE

AMLAN JYOTI BISWAS

Abstract : Level and pattern of consumer expenditure of the villages of any tribal community located in the Biosphere Reserve area in India indicate interesting facts about the relative dependence on the forest ecosystem and the state of rural economy they subsist on.

Nokrek Biosphere Reserve, situated in Garo Hills of Meghalaya, a land locked territory, inhabited mainly by the Garo tribe is quite behind the rest of country on economic and infrastructural front. Being away from the mainland society, devoid of cheap transportation network like railways coupled with absence of industry, this area seems to be underdeveloped and backward economically.

Manas Biosphere Reserve, situated in the foothills of the mountain range of Bhutan, being located in Assam, a part of Bodo Territorial Council and inhabited mainly by the Bodo, Santal and other tribes is quite behind the rest of country on economic and infrastructural front.

The present piece of study in villages of the buffer zone of the Nokrek & Manas Biosphere Reserve is an attempt to compare the pattern of consumption and other socio economic indicators of the villages with the rest of the country through the broad heads as household and population, work force, level of consumption, pattern of consumption, quantity of cereal consumption etc. It is interesting to note that the average monthly per capita consumer expenditure of these villagers are relatively higher than the national average of the poorest section in other parts of the country.

Key Words : Biosphere, Reserve, Consumption, Ecosystem

## Introduction

The quality of life of any place in India is always a point of interest to anybody who likes to observe our society. Quality of life may generally be reflected through parameters of consumer expenditure of any family under study (NSS Report no. 538, 2011). Level and pattern of consumer expenditure of the families in the villages of tribal communities located in the Biosphere Reserve areas in India indicate interesting facts about relative dependence on the forest ecosystem and the state of rural economy they subsist on.

The present piece of study in the villages of the buffer zone of the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve and Manas Biosphere Reserve is an attempt to compare the level and pattern of consumption and other socio economic indicators of the villages with the rest of the country through the broad heads like household and population, level of consumer expenditure, pattern of consumer expenditure, per capita cereal consumption etc. (NSS Report no. 538, 2011).

India is a large country with second highest population in the world. Among this

population about 8 percent belongs to various tribes. Of the total tribal population of the country 12 percent resides in the Northeast India (84 percent in the mainland states of Odisha, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh; 1 percent in the Northern India, 3 percent in the Southern India)(Census, 2011).

We can have various average results of indicators regarding level and pattern of consumer expenditure through which we can observe the quality of life in a place and compare it with all India results. But the main obstacle here is that such survey results are available only up to state level and in some cases up to district level. So other than direct study of the area under reference, there is no other way of getting the figures regarding level and pattern of consumer expenditure at the village level through which quality of life in Biosphere Reserve areas may be observed.

## Objective

We may have various indicators of level of living from Consumer Expenditure Survey. Through this survey we can have estimates pertaining to various facets of household consumer expenditure. This study aims at generating estimates of average monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) of a household, its distribution over households and persons and its break up by commodity groups. These indicators are amongst the most important measures of the level of living of the respective domains of the population.

In other words, (a) to observe various indicators of level of living, Consumer Expenditure Survey is a useful one and this has comparability with all India averages, (b)estimation of average monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) of a household has been generated to observe level and pattern of consumer expenditure. It is assumed that the quality of life has to be reflected in the average per capita expenditure on non-food items. Apart from expenditure on food items and from this part of analysis on non-food items, we can reach to the estimation of pattern of life.

## Methodology

In India, economic status of household is mainly studied with respect to and in terms of data on consumer expenditure, more specifically per capita consumer expenditure. India has a well-established system of statistical data collection on consumer expenditure operated by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) but there is no regular survey on incomes, either rural or urban.

Household income is difficult to measure with accuracy because income is a derived variable. Hence it is important to identify and measure each component of income accurately to derive reliable estimates. Thus income estimates from household surveys are subject to certain limitations (Aparajita Bakshi 2008). The problem of defining household income also arises from the fact that the household produces goods and services for sale in the market as well as for self-consumption. The monetized part of the household incomes can be accounted for, but it is often difficult to value the non-monetized part of the household incomes. Moreover, it is generally understood that higher income groups tend to underreport

incomes and income from certain activities are more difficult to measure than others. As a result, there is no uniform definition of household income accepted and applied all over the world.

Consumer expenditure, as a more viable way to assess economic status, aims at generating estimates of average monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) of a household, its distribution over households and persons, and its break up commodity groups. These indicators are amongst the most important measures of the level of living of the respective domains of the population.

The consumption of any good or service by a household or a person occurs in the form of a flow over time (S. Gangopadhyay & W. Wadhwa 2004). The survey needs to record the volume of consumption over a short period such as a day, or a long period such as a year. The time period for which consumption is recorded is called the reference period or recall period. It may vary from item to item. Because the respondents are asked to recall and report the volume of consumption.

The expenditure incurred by a household on domestic consumption during the reference period is the household's consumer expenditure. Expenditure incurred towards productive enterprises of the household is excluded from household consumer expenditure. Self-consumed produce of own farm or other household enterprise is valued and included in household consumer expenditure.

For this study the methodology adopted by NSSO for consumer expenditure survey has been used to avail opportunity to compare it's all India results and state wise results with our village level study results. During field study the data on monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) was generated for about 20 percent of the families.

## Study Area

We have visited buffer zone of two biosphere reserves in Meghalaya and Assam in North East India. These are Nokrek Biosphere Reserve in Meghalaya and Manas Biosphere Reserve in Assam. Within these areas present study is restricted to the village Darichikgre of Nokrek Biosphere Reserve and the village Ultapani of Manas Biosphere Reserve.

Among the four Biosphere Reserves in North East India, the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve (other three being the Manas BR of western or lower Assam, Dibru-Saikhowa in eastern or upper Assam and Dihang-Dibang BR in the Arunachal Pradesh Himalayas) is a unique one situated in the geologically old plateau of Meghalaya exposed to the vigour of the south-west monsoon climate (Compendium on Indian Biosphere Reserves, 2012). This geographically isolated region is the traditional habitat of the Garo tribal community who were predominantly *jhum* cultivators till near past and are now in an economic transition towards settled and plantation agriculture. The region is historically known as malaria endemic with certain altitudinal and seasonal variations other than most prevalent communicable diseases like respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases.

The Meghalaya state (the abode of cloud) is coterminous with the plateau of same name, a geological extension of the Chhotanagpur plateau, and receives highest rainfall in the

world from south-west monsoon. The central axis of the plateau runs east-west with two high points viz., the Laitkor or Shillong peak (1961m) on the east and Nokrek (1412m) on the west in Garo Hills. (Fig. 1).

Meghalaya is a tribal state in Northeast India situated along the international boundary with Bangladesh on the south and shares state boundary with Assam on the north, west and east.This is one of the smaller states in India in terms of area (22,429 Sq. km.) and population (29,64,007 in 2011) having 86% Scheduled Tribe population dominated by three groups viz., the Khasis, Garos and the Jaintias. All these three communities are matrilineal in societal form (Gowloog and Mukherjee, 2013).

Manas, gets its name after the serpent Goddess 'Manasa' (Durga), was established on 14.3.1989 with an area of 2837 sq.km. The area of the Reserve falls in six districts: Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang in the state of Assam in India (Fig. 2). The reserve extends along the Himalayan forest hills to the north of Brahmaputra valley. The Manas River is the largest Himalayan tributary of the Brahmaputara River. Manas was described as a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1985 (Compendium on Indian Biosphere Reserves, 2012).

The location of Manas Biosphere Reserve at the confluence of the Indian and Indo-Chinese realm along with hot and humid climate makes this reserve a treasure of immense diversity and endemism of the flora and fauna (Compendium on Indian Biosphere Reserves, 2012).

The village Ultapani is under Bodo Territorial Council, an autonomous council to protect customary laws in Sixth Schedule areas.

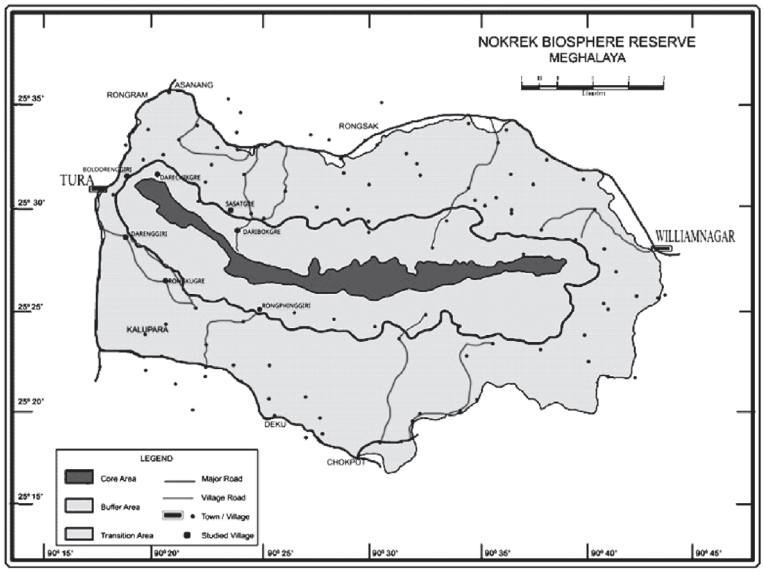



Figure 1: Location and Profile of the Study Area, NBR.
Source: Based on NBR map supplied by the State Forest Deptt., Meghalaya

The Nokrek Biosphere Reserve is spread over parts of all three Garo Hill districts namely West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills.

The Garo Hills or the Western Meghalaya with relatively lower altitude enjoys a fairly higher air temperature for major part of the year (February to October). The average annual rainfall is also lower (3300 mm) in the Western Meghalaya and winter is particularly dry.

The natural vegetation of Meghalaya varies from sub-tropical pine forest over the higher altitude zone to the dense mixed tropical wet evergreen type in areas with moderate altitude but receiving high rainfall. On the other hand, tropical moist deciduous forest cover is widely found in the lower hills and valleys of the Garo Hills districts.

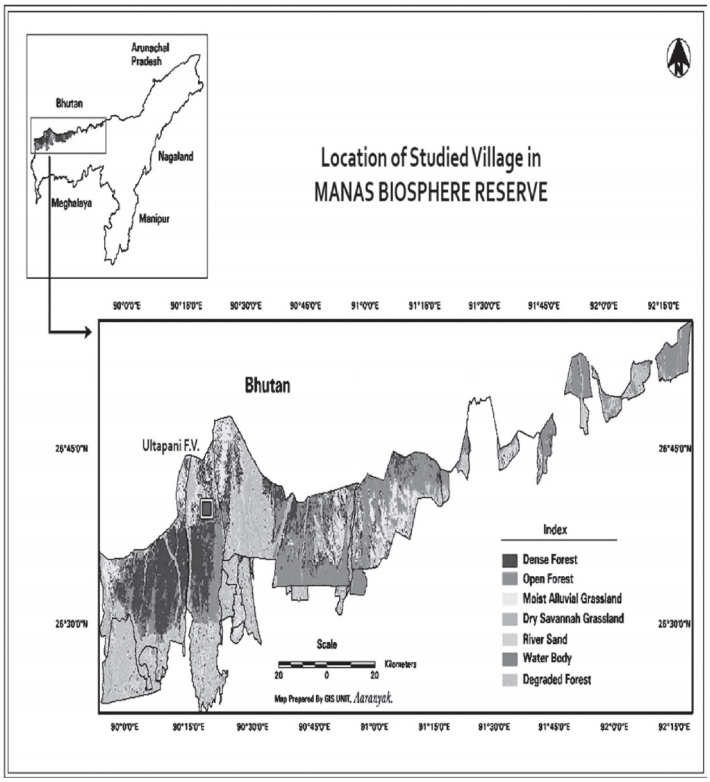



Figure 2: Location and Profile of the Study Area, MBR.

Source: Based on NBR map supplied by the State Forest Deptt., Assam.

## Accessibility and Transport Network

Darichikgre village is located at a distance of 14 km from Tura, HQ of Garo Hills. The village is not approachable by metalled road. Villagers have to cover 5/8 km to get bus route. Only small car can reach the village.

Ultapani village is situated in dense forest of Manas and it is 55 km away from Kokrajhar, the district head quarter. It is approachable by metalled road.

**Profile of Studied Villages**

The name of the studied village of Nokrek Biosphere Reserve is Darichikgre. The village under study is situated in the buffer zone of Nokrek Biosphere Reserve in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. The village is inhabited by Garo tribal people. It is devoid of basic modern facilities. To avail any facility relating to education or medical support or any other amenities, inhabitant of this village have to depend on nearest district head quarter i.e. Tura.

Table 1 : Basic Amenities Profile of the Village Darichikgre

| | |
|---|---|
| Nearest metalled road | 5Km |
| Primary School | Within village |
| Middle/ Secondary/ High Secondary School | 14 km |
| College | 14 km |
| Post Office | 5 km |
| Bank | 14 km |
| Police Station | 13 km |
| Bus stop | 5/8 km |
| P.H.C. | 4km |
| Drinking water, Electricity | Within village |
| Main market | 14 km |

Source: Field Survey

From the above table it is evident that to avail education above primary level or to avail medical facility, villagers have to cover at least 14 km through hilly terrain without having proper mode of conveyance. This is true for other day to day necessities also.

In Manas Biosphere Reserve we have studied the village named Ultapani. It is situated in the buffer zone of Manas Biosphere Reserve in Assam. The village is inhabited by Bodo, Nepali and Adibasi people. It is devoid of basic modern facilities. To avail any facility relating to education or medical support or any other amenities, inhabitants of this village have to depend on nearest district head quarter i.e. Kokrajhar which is 55 km away.

Table 2 : Basic Amenities Profile of the Village Ultapani

| | |
|---|---|
| Primary / Middle School | within village |
| H.S. School / College | 55 km |
| Post Office | within village |
| PHSC | within village |
| Bus Stop | within village |
| Bank | 55 km |
| Medicine Shop | within village |
| Drinking water, electricity | within village |

Source: Field Survey

## Village Economy

Agro-climatic factors of Nokrek Biosphere Reserve area are quite favourable for horticulture. Plantation of areca nut and orange claims major share of total agriculture. Traditional *jhum* cultivation, a very old mode of agriculture, involving slashing and burning of forests on slopes, is still in practice though at present it is not sufficient for food security. The produce of the *jhum* cultivation are mainly maize with millet as staple cereals along with little rice, arum and tapioca as staple tubers, and also ginger, turmeric and rai (mustard seeds) as cash crops. Cultivation of squash and strawberry have been started recently. All the respondents are mainly engaged in agriculture. Dependence on traditional *jhum* cultivation has been declined because presently people are found less involved and less informative about *jhum* cultivation as they have better alternative land use over this type of more laborious traditional cultivation with less return. Naturally, people find it more profitable to grow cash crops or to shift to plantation for its high return.

In Manas Biosphere Reserve area there are about 57 villages with 28,800 inhabitants, predominantly Bodo tribal people who live on the fringe of the Biosphere Reserve (Project Tiger, 2001). They come under the control of the District Revenue Authorities. Surrounding forests come under the Assam Forest Department. Agriculture is the mainstay of their economy. Land use for agricultural operation is an established practice. The timber and non-timber needs of the local population is met from the surrounding forest. In the post 2003 period after the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council, the local population is actively participating in the conservation and development programme of Reserve. (Debonnet & Lethier, 2008).

## Result and Discussion

As per NSS Report No. 538(66/1.0/1), December 2011, Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) of Rural India is estimated as Rs. 1053.64 and Rs. 1984.46 in urban India. The poorest 10% of India's rural population has an average MPCE of Rs. 453. The poorest 10% of India's urban population has an average MPCE of Rs. 599.The median level of MPCE is Rs. 895 in rural India and Rs. 1502 in urban India.

Food is estimated to account for about 57% of the value of the average rural India's household consumption during 2009-10. This includes 14% for cereals and cereal substitutes, a little less than 8% for milk and milk products, and 8% for vegetables. On non-food item categories, fuel for cooking and lighting accounted for about 8%, clothing and footwear for 6%, medical expenses for a little over 5%, conveyance and education for about 3.5% each, other consumer services for 4% and consumer durables for 3.5%.

Average cereal consumption per person is 11.3 kg in rural India and 9.4 kg in urban India.

In rural India, average monthly per capita cereal consumption is around 10.2 kg for the poorest 10% of the population.

Table 3 : Average monthly Consumer expenditure (per capita ) of studied village Darichikgre

| | |
|---|---|
| Food Item | Rs. 623.65 |
| Non-Food Item | Rs. 678.55 |
| Total | Rs. 1302.20 |

As per this study average per capita expenditure per month in Darichickgre village is Rs.623.65 on food items and Rs.678.55 on non-food items and total per capita expenditure per month comes Rs.1302.20.

**Comparison with all India estimate**

The poorest 10 percent of India's rural population had MPCE of Rs.453. In case of our studied village, it is much higher e.g., Rs.1302.20. In rural India, the average MPCE estimated is Rs.1053.00.

Table 4 : Absolute and percentage break-up of MPCE by item group : Rural India and village Darichikgre

| Item group | Monthly per capita expenditure (Rs.) | | Percentage to total MPCE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural India | Village Darichikgre | Rural India | Village Darichikgre |
| Cereal | 145 | 220.10 | 13.8 | 16.9 |
| Pulses | 35 | 34.46 | 3.3 | 2.6 |
| Milk | 81 | 20.80 | 7.7 | 1.6 |
| Edible oil | 39 | 40.00 | 3.7 | 3.1 |
| Egg, fish, meat | 50 | 134.00 | 4.7 | 10.3 |
| Vegetables | 86 | 63.90 | 8.2 | 4.9 |
| Sugar, salt & spices | 60 | 55.39 | 5.7 | 4.2 |
| Other food | 104 | 55.00 | 9.9 | 4.2 |
| **Food total** | **600** | **623.65** | **57.0** | **47.8** |
| Pan, tobacco & intoxicants | 31 | 63.03 | 2.9 | 4.8 |
| Fuel & light | 85 | 83.12 | 8.0 | 6.4 |
| Clothing & footwear | 65 | 102.00 | 6.2 | 7.8 |
| Education | 38 | 124.10 | 3.6 | 9.5 |
| Medical | 57 | 131.50 | 5.4 | 10.2 |
| Conveyance | 36 | 76.40 | 3.4 | 5.9 |
| Misc. goods | 44 | 45.90 | 4.2 | 3.5 |
| Others | 97 | 52.50 | 9.3 | 4.1 |
| **Non-food total** | **453** | **678.55** | **43.0** | **52.2** |
| **Total** | **1053** | **1302.22** | **100** | **100** |

Source: Field Survey

In the above table we have item wise monthly per capita expenditure calculated for the village under study and this has been compared with all India monthly per capita expenditure of rural areas for the same items.

This table depicts MPCE for the studied villages. MPCE includes expenditure by an individual both on food and non-food items. An analysis of the data as shown in the table-1 shows that average MPCE on food items in the said village is Rs. 623.65. It is higher than MPCE for rural India which is about Rs.600. It is higher by 3.79 percent compared to average MPCE in rural India.

An item wise break-up and descriptions of food items give a more detailed picture. In case of cereal, the average MPCE is Rs.145.00 while for the studied village it is Rs. 220.10. It means that there is a difference of Rs. 75.00 (34.12 percent). Similarly, the average MPCE for egg, fish and meat for the studied village is Rs.134.00 while for rural India it is only Rs.50.00. It means that on an average a person in the studied village spends about 62.69 percent more per month on the said items compared to rural India. But in case of milk and other food items, the average MPCE for rural India is closer to the studied village. In case of milk, the average MPCE for rural India is higher by 74.31 percent and for non-food items by 47.11 percent compared to the studied village.

An item wise break-up and descriptions of non-food items show interesting patterns of MPCE in case of few items. For the studied village, the average MPCE on betel leaf, areca nut, tobacco, and other intoxicants, clothing and foot wear, education, medical and conveyance is significantly very high compared to rural India. It is higher by more than 50 percent in case of areca nut, tobacco, and other intoxicants, education, and medical expenses (50.82, 69.38, 56.66, 52.88 and 36.27 percent) while for clothing and foot wear it is higher by 36.27 percent.

Similarly, the average MPCE on non-food items in the studied villages is Rs. 678.55 while the corresponding figure for rural India is much lower which is only Rs. 453.00. It means that the average MPCE in the village is higher by 23.24 percent compared to the average MPCE in rural India.

This gap in average MPCE with respect to rural India and the studied villages is also reflected when both food and non-food items are taken together. The average MPCE for the items (food and non-food) in case of rural India is Rs. 1053.00 while for studied villages it is Rs. 1302.22. It means that there is difference of 23.67 percent. This difference is mainly owing to higher MPCE on non-food items by the villagers.

Table 5: Percentage to total MPCE in the Village Darichikgre and Rural India

| Item | Rural India (Percent) | Village Darichikgre (Percent) |
|---|---|---|
| Food | 57 | 47.8 |
| Non-food | 43 | 52.2 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The percentage of total monthly per capita expenditure of Rural India and the village under study has been shown in the above table. It is evident from the above table that percentage of expenditure on food item is less in this village compared to all India average. And the percentage of expenditure on non-food item is much higher for this village which signifies better economic condition than average rural economy of India.

Table 6: Average cereal consumption per person per month

| | |
|---|---|
| Rural India | 11.3 kg |
| Village Darichikgre | 10.9 kg |

Average cereal consumption per person per month has been calculated to be 10.9 kg. for this village compared to Rural India average of 11.3 kg. Less cereal consumption also indicates better economic condition.

Table 7 : Deducting market value of home-grown /free collection items, MPCE of village Darichikgre and Rural India

| | |
|---|---|
| Food item | Rs. 473.65 |
| Non-food item | Rs. 632.75 |
| Total | Rs. 1106.40 |

In our study we have calculated the amount of consumption of home-grown/free collection item and also calculated the market value of it. After deducting the market value of home-grown/free collection items from total expenditure it was found that it is clearly less than average all India MPCE. This indicates dependence on the available natural resources in case of Nokrek Biosphere Reserve.

Now we can discuss the results of the study of the Village Ultapani of Manas Biosphere Reserve.

Table 8 : Average monthly Consumer expenditure (per capita ) of village Ultapani

| | |
|---|---|
| Food Item | Rs. 561.74 (Assam- 646.38) |
| Non-Food Item | Rs. 617.71 (Assam- 356.91) |
| Total | Rs. 1179.45 (Assam – 1103.28) |

**Comparison with all India estimate**

The poorest 10 percent of India's rural population had MPCE of Rs.453. In case of our studied village it is much higher e.g., Rs.1179.45. In rural India the average estimated MPCE is Rs.1053.

Table 9 : Absolute and percentage break-up of MPCE by item group: Rural India and Ultapani village

| Item group | Monthly per capita exp. (Rs.) | | Percentage to total MPCE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural India | Village Ultapani | Rural India | Village Ultapani |
| Cereal | 145 | 179.37 | 13.8 | 15.2 |
| Pulses | 35 | 15.79 | 3.3 | 1.3 |
| Milk | 81 | 71.59 | 7.7 | 6.1 |
| Edible oil | 39 | 34.18 | 3.7 | 2.8 |
| Egg, fish, meat | 50 | 47.95 | 4.7 | 4.1 |
| Vegetables | 86 | 107.36 | 8.2 | 9.1 |
| Sugar, salt & spices | 60 | 52.50 | 5.7 | 4.5 |
| Other food | 104 | 53.00 | 9.9 | 4.5 |
| **Food total** | **600** | **561.74** | **57.0** | **47.6** |
| Pan, tobacco & intoxicants | 31 | 30.13 | 2.9 | 2.6 |
| Fuel & light | 85 | 65.26 | 8.0 | 5.5 |
| Clothing & footwear | 65 | 132.78 | 6.2 | 11.4 |
| Education | 38 | 169.61 | 3.6 | 14.5 |
| Medical | 57 | 45.97 | 5.4 | 3.9 |
| Conveyance | 36 | 45.79 | 3.4 | 3.9 |
| Misc. goods | 44 | 83.65 | 4.2 | 3.5 |
| Others | 97 | 44.52 | 9.3 | 7.1 |
| **Non-food total** | **453** | **617.71** | **43.0** | **52.4** |
| **Total** | **1053** | **1179.45** | **100** | **100** |

In the above table No.9 we have item wise monthly per capita expenditure calculated for the village under study and compared it with all India monthly per capita expenditure of the rural areas for the same items.

This table depicts MPCE for the studied village Ultapani. An analysis of the data as shown in the table-9 shows that average MPCE on food items in the said village is Rs. 561.74. It is little lower than MPCE for rural India which is about Rs.600.

An item wise break-up and descriptions of food items gives a more detailed picture. In case of cereal, the average MPCE is Rs.145.00 while for the studied village it is Rs. 179.37. It means that there is a difference of Rs. 34.37. In case of vegetables the average MPCE for rural India is 8.2 percent while for the studied village it is 9.1.

An item wise break-up and descriptions of non-food items show interesting patterns of MPCE in case of few items. For the studied village the average MPCE on clothing and foot wear and education is significantly very high compared to rural India. It is higher by almost 50 percent in case of clothing and footwear and for education it is more than 400 percent higher.

Similarly, the average MPCE on non-food items in the studied villages is Rs. 617.71while the corresponding figure for rural India is much lower, which is only Rs. 453.00. It means, the average MPCE in the village is much higher compared to average MPCE in rural India.

This gap in average MPCE with respect to rural India and the studied villages is also reflected when both food and non-food items are taken together. The average MPCE for the items (food and non-food) in case of rural India is Rs. 1053.00 while for studied villages it is Rs. 1179.45. This difference is mainly owing to higher MPCE on non-food items by the villagers.

Table 10: Percentage to total MPCE of village Ultapani and Rural India

| Item | Rural India (Percent) | Village Ultapani (Percent) |
|---|---|---|
| Food | 57 | 47.6 |
| Non-food | 43 | 52.4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The percentage of total monthly per capita expenditure of Rural India and the village under study has been shown in the above table. It is evident from the above table that the percentage of expenditure on food item is less in this village compared to all India average. And expenditure percentage on non-food item is much higher for this village which signifies better economic condition than average rural economy of India.

Table 11 : Average cereal consumption per person per month in Ultapani and Rural India

| | |
|---|---|
| Rural India | 11.3 kg |
| Village Ultapani | 12.07 kg (Assam- 12.9 kg ) |

Average cereal consumption per person per month has been calculated to be 12.07 kg. for this village compared to Rural India average of 11.3 kg.

Table 12 : Deducting market value of Home grown / Free collection items, MPCE in the Village and Rural India

| | |
|---|---|
| Food item | 250.19 |
| Non-food item | 563.50 |
| Total | 813.69 |

In our study we have calculated the amount of consumption of home-grown/free collection item and also calculated the market value of it. After deducting market value of home-grown/free collection item from total expenditure it is found to be clearly less than average all India MPCE indicating dependence on the available natural resources in both cases of Biosphere Reserve.

## Concluding Remarks

In brief, it can be deduced that both the studied villages are handicapped with low and insufficient amenities including health services mainly due to their geographical isolation. For availing modern treatment facilities, villagers have to move to the district town i.e., Tura or Kokrajhar and naturally have to bear higher cost of treatment and conveyance which has been reflected in their total expenditure on medical treatment, clothing & footwear and for education. Considering monetary income only, villagers are generally poor and therefore men, women and children have to jointly eke out their living in a very difficult circumstance. Villagers still depend mainly on subsistence agriculture and economic diversification that has been insignificant other than a minor source of income from plantation- agricultural surplus. It is also observed that villagers still have a very close association with the forest. They go to the forest for a variety of reasons such as collection of food, games and medicinal plants. The elaborate and complicated nature of land ownership as per the Garo customary laws also reflects, to some extent, their dependence on land. A very high level of dependence on forest is quite evident from the figures which came out from the calculation of market value of free collection and home grown items of consumption. Interestingly if the value of those collections are deducted, their MPCE goes below the level of poorer section of the rural India.

The once viable shifting or *jhum* cultivation with 30-40 years of cycle has now become a serious environmental issue due to lower cycle of 4-6 years or even less. It is observed worldwide that degraded or fragmented forests encourage mosquito breeding than a good healthy forest. Hence changing over to settled or plantation agriculture in those degraded hill forest is exposing those people to the malaria vector with longer exposures as the man-days spend in the present day agricultural fields are several times more than that under primitive *jhum* cultivation.

Finally, the higher share of expenditure on non-food items (52.2 and 52.4 percent) among the villagers of such an interior forest settlement under subsistence economy seems related highly to the health expenditure caused by higher disease burden and expenditure on clothing etc. & education. Moreover, the seasonal impact on non-food expenditure due to festivity i.e., the Christmas and English New Year due to Christian influence among the Garo tribesmen and Bhogali Bihu in case of the village Ultapani cannot be ruled out. Though these two Biosphere Reserves are situated in different geographical set up being one in plateau and the other in foot hills, it is evident from the results regarding pattern of consumer expenditure that both the villages are comparatively well off than average rural India.

The main limitation of the study remains that it has been done only in one season. It is evident that market price was observed on the higher side than in main land in this particular period of survey. Therefore, a further investigation of MPCE in other seasons, particularly in the lean period, is needed to assess the seasonal variations. But dependence on natural resources is clearly evident. It is assumed that the quality of life may be reflected in the MPCE on non-food items, which is clearly higher than the MPCE on food items.

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# DISEASE ECOLOGY AND MORBIDITY PATTERN AMONG FOREST DWELLERS IN NORTH EAST INDIA

SUMIT MUKHERJEE

Abstract : Health of over one billion people, living in or close to tropical forests of the planet earth, is intricately linked to the forests. On the other hand, there exists a high correlation between the diversity of parasitic and infectious diseases and the distribution of tropical humid forests .Therefore, health of the forest dwellers is the manifestation of a complex multifaceted interrelationship particularly in the tropical monsoon climate as the case taken up here among the forests in India's northeast. Morbidity from communicable and parasitic diseases dominate depending upon certain environmental conditions like climate, relief, etc. Diversity of disease ecology is seen correlated with anthropogenic variations. Acute respiratory infections and acute diarrhoeal diseases prevail everywhere but malaria poses the most serious health problem with an intricate transmission dynamic. The study has revealed interesting seasonality of disease incidence along with certain cultural linkages among different tribal communities of North East India. The overall disease burden in the region is a major impediment on the human development aspects.

Key Words : Forest dwellers, Disease Ecology, Biosphere Reserve, Geo-medical, Malaria.

## Introduction

Health of over one billion people, living in or close to tropical forests of the planet earth, is intricately linked to the forests. Recent large scale researches in Indonesia has explored that the relationship between tropical forest and dwelling population exists primarily in four key areas: extraction of forest food and available nutrition; diseases and related health problems; use of forest medicine; and human culture as such (Carol et al 2006). On the other hand, there exists a high correlation between the diversity of parasitic and infectious diseases and the distribution of tropical humid forests (Guernier et al, 2004).Therefore, health of the forest dwellers is the manifestation of a complex multifaceted interrelationship particularly in the tropical monsoon climate as the case taken up here on the Biosphere Reserves located in India's northeast.

Going ahead of the accepted definition by World Health Organization (WHO), "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity", that part of human ecology has been taken into consideration for the purpose of the present study, which relates to the human health involving a more comprehensive concept of disease causation that synthesizes the basic factors of agent-host-environment relation in a less altered ecosystem. Out of the two principal focal points 'forest' here is

considered synonymous with both natural and cultural resource concept of the people living in and around it.

The environment in which we live is characterized by countless physical, chemical, and biological systems, and it is in this complex setting that we carry out our lives, whether we are aware of them or not. Disease Ecology is an emerging science that defines those aspects of the environment that have a direct bearing on human health. Jaques May, the founder of the theory of disease ecology in 1958, may be quoted from his comments on the Red River delta in Vietnam: "….from the waters the people get their food, also their cholera, their dysenteries, their typhoid fever, their malaria; from the earth they get their hookworm; from the crowded villages they get their tuberculosis and their yaws; from the type of housing they have been forced to adopt they get their plague and typhus; and from the food which earth, temperature and rain produce, their protein deficiencies and their beriberi" (May, 1995).

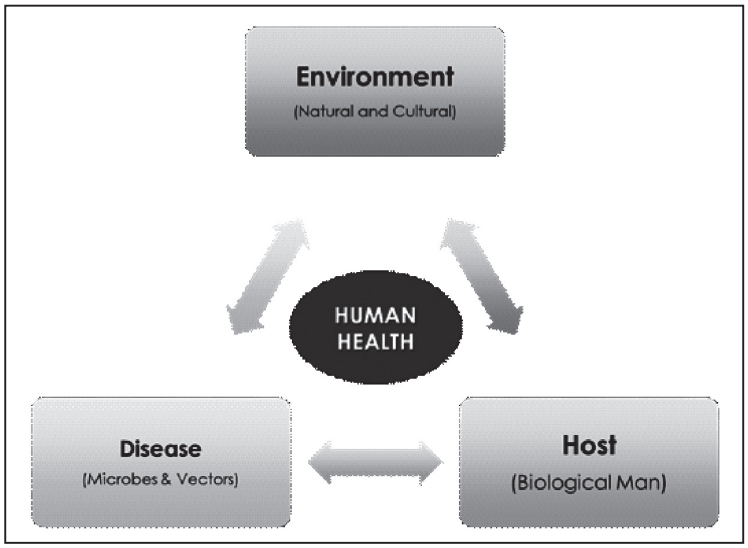



Figure-1 Manifestation of interactions between three components and dynamic equilibrium thereof from ecological point of view (based on May, 1995)

Nevertheless, forests do not have the same importance in the daily life of all people living in and near the forest; their importance varies along a continuum from hunter gatherers to *jhum* farmers, to recent in-migrants, to agriculturists, to urban dwellers. Hunter-gatherers and *jhum* farmers depend on forests most fundamentally in terms of subsistence, health, medicine and culture; their total way of life may depend on the forest. They are most likely to have useful tradition of indigenous medicinal knowledge.

Several species of forest plants and animals produce poisons, fungicides, antibiotics and other biologically active compounds as defence mechanisms, and many of these have medicinal uses. It is reported that in India alone, some 2,500 plants are used medicinally and Shankar and Majumdar (1997) added that for 400 million to 500 million Indians, traditional medicine is the only option.

It is needless to say that forest animals and insects serve as hosts and vectors to a number of important diseases like malaria, encephalitis, influenza etc. Land use changes affect various hosts and vectors differently, thus affecting human disease incidence (Wilcox and Ellis, 2006). Malaria is a major killer and factor in the burden of disease in and around forested areas, particularly in the tropical world. Though the causal links between deforestation and incidence of malaria are difficult to distinguish, certain logging processes can lead to standing water and increases in mosquito breeding sites. In a few places of Indian Himalaya, including Terai of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh communicable and vector borne diseases are most prevalent which are directly related to several environmental conditions like temperature, rainfall, humidity, species diversity viz., the existing forest ecosystem.

The present essay is an attempt to elaborate and analyse the prevailing disease morbidity pattern of the rural tribesmen in forested ecosystem at macro level of two Biosphere Reserves in North East India e.g., the Nokrek BR in Garo Hills of Meghalaya and Manas BR in the Himalayan foothills of western Assam. The study has revealed that Morbidity from communicable and parasitic diseases dominate depending upon certain environmental conditions like climate, relief, etc. Diversity of disease ecology is seen correlated with anthropogenic variations. Acute respiratory infections and acute diarrhoeal diseases prevail everywhere but malaria poses the most serious health problem with an intricate transmission dynamism. Unique seasonality of disease incidence along with certain cultural linkages is evident among different tribal communities of North East India. The overall disease burden in the region is a major impediment on the human development aspects.

**Geo-medical backdrop of major diseases**

It is important to understand that the North East India, as a unique eco-cultural region, possesses a wide variation in geographical and anthropological conditions and also a diverse range of disease occurrence at the same time. From the high mountains of Arunachal Himalaya to the hot humid Brahmaputra flood plains of Assam and from the rainiest plateau of Meghalaya to the forested foot hills, the region offers perhaps the widest range of habitat ecosystem for the equally diverse ethnic groups of people. On the other hand, most of the interior forest villages are still isolated from modern health care delivery and are left with their rich tradition of indigenous medicine.

The Biosphere Reserve is a controlled conservation concept created in tune with the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere concept, to protect the biological and cultural diversity of a region while promoting sustainable economic development.

It will be interesting here to compare the major disease prevalence in the following Biosphere Reserves studied with respect to human health since the national project 'Man in Biosphere' has been taken up by the Anthropological Survey of India.

In conformity with the several research findings, the present author has found that the scenario of disease morbidity in the six Biosphere Reserves of India, studied so far, is in full agreement. In all the four BRs three major communicable disease groups dominate viz., Acute Diarrhoeal Diseases (ADD) along with dysentery and Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) other than vector borne Malaria. These three groups alternately prevail as first, second and third ranked diseases in the BRs (Table-1). Though whole of North East India is historically

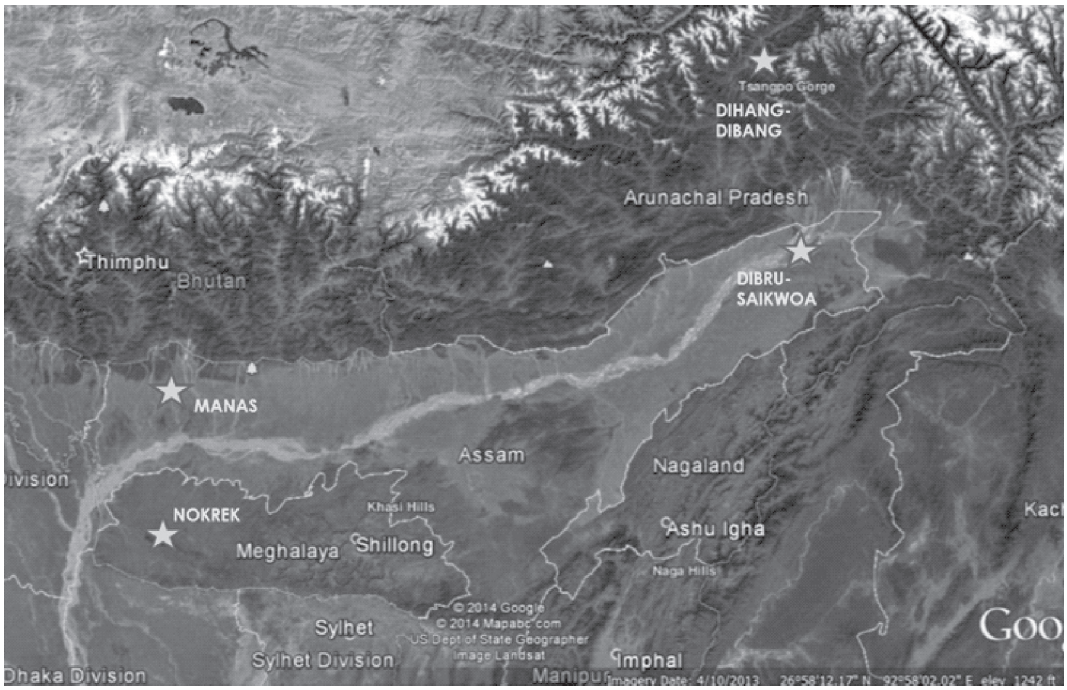



Figure - 2 Location of Biosphere Reserves studied in North East India

known as malaria endemic region but by rate of incidence ARI and ADD hold the first rank with only exception of Nokrek BR. ARI dominates in Manas BR and Dehang Dibang BR located at the foothills and interior of the Himalayas respectively. The Dibru-Saikhwa BR in the upper Assam region has its core area in a riverine island composed of sandy and coarse loamy soil and frequented by heavy rains and flood, minimizing the scope of developing water stagnation for mosquito breeding. On the same ground potable water and low level of hygiene remains major problem thus spreading diarrhoeal epidemics. On the other hand, respiratory infections from common cold to flu and pneumonia are prevailing during late monsoon and winter seasons caused by exposure to chill from sudden fluctuation of air temperature mainly in the higher hills and mountains of Arunachal Pradesh. Jaundice, tuberculosis, skin disease, insect and dog bites are other commonly occurring morbidity factors amongst these forests dwellers.

Respiratory Disease : Diseases like common cough and cold, bronchial infections, influenza, asthma, pneumonia etc. of both acute (ARI) and chronic nature, are grouped together. Epidemics usually occur in winter months but in India it often occurs in summer. These diseases spread from person to person by droplet infection created by sneezing, coughing and talking. Overcrowding enhances transmission, so rates are higher in close population i.e., in schools, overcrowded houses, public gatherings, etc. (Park, 1995). Presence of various pollens of flowers particularly in the forested area are also reported as the causative factor for spreading ARI diseases in the flowing season (Barrel et al, 2004).

Table -1. Major Disease Morbidity in the studied Biosphere Reserves of North East India

| Name of Biosphere Reserve | Altitudinal Range (feet) | Physiographic Character | Climatic Character | Disease Rank I | Disease Rank II | Disease Rank III |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Manas(Lower Assam) | 150 - 1400 | Himalayan Foothills (Terai) | Hot humid, high rainfall zone | ARI | Dysentery (+ADD) | Malaria |
| Dibru-Saikhwa (Upper Assam) | 350 - 415 | Riverine Island (Flood prone) | Warm Humid, Cooler winter | ADD | ARI | Malaria |
| Nokrek(Garo Hills, Meghalaya) | 1200 - 4200 | Plateau with mixed forest | High rainfall, Hill climate with Cooler winter | Malaria | ADD | ARI |
| Dihang-Dibang (Arunachal Pradesh) | 3500 - 16000 | Eastern Himalaya, Tropical evergreen forests | High/Moderate rainfall, Mountain climate | ARI | Malaria | ADD |

Further, a serious impact of wood smoke generated due to use of wood fuel as the main medium of cooking and heating the rooms is very common in the forest villages in India. Regular inhaling of smoke in a closed and congested living room causes infections in the bronchial tract as most rural household do not have separate kitchen. Smoke from simple biomass fuels may account for 1 million to 2 million premature deaths annually, mainly women and small children in developing countries (Smith, 1993).

Diarrhoeal Disease : The term diarrhoeal diseases should be considered only as a convenient expression for a group of diseases due to intestinal infections in which the predominant symptom is diarrhoea (WHO/UNICEF). Unhealthy environment is the main culprit for causation in the community. The incidence of these diseases is directly related to hot season, poor environmental sanitation and quality of potable water. Flies, cockroaches and several other insects are important vectors (probably mechanical) in warm climate countries. A temperature of 25°C or more is suitable for faster breeding of these insects.

Malaria: The optimum temperature for the mosquito breeding is 25°-30° C and its development is hindered at above 35° C and below 16° C. Malaria parasite in the mosquito requires a temperature range of 20°-30° C while above 30° and below 16°C either kills or breaks the life cycle. Similarly, at least above 60% relative humidity is found suitable as in higher humidity the insect is more active and eats more voraciously. Rainfall governs the geographical and seasonal distribution of mosquito habitat and transmission. Anopheles species are not found at the altitudes above 2000m – 2500m. The protozoan parasite cannot complete the life cycle at higher altitude mainly due to lower temperatures (Park, 1995).

**Ecological and cultural dimension of major diseases in Nokrek BR**

Situated in the tropical monsoon climate with hot humid summer and mild winter Garo Hills area has wide range of disease ecology and is traditionally well known for its crucial

public health problems like Kalajar, malaria and leprosy. Still today, malaria, especially the dreaded Plasmodium Falciparum type, is highly prevalent all over the region along with other communicable diseases like acute diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections/ respiratory tract infection, pneumonia, jaundice, tuberculosis, etc. Health of the predominantly tribal rural population living within this BR is obviously linked to the forested hill ecosystem. Varied geographic conditions also offer varied disease prevalence along horizontal and vertical extents.

Among the four Biosphere Reserves in the North East India the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve is a unique one situated in the geologically oldest plateau of Meghalaya exposed to the vigour of the south-west monsoon climate. This geographically isolated region is the traditional habitat of the Garo tribal community who were predominantly *jhum* cultivators till near past and are now in an economic transition towards settled and plantation agriculture. The region is historically known as malaria endemic with certain altitudinal and seasonal variations other than most prevalent communicable diseases like respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases.

The Nokrek Biosphere Reserve is spread over parts of all three Garo Hill districts namely West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. In total 22,084 souls residing in 166 villages within the BR area is served by only 3 Primary Health Centres and 5 Health Sub Centres covering the total area of 772.52 sq. km. (excluding the Core area of 47.48 sq.km. as there is no village). Hence the inhabitants of about 62% of the villages need to negotiate 20 km distance through seasonal village roads and foot paths for availing State healthcare facility in the Tura, Williamnagar and Baghmara hospitals. But on the other hand, there is a long tradition of herbal medicine supported by rich varieties of herbal plants mainly available in the pristine core area forest covering the crest of the Nokrek range.

The Garo Hills or the Western Meghalaya with relatively lower altitude enjoys a fairly higher air temperature for major part of the year (February to October). April is the hottest month with mean minimum and maximum temperatures of 33°C and 22°C respectively. January is the coldest month and the mean temperature varies from 24°C to 12°C. The average annual rainfall is also lower (3300 mm) in the Western Meghalaya and winter is particularly dry. The amount of rainfall decreases from south to north as the south-west monsoon wind gets obstructed by the Tura range and causes heavy orographic rainfall on the southern slopes.

Administratively, the WGH portion of the Nokrek BR falls under Rongram CD Block and is served by two Primary Health Centres namely i) Asanang PHC and ii) Babadam PHC covering population size of 38,996 and 8485 respectively. The Asanang PHC area actually includes six studied villages i.e., Daribokgre, Sasatgre, Darechikgre, Boldorenggiri, Darenggre and Rongkugre except the Ronphinggiri which falls under Babadan PHC. Therefore, a detailed study of the Asanang PHC records has been done to comprehensively assess the health, health care delivery profile of the concerned Nokrek BR area.

Table-2 Rank wise Cause of Death in Villages under ASANANG PHC, WGH District 2009-2010

| Cause of Death | Total No. | Percent | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| FEVER | 96 | 42.11 | 1 |
| Pyrexia of Unknown Origin (PUO) | 31 | 13.60 | 2 |
| ARI / RTI | 13 | 5.70 | 3 |
| OLD AGE | 12 | 5.26 | 4 |
| STROKE | 12 | 5.26 | 5 |
| ARDS (Acute Respiratory Disease Syndrome) | 6 | 2.63 | 6 |
| HIGH FEVER | 5 | 2.19 | 7 |
| PNEUMONIA | 5 | 2.19 | 7 |
| ACCIDENT | 4 | 1.75 | 8 |
| CANCER | 4 | 1.75 | 8 |
| FEVER & JAUNDICE | 4 | 1.75 | 8 |
| LBW | 3 | 1.32 | 9 |
| RENAL FAILURE | 3 | 1.32 | 9 |
| UNKNOWN | 3 | 1.32 | 9 |
| ANAEMIA | 2 | 0.88 | 10 |
| PRETERM BIRTH | 2 | 0.88 | 10 |
| SUICIDE | 2 | 0.88 | 10 |
| ASPHYXIA | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| CHRONIC DEBILITY DISEASE | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| CONVULSION | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| DROWNING | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| G B MALIGNANCY | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| GASTRIC ULCER | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| HEAD INJURY | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| HEART DISEASE | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| LOOSE MOTION | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| MATERNITY DEATH | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| SEVER ANAEMIA | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| SEVER INJURY | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| SP AFFECTION | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| TB | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| THROAT CANCER | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| VOMITTING | 1 | 0.44 | 11 |
| All Deaths | 225 | 100 | |
| Population under Asanag PHC | | | 38,996 |
| Death Rate (per mille) 2009-10 (on hospital death only) | | | 5.77 |

Source: Hospital records collected from Asanang PHC

It was very useful to find a reasonably structured record keeping in the Asanag PHC compared to several other such rural centres visited by the author in different interior parts all over the country. Instead of extracting the morbidity data for the preceding year from the OPD and IPD registers, it was found more useful to utilise the formatted register on

Causes of Death maintained month wise both for child and adult. In total 225 cases of death due to 33 different causes have been registered during October 2009 to September 2010 (table - 2).

It is interesting to note that 'fever' is recorded as the cause of almost half (42.11) of deaths. In response to inquiry the doctor-in-charge of the PHC revealed that fever of any origin, if not diagnosed pathologically or otherwise, are put under the general fever. Thus actually many such undetected cases of malaria, pneumonia, jaundice or even diarhoeal diseases are included as fever through symptomatic diagnosis.

13.6 % death occurred due to PUO or pyrexia of unknown origin. These cases are clinically detected as malaria, but the slide positivity is not ascertained in the laboratory at the time of death. According to the Medical Officer on duty, most of the malaria cases here are complex in nature and are combined with jaundice, acute anemia etc. related diseases. They refer the cases to Civil Hospital at Tura, the district town some 12 km away. Therefore, though malaria morbidity is recorded in the PHC, not a single case of malaria death has been recorded.

ARI/RTI, Old age and stroke are the next imporatnt group of causes which share more than five per cent each followed by ARDS, high fever and pneumonia with a combined share of seven per cent. Therefore, it can be emphaised here that diseases of respiratory track, viz., pneumonia, ARI/RTI, ARDS etc. have emerged as the most fatal among others. This trend can be justified by the fact that villges under Asanang PHC are situated at relatively higher altitude along the Tura range and closest to the forested core area NBR, offering a higher rainfall and colder winter. At the same time the congested rooms in the villages with larger household size also help spreading such highly infectious diseases through sneezing, coughing etc.

Four deaths due to cancer, in an area where cancer detection facility is almost absent, is a matter of real concern. It was learnt from the experienced doctors and health workers that the prevalence of cancer, particularly in the oral cavity, throat and esophagous regions is high which is probably related to the habit of chewing betel nut and smoking etc. among the people of Garo Hills area.

Deaths due to fever and jaundice should also be mentioned as a reflection of huge burden of intestinal infections. The diahorreal diseases pose a huge public health problem in this area after respiratory track infection. But it has lower fatality now-a-days with increased preventive and prophilactic measures taken though government health network.

Deaths due to low birth weight (3) and anaemia (2) also recall medical attentions, particularly, mother and child care system.

It is interesting to observe that ARI diseases showed highest incidence mainly during the winter season i.e., October- December and gradually decreased to reach its lowest in the peak rainy season i.e., July-September. The heaviest rainy season here restricts outdoor

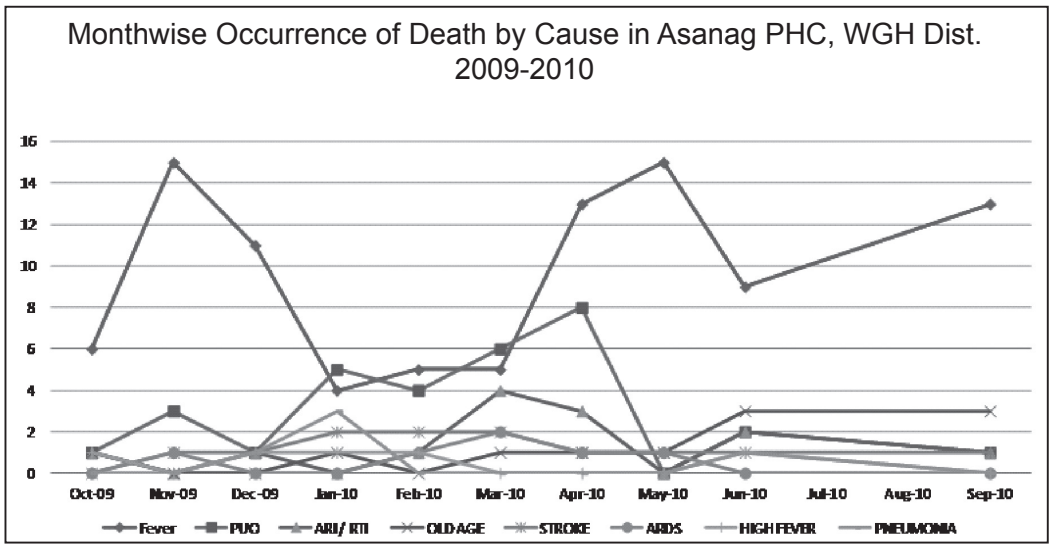



Figure - 3. Seasonality of recorded deaths by causes in the Asanang PHC, WGH district during 2009-2010

movements when there is hardly any agricultural activity in the *jhum* fields. But villagers get exposed to the summer rains starting from April-May when field preparation and broadcasting/sowing of seeds are in peak (Fig: 3).

**Ecological and cultural dimension of major diseases in Manas BR**

Manas Biosphere Reserve (MBR) is located along the Himalayan foot hills on the north of Brahmaputra Valley and belongs to Tropical Humid Forest Biome under Burma Monsoon Forest Biogeographical Province. Manas with its spectacular landscape is one among the most stunning pristine wildlife habitats in the world. The area has a unique distinction of being Natural World Heritage site, Tiger Reserve, Elephant Reserve and an Important Bird Area. The Core zone of reserve is the only representative of continuous Terai-Bhabar Grassland Ecosystem merging into Burma Monsoon forests of the Bhutan outer Himalaya. The landscape is at a confluence of Indo-Gangetic and Indo-Malayan inflow. It is also on the Central Asian flyway.

The Reserve extends over an area of 2837 $km^2$ between 89°51´ to 92°0´ E, 25°45´ to 26°50´ N. from the river Sankosh and Dhansiri in the east, with core area of 520 km which includes World Heritage Site, Project Tiger, Elephant Reserve and Manas National Park. The buffer area which extends over 2300 $km^2$ consists of a number of Reserved Forests, and Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary. The buffer area is managed under the forest divisions namely Kachugaon, Haltugaon, Aie-Valley, North Kamrup, East Darrang and Mangaldoi Wildlife division. The buffer zone is managed on a multiple use basis, allowing selective forestry, plantations, grazing and fire wood collection. Some 55,000 people live in 167 forest villages in this zone.

A considerably large portion, western part, of the BR is under the Kokrajhar district.

Therefore, for the present paper this district is taken as the administrative unit for which morbidity data has been collected from IDSP under NRHM Kokrajhar. The district is situated in a humid sub-tropical climate that is characteristic of the lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. There is high rainfall and humidity. The district also has the largest concentration of forest in the state. The soil throughout the district is composed of sand and clay in varying proportion ranging from pure sand in the river-bed to soft clay in different parts. The water that flows along natural dongs and canals are the main source of irrigation for the agricultural fields for extensive paddy cultivation. Rain water flows down from the hill tracts of Bhutan and along the foothills and reserve forests of the district. The Bhutan hills are also the source of a number of rivers that flow through the district and act as tributaries of the mighty Brahmaputra that flows from east to west, far from the southern boundary of Kokrajhar district. The important rivers of the district that flow from north to south are the Champamati, the Gaurang, the Tipkai and the Sankosh. All the rivers and rivulets flowing through the district have their origin in the Bhutan hills.

Forest is one of the most prominent features of Kokrajhar district. The present estimated area under reserved forests is roughly 1,719 sq. km. that includes parts of Aie Valley Forest Division of Bongaigaon district and Guma Range of Dhubri Forest Division. The two forest divisions that fall completely under Kokrajhar district are Haltugaon and Kachugaon. Though records show that about 55% of the total geographical area of the district is under reserved forest, the actual position has dwindled to some extent due to relentless felling of trees by unscrupulous elements and encroachment of reserved forest.

Being spread over the forested Himalayan foothills, north of Brahmaputra flood plains of western Assam, the whole of Manas BR is traditionally known for its multiple domain of environmentally induced diseases. High rainfall with warm summer in the tropical forest regularly flooded by numerous rivers and streams from Bhutan Himalayas offer an ecosystem, which is favourable for various bacterial and parasitic diseases. Forests of Assam are historically endemic zone for Malaria, mainly Plasmodium Falciparum. But the main diseases burden of the BR area is Acute Respiratory Infections including influenza occurring mostly during rainy and winter seasons due to exposure to a sudden fall in air temperature. Intestinal infectious diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, and typhoid etc. are also prevalent throughout the region which is related to lacunae in both provisions of potable water and safe sanitation system as well as the community and personal hygiene practices.

The Government health care delivery system in the completely rural belt of the four districts is mostly served by the Primary Health Centres. These centres are yet to be equipped with proper manpower and medical facilities to ease out the total disease load. On the other hand, most equipped Government Hospitals in the small towns outside the Biosphere area are only accessed by the forest villages located along the southern limit. Among the different communities, the beliefs and practices of traditional medicine and healing system are in vogue. It was found that the traditional methods of medicine prevailing in the region have developed a multi-ethnic character where traits of the Santhal, Bodo and Nepali methods of medicine have intermingled to some extent. It is interesting to note that the villagers adjacent

to the Bhutan border, irrespective of community affiliation, are taking benefits of the health care facilities available on the other side of the international border. Therefore, it may be concluded that the MBR as a whole, is a breeding ground of numerous diseases where communication and other infrastructural hindrances are posing a challenge to the effective health care delivery. Additionally, the prolonged tension resulting in a huge number of internally displaced population has also destabilised the system and the traditional medicine including herbal ones are effectively serving to the dire need of the ailing population at least as the primary measure.

In tune with the findings among the other forest dwellers with similar ecological conditions, ARI clearly dominates (19 percent) in the villages of Kokarajhar district having a very large proportion of forest area. ARI group of diseases shared 19 percent of the total reported cases in the district (Table-3 and Fig. 4). The second position is occupied by bacillary dysentery, a type of common intestinal infection communicated easily. If this is clubbed with the share of ADD, which is fourth in the rank, the total share becomes as high as 7 percent for the group of intestinal diseases where primary symptom is diarrhoea. In that case, malaria ranks third with just 4.88 percent to all cases. Therefore, virtually the major disease category remains same in the BR as well. Significant cases of enteric fever and pneumonia also add to the two most important disease groups ADD and ARI.

Table-3 Month wise Share of Major Communicable Diseases in Kokrajhar District, 2011

| Month | Malaria | Fever of Unknown Origin (PUO) | Acute Diarrhoeal Disease (ADD) | Bacillary Dysentery | Viral Hepatitis | Enteric Fever | Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) | Pneumonia | All Other Diseases |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | 2.69 | 0.03 | 2.87 | 3.27 | 0.00 | 0.42 | 17.85 | 0.31 | 72.54 |
| February | 2.29 | 0.02 | 2.57 | 3.17 | 0.00 | 0.44 | 18.32 | 0.21 | 72.96 |
| March | 2.11 | 0.02 | 2.36 | 3.71 | 0.00 | 0.52 | 16.51 | 0.17 | 74.61 |
| April | 1.76 | 0.01 | 2.56 | 3.60 | 0.01 | 0.33 | 15.48 | 0.17 | 76.07 |
| May | 1.92 | 0.02 | 2.55 | 3.89 | 0.01 | 0.48 | 16.83 | 0.17 | 74.15 |
| June | 2.13 | 0.00 | 2.43 | 3.35 | 0.02 | 0.60 | 16.63 | 0.17 | 74.66 |
| July | 4.24 | 0.00 | 2.58 | 3.22 | 0.02 | 0.81 | 19.35 | 0.23 | 69.54 |
| August | 4.20 | 0.00 | 3.10 | 3.93 | 0.02 | 0.84 | 21.29 | 0.17 | 66.39 |
| September | 3.23 | 0.00 | 3.01 | 3.38 | 0.01 | 0.64 | 17.88 | 0.17 | 71.69 |
| October | 4.13 | 0.00 | 3.14 | 4.11 | 0.03 | 0.62 | 20.62 | 0.33 | 67.07 |
| November | 3.02 | 0.00 | 2.95 | 3.77 | 0.01 | 0.74 | 24.80 | 0.40 | 64.31 |
| December | 2.64 | 0.00 | 2.93 | 3.80 | 0.00 | 0.66 | 26.81 | 0.46 | 62.69 |
| **Annual Total** | **2.88** | **0.01** | **2.73** | **3.60** | **0.01** | **0.60** | **18.93** | **0.23** | **71.01** |

Source: Integrated Disease Surveillance Project records on OPD under NRHM, Kokrajhar

Hence, it can be deciphered that higher forest cover and higher rainfall in the Himalayan foothill of Kokrajhar district seem to be related to very high incidence of ARI diseases in conformity with earlier observations. Moreover, cases of pneumonia, another dreaded acute respiratory tract disease has been observed occupying 6$^{th}$ rank, also indicates a lower resistance and immunity level among vulnerable groups. Secondly, several intestinal infectious diseases, including dysentery, diarrhoea and enteric fever, mostly water borne, are prevalent in the district indicating a low level of personal and community hygiene. Malaria, mainly PF or cerebral or forest malaria, is another disease clearly dominating the scenario in the district. Forested belt, particularly the degraded forest areas, in the district are providing wide spread mosquito habitat. Both the cultivators in the vast wet paddy fields and forest dwellers as such are regularly exposed to mosquito bites.

The seasonality of major diseases also highlights a few remarkable patterns (Fig.-5). ARI in particular presents a strong association with certain seasons. It is clear from the Fig. No. 5 that the number of ARI cases increased during the peak rainy season i.e., July-August and reached a high peak in December, the mid-winter month. Malaria also shows a trend of increase during hot humid period starting from June and continues till early winter month of November. Nevertheless, occurrence of malaria throughout the year indicates a high parasite load among the population in the district, particularly in the forested belt. On the

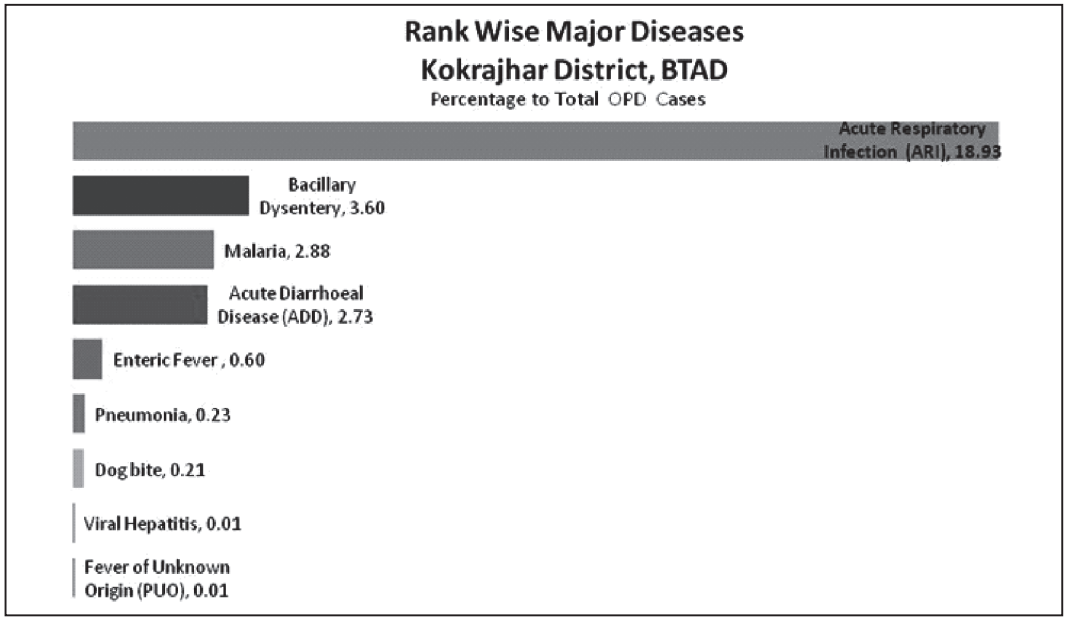



Figure 4. Major disease occurrence by rank on percentage to all recorded cases in the Kokrajhar district for the year 2011 as per IDSP under NRHM, Kokrajhar

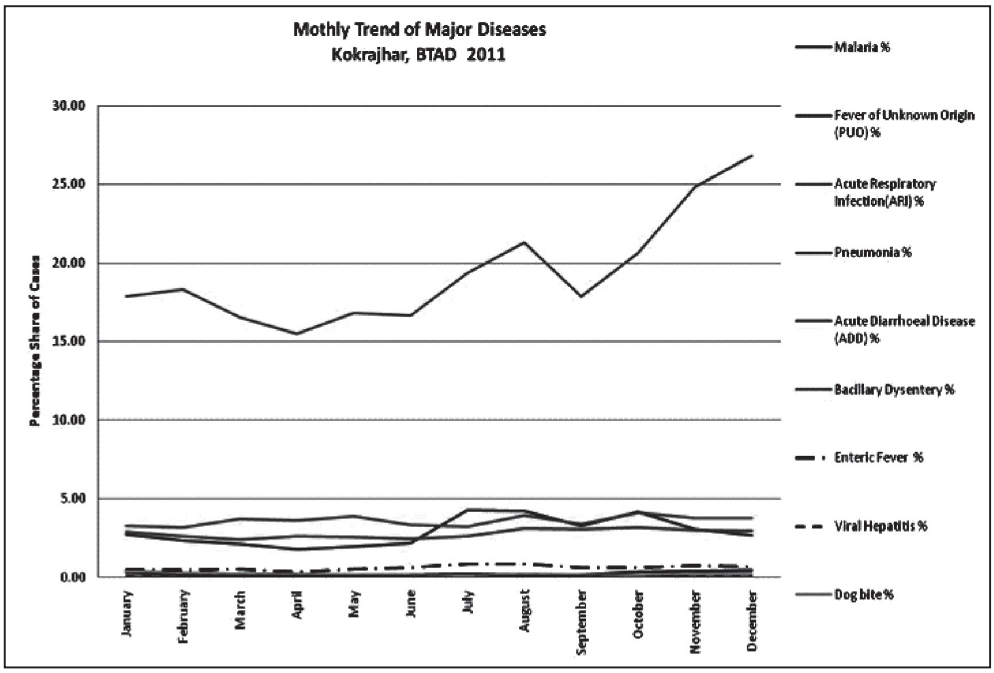



Figure 5. Seasonality of recorded diseases in OPD from IDSP under NRHM, Kokrajhar during 2011

other hand, ADD group of disease demonstrates no clear monthly variations other than a slight increase during rainy season when flood is a common phenomenon causing contamination of available water sources like dug wells, tube wells, streams, etc.

It will be interesting to note that most of the communicable diseases discussed above and prevalent among the tribal communities are related to various spiritual beliefs and taboos. Hence, in several cases,villagers are reluctant in accepting modern medicine even if available readily. Like many other tribal and non-tribal communities in whole of Eastern India Measles is taken by several tribal groups as blessings of a benevolent spirit and that it's a taboo to cure it. Even vaccinations against such fatal diseases are wilfully avoided as a sin and hence several infant child mortality occurs.

**Tradition of Ecosystem-medicines**

In fact, still today, vast majority of these tribesmen, living in and around the Biosphere Reserves, are found dependant on the forest for traditional medicines. Indeed, villagers here use, what can be better called 'ecosystem-medicine' by preference and with the wisdom which links most of the diseases and illness to the malevolent and benevolent spirits living in the same forest. All the tribal communities here practice their own traditional medicinal

methods which are predominantly herbal in nature. It should be mentioned here that among these two BRs Nokrek is more uniethnic and the Garos here have preserved their own system of medicine only with some influence from herbal medicines prevalent in nearby Bangladesh whereas in Manas BR there is an interesting admixture of traditional medicine across the ethnic groups. With a disease outbreak the priests and traditional healer in the village assess the severity of the epidemic situation through their own method and point out the responsible spirit or an incidence or even a person in the village. The preventive and curative steps are prescribed which often include offerings, poultry or animal sacrifice, tabooing food items and restrictions in movement to certain places or houses.

## Concluding discussion

The morbidity pattern which emerged above clearly portrays the dominance of several communicable diseases in both the BRs though situated in different geographical areas. It can also be inferred that the total disease burden on the people in and around protected forests is alarmingly high resulting in loss of man-days and higher expenditure on health ground leading to backwardness. The results of the study also indicate the higher incidence of Acute Respiratory Infections and related diseases both in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya plateau as well as in the Himalayan foothill and flood plains of Kokrajhar district in Assam. This can be related to the unprotected exposure to cold weather, presence of pollens during flowering season in the forest, crowded house conditions causing quick spread through sneezing and coughing, extensive use of fuel wood and absence of separate kitchen, etc.

Several recent studies have approved that emerging infectious diseases, in the world today, either once were, or currently are, zoonotic, i.e., transmitted between animals and humans (Taylor, Latham and Woolhouse, 2001). Further, 15 percent of about 250 infectious diseases emerging today have direct association with forest (Despommier, Ellis and Wilcox, 2006). In fact, infectious disease-causing virus, bacteria and protozoans are collectively mentioned as 'micro-parasites' inside human host in infectious disease epidemiology. Therefore, infectious diseases are often viewed ecologically as an extension of host-parasite relationship existing in any ecosystem like that of predator-prey (Wilcox and Ellis, 2006).

The geo-medical dimension of the disease occurrence and spread in the forest ecosystem is also different than non-forested areas. Firstly, the transmission dynamics of microbial and vector borne diseases is unique, faster and stronger in the forests (Coffer et al, 2006). Moreover, human health is, in many respect, open to certain natural conditions including hazards. Therefore, the vector control programme resulted far less success in the forests than in other places. Thus man is, in other words, restricted from controlling and managing

those disease causative elements in forest. Similarly, remote locations make the forest villagers handicapped in accessing modern health care delivery. Traditional medicine of herbal and animal origin are important alternates but restricted at different levels and forms.

Finally, it is felt that the people living in and around protected forest areas are regularly exposed to numerous natural hazards along with the unhealthy elements of the rich biodiversity. Therefore, inhabiting 'man' as the part and stake holder of the preserved biodiversity needs to be properly protected with adequate health facilities and other infrastructural support system. Side by side, traditional medicine systems, of the predominantly tribal communities in these forests, need to be encouraged with herbal reserves accessible to the tribesmen towards preservation and quality enhancement of the same.

**Acknowledgement**

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# THE LOOK EAST POLICY AND NORTHEAST INDIA : RUBRIC, RHETORIC AND REALITY

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Abstract : As a region Northeast India has undergone various transformations both in terms of cartography as well as perceptions. This region has often been ascribed as the anthropologists' paradise during the colonial era while in the post-colonial period the perception related to the region has been through the statist paradigm of threat perception and security. The cartographic reality of the region being such that it remains overwhelmingly surrounded by international borders added to this perception. During the contemporary times of globalisation, as India sought to open up to the world, the borders of this otherwise peripheral region is showcased as gateways to prosperity and the much touted Look East Policy has been an initiative in that direction. The official documents attempt to situate Northeast as the arrowhead to the success of this policy. In this regards, this paper deals with the rubric and, rhetoric associated with the policy vis-à-vis the region and in the process understand the emerging reality.

Key Words : Look East Policy, Trade, Macroeconomy

## I. The Look East Policy

The Look East Policy (LEP) has been India's effort for a global footprint in the post-Soviet world order. As India embarked on a programme of free market restructuring at home, LEP became instrumental in its search for newer markets and economic partners aboard. As a policy,without any white paper, officially defined and articulated in September 1994, in his Singapore Lecture by the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, the stress was on building India's long term co-operation with South East Asia with whom it had a legacy of strong historical, cultural and civilizational relations (Muni : 2011). India tended to come closer to Southeast Asia through improving her relation both at multilateral level with ASEAN and at bilateral level with each of the member nation of the Association. Bilateral cooperation was strengthened by setting up a joint commission with Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea and Indonesia. India also strengthened its economic relations with Japan. The Policy looked forward to private sector-led market oriented growth. This gave the rationale for building connectivity for trade expansion and natural resource flow. It was a package primarily aimed at promoting trade and market relations, inducing foreign direct investment (FDI) and engaging regional and sub-regional partners for investments.

Another and more important factor behind the Look East Policy was integration of the region with the global communities and with the global FDI. The World Bank hooked the

prospect of integration of South Asia and East Asia as the playing field of global finance. The World Bank (2010) felt that integration could help the rise of a globally competitive manufacturing sector. This could be possible by taking advantage of three levels of growing integration: with East Asia, within the region and with the rest of the world. The Document also stated that the gains from a Look East strategy would be even stronger with such an expanded regional market. Such a larger regional market would allow bigger scale economies, induce greater competition and technology spillovers, improve trade logistics and attract greater private investment from East Asia and the rest of the world. India's role would be central to improve integration opportunities for smaller neighbours as they respond. The strategy is to lower tariff and non-tariff trade barriers with respect to East Asia and the rest of the world and to expand opening of services and foreign direct investment.

On the other, as a foreign policy initiative, the scope of the Look East Policy was also extended from its regional focus towards a new horizon of the global economy. Chatterjee (2007) has three articulations of India's Look East Policy, each underpinned by a different conceptual orientation. First, the Look East Policy might be conceived as an extended security trajectory to protect India's legitimate power and resist growing Chinese domination of the region. This is geo-strategic space. Second, a communitarian reading of the Look East venture, interpreting it in terms of sub-nationalism and soft border exercises. This space has shared culture, language groups and social structure that define region. Third is the strategic place for economic cooperation.

Programmatically, Northeast India offered the space for realizing these aspirations. It is noteworthy that although the policy in its present form got initiated with the advent of liberalization in the early 1990s, it was only in 2008 that Northeast India gained prominence with the launch of the NER Vision Document 2020. This document identified the problems of the region to the post-partition peripheralization which isolated the region and exacerbated its socio-economic backwardness vis-à-vis mainland India. Infrastructure development, border trade and better governance were highlighted in the document as the means for ushering inclusive growth in the region. The document emphasized six development components, namely, self-governance and participatory development, creation of development opportunities, developing sectors with comparative advantage, capacity building of people and institutions, creating hospitable climate for investment and building infrastructure through public investment. The Vision Document also emphasized increase in connectivity and in employment opportunities through state investment in infrastructure. It stated that the Look East Policy should focus on the Northeastern region so that Southeast Asia should begin from Northeastern India. Opening up trade routes would expand economic opportunities for the region and accelerate its growth process. It is all about a foreign policy initiative towards building connectivity through road, rail, telecommunication, etc. connecting India's Northeast with

the near east neighbours like Bangladesh and Myanmar and even beyond, with other countries of east and southeast Asia. The driving force of this foreign policy initiative is to expand market economy. The geographical proximity of the Northeast with South East Asia made the region more relevant for the prospects in regional cooperation for trade and for ensuring governance, a *sine qua non* for the FDI and the trade regime. Considering this relevance, the policy did re-imagine the once sensitive border region of Northeast as a prospective economic zone. The implications of the Look East policy are therefore, diverse and multi-dimensional including security, strategy, foreign policy and administration other than the economic imperative dominant in its orientation.

With this understanding about Look East Policy it is worthy to 'look' at the select macro-economic fundamentals of NER so as to compare the idealized scenario being advertised by the Indian state and the existing reality of the region.

## II. Select Macro-economic Indicators

If we assess select macro-economic indicators of the region, it provides us with the picture as to where NER stands today e.g., the growth of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP), the unemployment scenario, the formal and informal trade patterns, etc. In this section we briefly deal with these indicators.

### a) Trends in Regional Income

The overall growth rate of NSDP of the states in the region shows a marginal increase during the first decade of this century. But compared to the Indian growth story, NER falls way behind. So if we compare the long term trend of the growth in NER in the decade preceding and succeeding liberalization there is hardly any major change in the growth rates.

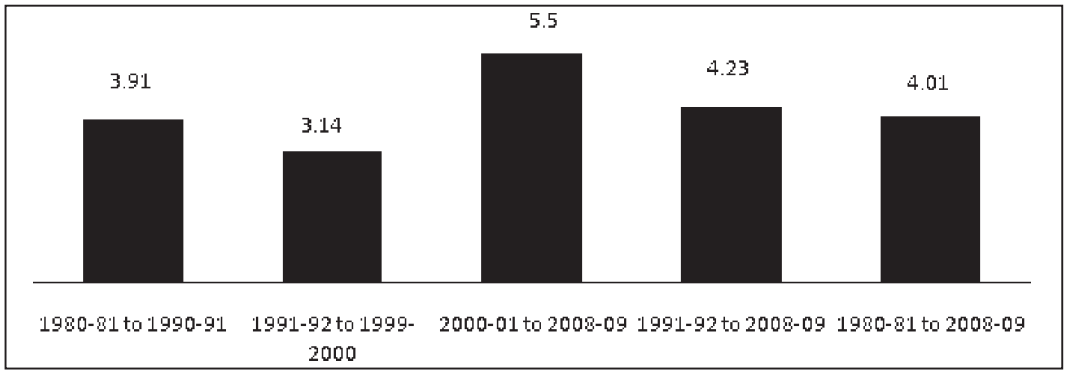



Figure I: NSDP Growth Rates in NER: Different Time Periods

This is amply reflected in the falling contribution of NER towards India's national income, which has declined from 4.23 per cent in 1980-81 to 2.65 in 2008-09.

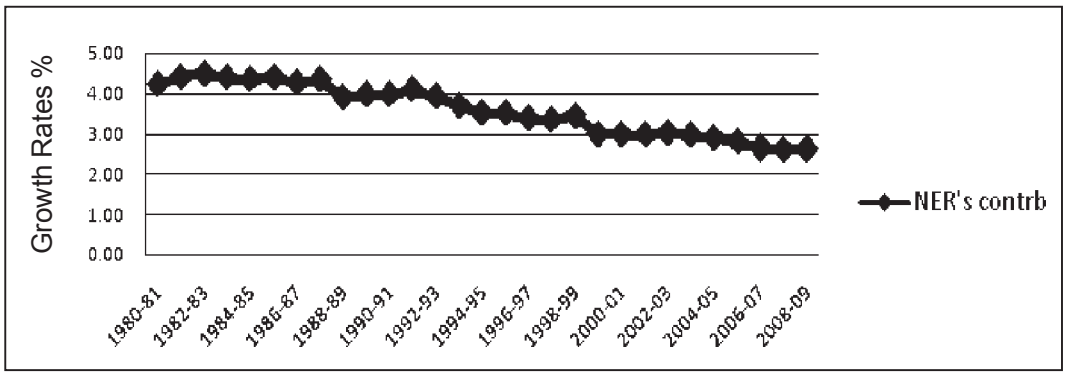



Figure II : NER's Contribution to National Income-1980-81 to 2008-09

**b) NSDP Composition and Contribution of Labour**

There has been a decline in the contribution of the primary sector to the regional NSDP but the workforce engaged in this sector has not declined commensurately. More than 67 per cent of the rural and 10 per cent of the urban workforce continues to be engaged in this sector. Except Nagaland, contribution of agriculture has declined among all the states in the region. On the other, Mining and Quarrying shows an increasing trend in the region particularly in Meghalaya and Assam.

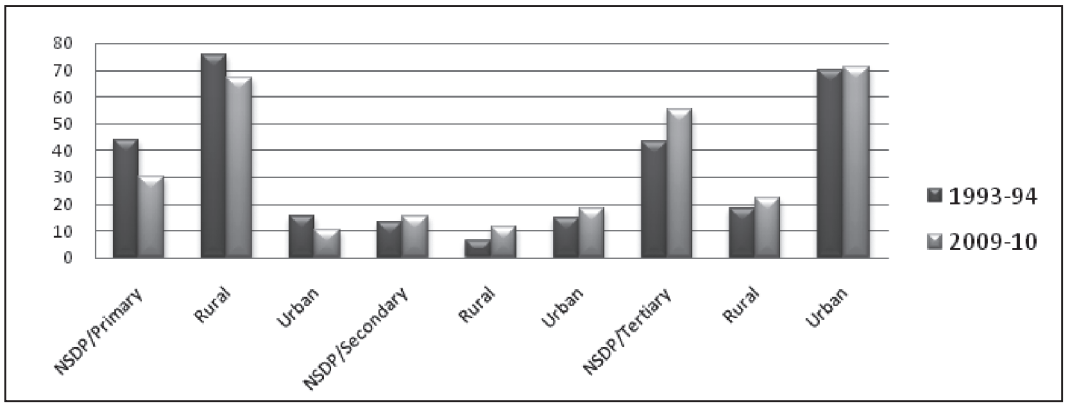



Figure III: NSDP Contribution and Composition of Labour in NER, 1993-94 to 2009-10

The secondary sector has contributed to income and employment generation in the region albeit marginally. Only construction has contributed both in terms of income and employment generation whereas manufacturing shows a declining trend in terms of income with a marginal change in employment generation. It is noteworthy that both construction and manufacturing sub-sectors contributed equally during 1993-94 but thereafter there has been a consistent deceleration in manufacturing, which has been taken over by construction activities.

On the other, despite being the largest source of employment in the urban areas, the tertiary sector failed to engage workforce commensurate with its contribution to the regional income.The aggregated sub-category of Public Administration and Others exhibit a negative trend in employment generation. There has been more than 12 per cent decline between 1993-94 and 2009-10 in this category in the urban areas. Although the contribution of Trade, Hotel & Restaurants has declined but employment generation in this sub-sector has increased substantially, particularly in the urban areas. Only Transport, Storage and Communication have contributed positively to the income generation and urban employment in NER.

**c) Unemployment**

A comparative analysis of the 50th (1993-94), 55th (1999-2000), 61st (2004-05) and 66th (2009-10) rounds of Survey done by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) of usual status of rural unemployment in NER and India exhibited a declining trend for the region during 1999-2000 and 2004-05. But this has reversed in 2009-10. The rate in the region continues to be almost three times higher than all-India. Urban usual unemployment in the region has shown a downward trend since 1999-2000, it continues to be double than the all-India rate.

The all-India trend of declining rates of youth unemployment (15 to 29 age group) is observed in the region too. In both rural and urban areas of the region, the rates were halved in 2009-10 compared to 1993-94. However, here also the youth unemployment rates in NER (4.90 for rural and 7.59 for urban) have remained significantly higher compared to India (1.8 for rural and 5.9 for urban), particularly in the rural areas.

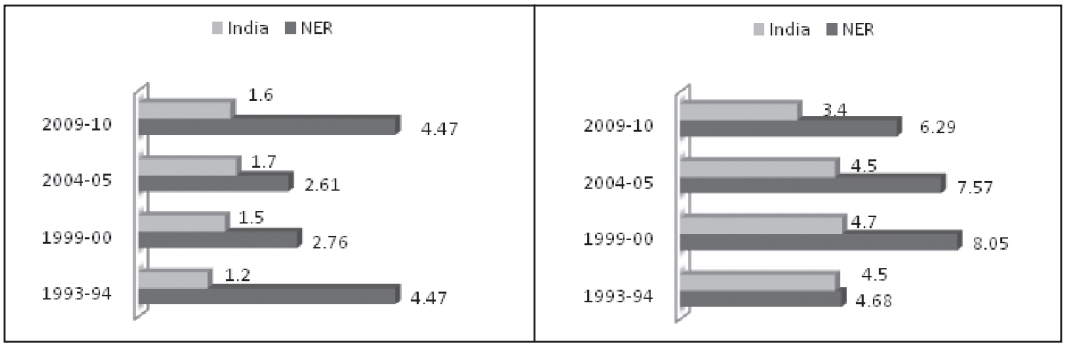



Figure IV: Comparative Percentages of Rural & Urban Usual Unemployment (Persons): NER-India

**d) Formal Trade with Neighboring Countries**

According to the estimates of the Planning Commission, during 1997-98 to 2005-06, the average value of trade of NER with NC's has been estimated to be Rs. 406 crores.

Balance of trade has been heavily in favour of the NER. In 1997-98, exports constituted more than 88 per cent of the total trade while imports were just over 11 per cent. The pattern of trade remained similar during 2005-06 too.

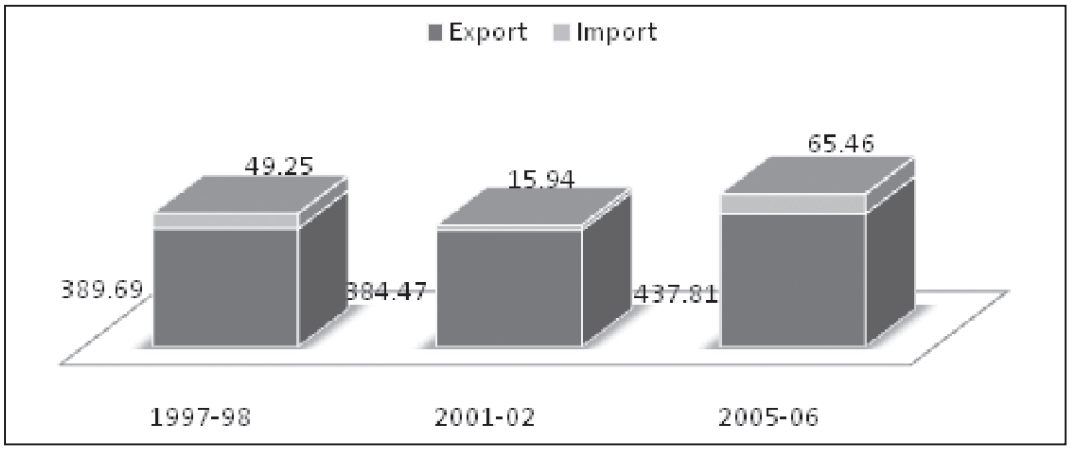



Figure V: NER'S Trade with Neighboring Countries (in Rs.)

The Report indicates that the region mainly exports primary products e.g., boulder stone, limestone, tea, coal, etc. which increased from Rs 395.90 to Rs 437.81 crores from 1999-2000 to 2005-06 with fluctuations in between. During 1999-2000, tea (55.47 per cent), coal (26.68 per cent) and limestone (7.38 per cent) contributed about 90 per cent of the total exports from the region. The share of these three items increased to 94 per cent in 2005-06. The share of tea (45.60 per cent) has fallen significantly although it continues to be the single most exported item from NER. Share of coal has increased significantly from 26.68 to 45.49 per cent, while that of limestone has fallen from 7.38 to 2.75 per cent. Export of coal is fast becoming the most important item, mainly to Bangladesh. On the other hand, manufactured goods have a negligible presence in the export basket. Even the manufactured goods produced in areas other than Northeast are not very significant in formal border trade.

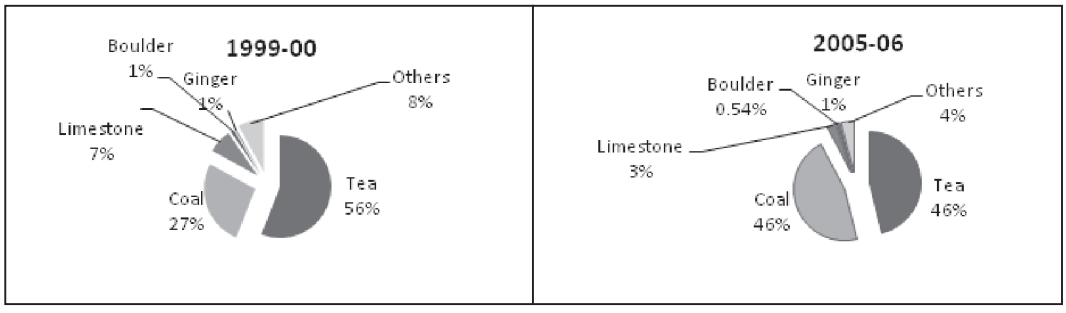



Figure VI: Major Export Items from NER to Neighboring Countries

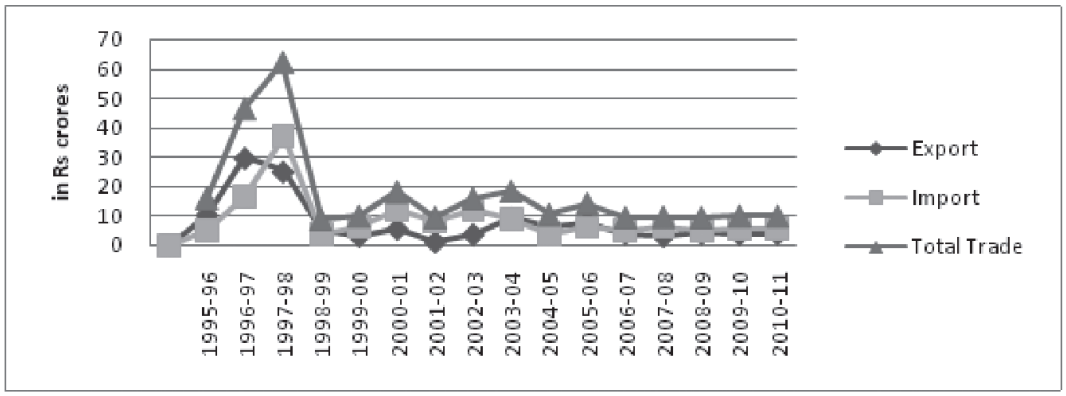


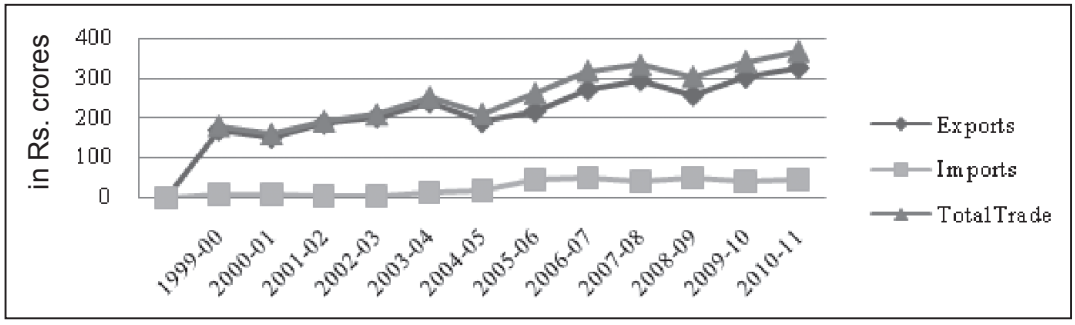

Figure VII: Value of Trade in the Moreh-Tamu Sector

To facilitate official trade The Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement was signed on January 21, 1994. Accordingly, Moreh was transformed into a Land Custom Station on April 12, 1995. The Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement introduced a three tier trade system. But where does the Moreh-Tamu trade stand today?

Analysis of data reveals that after the initial spurt in trading activities there has been a sharp fall in the volume of trade. Other than the initial spurt there has been no major momentum for trade in this sector. Above all, the diversity of tradable items has also been absent.

Presently, there are 33 Land Custom Stations (LCS) along the NER-Bangladesh border, among them 18 are functional, which co-ordinate official border trade. During 1999-00 to 2010-11, average trade between NER and Bangladesh was of Rs. 260.41 crores, average exports consisted of Rs. 233.30 crores and imports Rs. 27.05 crores. NER enjoyed a trade surplus during the entire period.

Among the items exported during 1996-97, mineral products comprised 90 per cent and horticultural products a little over 5 per cent. The rest consisted of agro-horticultural products produced outside the region but exported through the LCS's of the region. The pattern has remained similar with mineral products now comprising more than 98 per cent of the total




FigureVIII: NER-Bangladesh Trade, 1999-2000 to 2010-11

exports in 2010-11. Minerals mainly comprising of coal and limestone were supplied from Meghalaya to meet the demand of industrial units such as Chhatak Cement Company, Lafarge Surma Cement Company, jute mills, brick kilns and tea gardens in Bangladesh. Almost all the items exported from the region were without any value addition.

This is amply reflected in the export profile of the LCS in NER. Shillong division handled over 61 per cent of the total value of exports from the region in 2000-01, which increased to 77 per cent during 2010-11. The share of other divisions has declined. On the other hand, import takes place mainly through the Agartala division although in terms of value it shows a declining trend. Other sections have registered an increase, the highest being in the Karimganj section. Items of import which are consistently found over the years comprise raw and processed items such as *hilsa* fish and dry fish. A host of other items including electronics goods, confectionaries, soft drinks, garments, etc. appear sporadically.

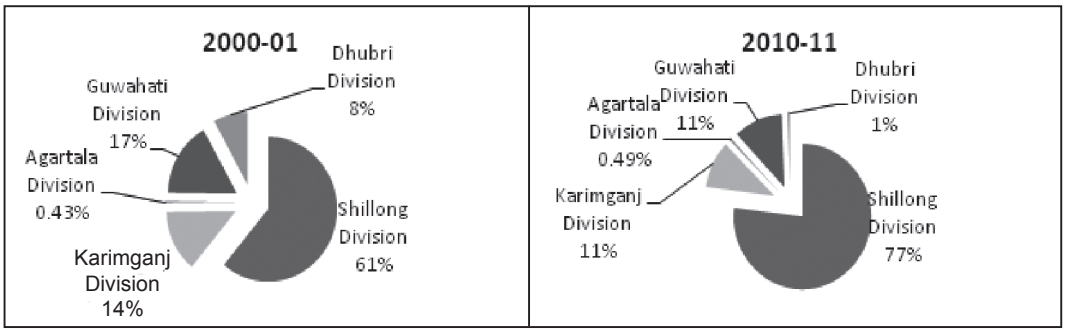



Figure IX :Items Exported to Bangladesh through LCS's in NER

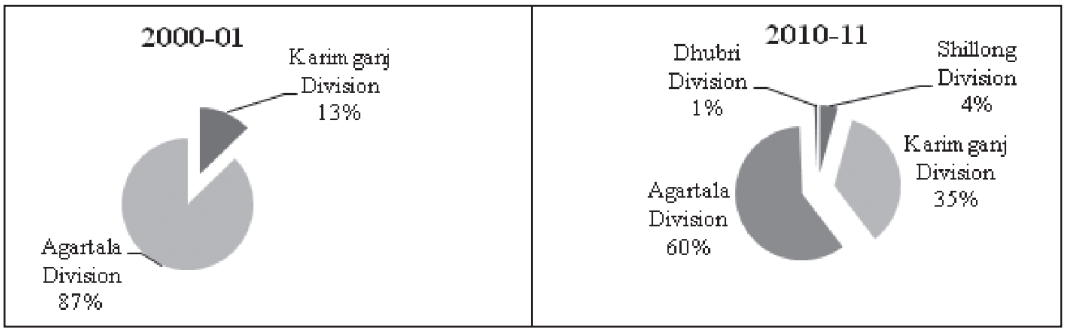



Figure X:Items Imported from Bangladesh through LCS's in NER

### d) Informal Trade with Neighboring Countries

Several studies indicate that the volume and variety of informal trade between NER and NC's far exceeds vis-à-vis formal trade. There are number of reasons for this flourishing activity which are beyond the scope of this article but a look at the quantum will indicate the scope of this pattern which exist in the region.

**i) Myanmar**

Informal trade along the Indo-Myanmar border is a huge business. The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi estimated the annual volume of trade (1995) in the NER-Myanmar border to be Rs. 2200 crores, where the Moreh-Tamu sector contributed Rs. 1600 crores, Champhai Rs. 500 crores and Lungwa Rs 100 crores. Although this estimation is stated to be simplistic and over-estimated, the gap between the formal and informal trade seems to be enormous, about 44 times compared to the formal trade. Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE), Guwahati, estimated the volume of informal trade (2000-01) based on custom seizure data at Rs. 224.90 crores, where 86.88 per cent of the same got routed through Manipur and the rest through Mizoram. If we take the value of trade as calculated by IIE, the estimates for informal trade is 10 times more than the formal trade in the Manipur sector. Based on the IIE model, Bezbaruah (2003-04) calculated the volume of informal trade at Rs. 227.73 crores, the volume of informal trade thereby was 12 times higher than formal trade. So although there are huge variations in the estimation of the value of informal trade, it is clear that formal trade represents only a small portion of the total trade between NER and Myanmar and the bulk of trading takes place through informal channels.

Although Myanmar has borders with four Northeastern states, informal trade takes place mainly through Manipur (Moreh) and partly through Mizoram (Champai). During 2003-04, composition of imports from Myanmar comprised about 50 per cent electronics and electrical equipment. Textiles and footwear (17 per cent) were the second biggest items of import. In this regard, it is interesting to note that there was a difference in the import profile among the two states - Manipur and Mizoram where informal trade was rampant. While in Manipur, electronics & electrical items comprised the largest component of imports, along with generator sets, inverters and inverter batteries mainly to meet the local requirements in the state where power shortage is a severe menace, a better-off state like Mizoram shows preference for textiles and footwear. It is also observed that recently Mizoram is slowly becoming the preferred route for informal imports vis-à-vis Manipur because of the prevailing adverse law and order situation in the state. On the other, informal exports to Myanmar include manufactured items such as motor cycles, bicycles, agricultural implements, paints, baby food, medicines, fuel, etc. Chemicals used as inputs for producing narcotics also comprise an important item of informal exports from the Northeast (Bezbaruah).

**ii) Bangladesh**

NCAER (1995) studied 3 districts each from Assam and Tripura (other than 9 districts of West Bengal) and estimated informal trade at the state level. The value of informal trade in Assam was Rs. 35.50 crores and Rs. 8.10 crores in Tripura. Sugar was identified as the single most important commodity of informal trade followed by printed saris along the

Karimganj sector in Assam. In other districts of Assam and Tripura, wood and timber-based products were the major commodities informally exported to Bangladesh. In terms of the group of commodities, food and live animals comprised 40 per cent from Assam, while in Tripura, forest products comprised more than 52 per cent of all the commodities exported informally. RIS(1996) conducted a study titled India's Border Trade with Select Neighbouring Countries where they quantified the value of exports at Rs.42.01 crores and imports at Rs. 13.16 crores. The study found that exports from NER were higher through Mizoram and Meghalaya whereas through Assam and Tripura imports were prominent. Tripura and Assam were the two important states through which informal trade was largely practised. There are a few other studies concerned with the volume and composition of informal trade. Bakht (1996) estimated that informal exports to India were at least 6 times higher than legal exports thereby showing the huge quantum of informal trade. On the other, Rahman (2004) calculates that illegal imports and exports are as large as their formal counterparts. He states that illegal exports from Bangladesh to the NER are limited to few high value items such as gold. Halder (2008) estimates the ratio of legal and illegal imports from India as 1:1.5. Notwithstanding the variety of estimates provided by scholars about the quantum, direction and composition of informal trade, it is apparent that there exists a huge network of informal trade between Bangladesh and the NER.

Informal exports from NER to Bangladesh include spices (23 per cent), textiles (13 per cent), sugar (12 per cent), pharmaceutical products (10 per cent), processed food (9 per cent), cereals (8 per cent), fish (6 per cent) and fruits (3 per cent). On the other hand, informal imports from Bangladesh comprise electronic items (20 per cent), jute (15 per cent), plastic products (10 per cent), palm oil (7 per cent), spices (4 per cent), textiles and fish (4 per cent each) (Halder : 2008). If the seizure criterion is applied to ascertain the volume of informal trade then estimates suggest that during 2000-01 to 2011-12 there were 84,186 cases of seizure in NER where the total value involved amounted to Rs. 123.80 crores (Table I). The number of cases has shown a declining trend although there is a steep rise in value terms of the goods ceased. This indicates the trade of valuable goods in the informal variety.

**Table I : Seizures in NER-Bangladesh Border: 2000-01 to 2011-12**

| Year | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **No. of Cases** | 6828 | 7274 | 7405 | 7687 | 7789 | 7899 | 8048 | 6331 | 7968 | 6817 | 6427 | 3713 |
| **Value (in crores)** | 5.28 | 8.92 | 9.69 | 5.81 | 8.13 | 8.65 | 7.98 | 7.65 | 12.19 | 20.34 | 19.25 | 9.89 |

Source: Office of the Commissioner of Customs, Shillong

## III. In Lieu of Conclusion

From the cultural-anthropological paradigm of the 1950s, security paradigm of the 1960s and political paradigm of the 1970s & 80's, Northeast has been re-incarnated under the development paradigm at the threshold of the 20th century. With the advent of the market economy, the peripheral regions of Northeast suddenly became economically and commercially significant for the Indian state. Market economy gave new meaning to this region - a trans-meaning, a new taxonomy, a new focus and a new knowledge system driven by the hard principle of economic rationality. This trans-meaning marked a corresponding transition of Northeast towards a political economy promoted by the worldwide wave of globalization and structural adjustment. It was also an effort towards regional integration and thereby talk shows related to regional cooperation particularly at the supra-national level gained much public attention.

But the questions remain as to how the NER will contribute to the process of trade with the neighbouring countries and other Southeast Asian nations? It is evident from the discussion so far that there has been hardly any remarkable economic growth in the region during the liberalization period as a result of which the region's contribution to the Indian GDP reflects a falling curve. Agriculture continues to be overcrowded and necessitates a structural change; only technology infusion as suggested in the NER Vision Document can hardly change the scenario. Manufacturing sector presents with a dismal plight despite a large resource base in the region. A vision that brings about a resource-industry linkage is missing in the region. The skewed nature of the tertiary sector fails to add much needed vibrancy to the economic system and therefore, bears a residual character. Similarly, trade profile in NER remains insignificant and whatever the region exports are nothing but primary products without any value addition. The inability to formalise the informal trade leads to not only revenue loss for the states in the region but also fails to generate proper employment, trade related infrastructure and facilitation in the region. Moreover, the lack of initiative in bringing about internal reforms among the states in the region acts as an obstacle in NER.

Under these circumstances the much professed idea about NER being the 'arrowhead' of India's Look East Policy seems to be associated more with the pathway that the region provides rather than being a partner in international trade. LEP looks more of an Indian game plan where its foreign policy aspirations, strategic initiatives, geo-economics, security considerations and various aspects of geo-politics are seamlessly entwined whereas the agenda for the development of the region remains an outlier. Until the Northeast and its people are situated within the policy frame of the LEP, it will continue to be an elusive agenda for the population groups in the region.

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# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH EAST INDIA : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

TARUN BIKASH SUKAI

Abstract : The North East India is marked by diversity in customs, cultures, traditions and languages. It is home to multifarious social, ethnic and linguistic groups. The North East region is characterised by physical isolation having great distance from the core, high cost of access, sparse population, low GDP per capita, dependence on tertiary sector in the economic structure, limited local economic control, relative neglect by the central government and borderland locations. Development or prosperity encapsulates and represents a multi-dimensional connotation. To capture the multidimensionality of development, this paper visualizes some aspects of development, namely—physical infrastructure, social or institutional infrastructure, industrial performance, human development, privatization of industry and investment and public efforts expressed in terms of government expenditure to facilitate developmental activities. The present paper intends to bring out the position of the North Eastern States vis-a-vis the other states of India in matters of prosperity on the basis of the most recently available as well as comparable data compiled from secondary sources.

Key Words : Development, Caste, Culture**,** Human Development, GDP, Community

## Introduction

India's North Eastern Region is a 'rainbow country …extraordinarily diverse and colourful, mysterious when seen through parted clouds'. It stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas in the eastern range and is surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar. It includes the seven sisters - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, along with a small and beautiful cousin in the Himalayan fringes, namely, Sikkim. The region is rich in natural resources, covered with dense forests, has the highest rainfall in the country, with large and small river systems nesting the land and is a treasure house of flora and fauna. Marked by diversity in customs, cultures, traditions and languages, it is home to multifarious social, ethnic and linguistic groups (Italian Trade Commission, 2011). The pristine beauty of the eastern Himalayan region charmed India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru who attributed the hills of Meghalaya as 'Switzerland of the East' and Manipur as 'Jewel in the East'. The 'Incredible India Campaign' describes Arunachal Pradesh as the 'Virgin Land', Mizoram as 'Songbird of the East', and Sikkim as the most exquisitely beautiful land. Pristine environment and off-the-beaten path destinations, peripheral and isolated regions located near national borders or in areas of difficult climate and topography has attracted intellectual discourse seeking an alternative development route

to such borderlands (Hall & Boyd, 2005). Such regions are characterised by physical isolation having great distance from the core, high cost of access, sparse population, low GDP per capita, dependence on tertiary sector in the economic structure, limited local economic control, relative neglect by the central government and borderland locations (Wanhill, 1997). These characteristics are aptly found in the North East region of India.

The abundant natural resources have prompted the government to flag 'the paradise unexplored campaign', but lack of vision in planning and management in the development policy of the region has not produced the desired outcome. The region continues to be characterized by low per capita income, low investment, acute unemployment problems, poor communication and infrastructure. The undeveloped condition is attributed to the phenomenon of isolation (physically- administratively in pre-independent India before 1947) and lack of planning and development policy in post independent India. The importance of the region was never more than a military strategic border (Samantha, 1994, Thomas, 2006, NERC, 2005). The alienation led to undeveloped condition and this produced acute unemployment problem that increasingly frustrated the youth. The decline in law and order weakened administrative discipline and depleted human capacity. The needs of the people are not met and the low level of motivation manifested in the mushrooming of insurgent outfits operating as extortionists (Maslow, 1943, Alderfer, 1972). The problem of unemployment and economic underdevelopment sustained and encouraged militant activities, disrupted law and order leading to further deterioration of economy and administration.

The North East has remained one of the most backward regions of the country. The trauma of partition in 1947 not only took the region backwards by at least a quarter of a century, but also placed hurdles on future economic progress. It isolated the region, sealed both land and sea routes for commerce and trade, and severed access to traditional markets and the gateway to the East and South-East Asia – the Chittagong port in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). It distanced the approach to the rest of India by confining connectivity to a narrow 27 km wide 'Siliguri corridor', making it a 'remote land' and constraining access for movement of goods and people. The uneasy relationship with most of the neighbouring countries has not helped the cause of development of the region either with 96 per cent of the boundary of the region forming international borders. Similarly, due to poor infrastructure and governance combined with low productivity and market access, private investment has shied away from the region. Inability of governments to control floods and river bank erosion causes unmitigated damage to properties and lives of millions of people every year in the region. If the quest for ethnic and cultural identities has sowed the seeds, frustration and dissatisfaction from seclusion, backwardness, remoteness and problems of governance have provided fertile ground for breeding armed insurgencies. There is overwhelming dependence on the Central Government for resources. Public investment in the region has sub-optimal productivity due to weak forward and backward linkages.

## North Eastern Region: Economic, Social and Demographic Profile

North East of India was one political entity named Assam before the rest of the states were carved out of it. The entire North East of India has been a pot of amalgamation of

different cultures and ethnic groups coming and settling here. Earliest mention of this region was by the Chinese explorer, Chang Kien in 100 B.C. The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea and Ptolemy's Geography also suggest the same. The Australoids or the pre-Dravidians were the earliest inhabitants of this state. Huen Tsang, the great Chinese traveller visited this region in the 7th century (ITC, 2011).

The NER stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas in the eastern range and is surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar. The region has a long international boundary with China and Bhutan in the north, Myanmar in the east, Nepal in the west and Bangladesh in the south and west. Most of the hill States in the region like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are predominantly inhabited by tribal people with a fairly high degree of diversity even within the tribal groups.

Assam was a founding state of the Union of India in 1947. At that time, the state comprised the whole of the North East region. Subsequently, a number of other North Eastern states were formed of Assam, starting with Nagaland in 1962, Tripura, Manipur and Meghalaya became full-fledged states in 1972. The Union Territory of Mizoram came into being in 1972 and attained statehood in 1987. Sikkim became a state in 1975. The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was created in 1955. NEFA was renamed in 1972 and became the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh, which became the state of Arunachal Pradesh in 1987.

**Socio-Economic Profile**

The eight States cover an area of 2,62,179 sq. km. constituting 7.9 per cent of the country's total geographical area, but have only 45.56 million people or about 3.7 per cent of the total population of the country (2011 census). Over 68 per cent of the population of the region lives in the State of Assam alone. The density of population varies from 13 per sq. km. in Arunachal Pradesh to 340 per sq. km. in Assam.

**Table-1: General Information on North East Region**

| States | Total Population (in millions) | ST Population (%) | Literacy Rate (%) | Per Capita NSDP (Rs.) 2003-04 | Below PovertyLine (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 1.38 | 68.8 | 66.95 | 21,919 | 33.47 |
| Assam | 31.16 | 12.4 | 73.18 | 15,661 | 36.09 |
| Manipur | 2.72 | 35.1 | 79.85 | 16,299 | 28.54 |
| Meghalaya | 2.96 | 86.1 | 75.48 | 20,775 | 33.87 |
| Mizoram | 1.09 | 94.4 | 91.58 | 30,357 | 19.47 |
| Nagaland | 1.98 | 86.5 | 80.11 | 26,129 | 32.67 |
| Sikkim | 0.60 | 33.8 | 82.20 | 26,215 | 36.55 |
| Tripura | 3.67 | 31.8 | 87.75 | 24,984 | 34.44 |
| **NER** | **45.56** | **56.1** | **79.6** | **18,032** | **34.69** |
| **India** | **1210.19** | **8.20** | **74.04** | **Rs. 25,968** | **26.10** |

*Source: North East Vision 2020; Census Report, 2001; Census Report, 2011*

Richly endowed with natural resources, the region is identified as one of the world's

biodiversity hotspots; it hosts species-rich tropical rain forests and supports diverse flora and fauna and several crop species. The forest cover in the region constitutes 66 per cent of its total geographical area. Similarly, reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the region constitute a fifth of the country's total potential.

**Table-2 : Socio Economic Profile of North East**

| States | Districts (No.) | Forest Area (%) | Rural Population (%) | Decadal Population Growth Rate | Population Density Person/ sq. km. | Sex Ratio | IMR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 16 | 80.5 | 77.3 | 25.92 | 13 | 893 | 32 |
| Assam | 27 | 35.3 | 85.92 | 16.93 | 340 | 935 | 55 |
| Manipur | 9 | 76.5 | 69.79 | 18.65 | 107 | 974 | 11 |
| Meghalaya | 7 | 77 | 79.92 | 27.82 | 103 | 972 | 52 |
| Mizoram | 8 | 90.7 | 48.49 | 22.78 | 40 | 935 | 34 |
| Nagaland | 11 | 80.3 | 71.03 | -0.47 | 120 | 900 | 21 |
| Sikkim | 4 | 47.3 | 75.08 | 12.36 | 76 | 875 | 24 |
| Tripura | 4 | 76.1 | 73.82 | 14.75 | 304 | 948 | 29 |
| **NER** | **86** | **66.1** | **72.6** | **17.34** | **NA** | **-** | **-** |
| **India** | | | **68.84** | **17.64** | **324** | **933** | **44** |

*Source: North East Vision 2020; Census Report, 2001; Census Report, 2011; *Forest Survey of India, 2011*

The region is covered by the mighty Brahmaputra-Barak river systems and their tributaries. Geographically, apart from the Brahmaputra, Barak and Imphal valleys and some flat lands in between the hills of Meghalaya and Tripura, the remaining two-thirds of the area is hilly terrain interspersed with valleys and plains. The altitude varies from almost sea-level to over 7,000 meter above the sea-level. The region's high rainfall averaging around 10,000 mm and above creates problems of eco system, high seismic activity and floods.

**Table - 3 : State-wise Thrust Areas**

| Parameter | Thrust Areas |
|---|---|
| **Arunachal Pradesh** | Power, Mineral Based Industry, Agriculture, Forest Based Industries, Tourism, Textile |
| **Assam** | Tea, Energy, Limestone, Cement, Medicinal Plants, Agriculture & Horticulture |
| **Manipur** | Khadi and Village Industry, Handloom, Handicrafts, Sericulture, Food Processing, Bamboo Processing, Tourism |
| **Meghalaya** | Agriculture & Food Processing, Horticulture, Mining, Cement, Tourism, Hydroelectric Power, Dairy & Livestock, Handloom, Handicrafts, Steel Processing |
| **Mizoram** | Bamboo, Sericulture, Agriculture, Horticulture, Tourism, Food Processing, Khadi and Handloom, Minerals and Stones |
| **Nagaland** | Bamboo, Agriculture & Allied Industries, Horticulture, Sericulture, Minerals &Mining, Sericulture, Handloom, Handicrafts, Tourism |
| **Sikkim** | Bamboo, Agriculture & Allied Industries, Horticulture, Sericulture Minerals & Mining, Sericulture, Handloom, Handicrafts,Tourism |
| **Tripura** | Natural Gas, Food Processing, Rubber, Tea, Bamboo, Handloom, Handicrafts, Sericulture, Tourism, IT, Medicinal Plants |

*Source: North East Vision 2020*

## Human Development Index

Following a different methodology, Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2009 brought out a report to update our awareness on gender aspects of human development for India and 35 States and UTs. So far as the HDI scores are concerned, all the north-eastern states (except Assam in 2006) attained higher values as compared to national score.

**Table-4 : Human Development in North Eastern States, 2006**

| State | Human Development Index (HDI) 2006 | | Gender Development Index (GDI) 2006 | | Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) 2006 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Value* | *Rank* | *Value* | *Rank* | *Value* | *Rank* |
| Arunachal Pradesh | .647 | 20 | .642 | 18 | .469 | 17 |
| Assam | .595 | 26 | .585 | 26 | .417 | 26 |
| Manipur | .702 | 7 | .699 | 6 | .418 | 27 |
| Meghalaya | .629 | 24 | .624 | 23 | .346 | 34 |
| Mizoram | .688 | 12 | .687 | 9 | .374 | 32 |
| Nagaland | .700 | 8 | .697 | 7 | .289 | 35 |
| Sikkim | .665 | 17 | .659 | 15 | .447 | 23 |
| Tripura | .663 | 18 | .626 | 21 | .382 | 30 |
| **India** | .605 | | .590 | | .497 | |

***Note:***

- The Human Development Index is a composite of variables capturing attainments in three dimensions of human development viz., economy, education and health.
- The Gender Development Index adjusts the average achievements in the same three dimensions that are captured in the HDI to account for the inequalities between men and women.
- The Gender Empowerment Measure focuses on gender inequality in three areas: Political participation and decision-making power; Economic participation and decision-making power and Power over economic resources.
- The Ranks are assigned from the list of 35 numbers of States and Union Territories.

**Source:** Ministry of Women and Child Development, GOI, 2009

Nagaland and Manipur in 2006 could manage single digit rank in the list of 35 numbers of federal units while Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura are not lagging much behind. The deterioration of Meghalaya from 13th to 24th position during the decade (1996-2006) is a great concern. However, the poor performance of the most populous state in the region – Assam needs a special attention. GDI reflects almost similar trend. The performance of the only matrilineal state in the country does not bring any surprise as worrisome relative performance in HDI reflects almost parallel deterioration in GDI in Meghalaya (Nayak 2005).

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) focuses on gender inequality in three areas

viz., political participation and decision-making power, economic participation and decision-making power, and power over economic resources. As such, the nation as a whole has long been struggling to fulfil the agenda of women empowerment. All North Eastern states' records in this crucial issue have been simply miserable. Nagaland not only emerged as the worst performer – the rate of progress during the decade is equally disappointing. Meghalaya brings surprise by securing the second worst position in the country in gender empowerment measure. Manipur and Mizoram – the consistently better performers in HDI, GPI and GDI are also seriously lagging behind in empowering women in their respective states (Nayak 2005). Arunachal Pradesh has kept the hope alive for the entire region, which was possible mainly due to the encouraging growth in the index value of *economic participation and decision-making power* during the decade (1996-2006).

**Self Help Group Movements in North East India**

India's SHG movement has emerged as the world's largest and most successful network of Community Based Organisations. It is predominantly a women's movement though considered as a means of empowerment and financial model of development. The Saving Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP), which is the India's own innovation, has proved to be one of the most effective poverty alleviation and women empowerment programmes.

In the NER, the SBLP began only around 1998-99, but began to take off only from 2003-04 onwards. As can be seen from the Table-5, the number of SHGs credit linked to the bank and the amount disbursed had increased substantially in NER. It has been consistently higher than the all India figures. In terms of spread, it is found that most of the growth has been skewed and concentrated in the two states of Assam and Tripura (Sharma, 2010). These two states account for the bulk of the SHGs credit linkage in the region (more than 85%) as on 31st March, 2010. The strong concentration of SHGs in Assam has persisted over time. In fact, some of the states like Manipur, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh which showed initial promise failed to live up to expectations and have shown disappointing performances in subsequent years.

**Table-5: Trend of SHGs linked to Banks under SBLP in India & NER**

| Year | Number of SHGs | | Amount of bank loan outstanding ( in Rs. Lakh) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***India*** | ***NER*** | ***India*** | ***NER*** |
| March 2006 | 22, 38, 565 | 62, 517 | 11, 39, 754.30 | 16, 570.10 |
| March 2007 | 29, 24, 973 | 91, 754 | 12, 27, 770.00 | 26, 389.00 |
| March 2008 | 36, 25, 941 | 1, 03, 424 | 16, 99, 990.00 | 35, 563.10 |
| March 2009 | 42, 24, 338 | 1, 17, 812 | 22, 67, 984.30 | 46, 930.53 |
| March 2010 | 48, 51, 356 | 1, 33, 783 | 28, 03, 828.00 | 67, 345.45 |
| March 2011 | 47, 86, 763 | 1, 23, 425 | 31, 22, 117.00 | 71, 213.42 |
| March 2012 | 43, 54, 442 | 1, 12, 365 | 36, 34, 000.00 | 73, 452.56 |

Source: NABARD Annual Reports, 2011-12.

The poverty alleviation programme i.e., Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) started almost simultaneously with the SBLP in the NER in the late 90s. It is reported in many studies that the growth of SHGs under the SGSY in the NER was too rapid as compared to the SBLP which resulted clear domination of SGSY in the SHG movement of the region. Sharma (2010) reported that "in some states like Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland the entire portfolio is almost under SGSY. Even in the state of Assam, where the SBLP movement had taken stronger roots, SHGs under SGSY are still more than those under the SBLP movement. The clear domination and lead taken by the SGSY has been primarily due to the government's patronage and support which provided the funds for its growth and also ensured its subsequent linkages with the banks". This meant that the SHG movement in the region was dominated by the philosophy and processes of the SGSY programme rather than by the SBLP programme.

The state of the SHG movement varies from state to state, and within states from one district to another. The SHG movement is yet to take off in any major way in Arunachal Pradesh. In Manipur too, it is not significant. However, many traditional systems of organising savings and lending still holds way. Sharma (2008) outlines some of the traditional systems of savings and lending prevalent in the states in the region. For instance, Manipur has a wide network of 'marups' started by the Metei community. In Arunachal, the lack of adequate number of formal financial institutions and the thin spread of population make the SHG model irrelevant except a few. In Mizoram, the number of SHGs linked to banks was also very limited. Meghalaya has been the most proactive in the formation of SHGs. This was also the first state in which banks directly started SHGs. In Tripura and Assam, the SHG movement is very successful in terms of quantity. However, the micro finance movement in the NER, as in the rest of the country, has been dominated by SBLP which was initiated by NABARD.

**Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)**

The standard of living of the people in the region, as measured by per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), has lagged significantly behind the rest of the country. It was Rs. 18,027.00 in 2004-05, it was less than the all-State average of Rs. 25,968.00 by 31 per cent. Interestingly, available information shows that at the time of independence per capita income in the undivided State of Assam was higher than the national average by 4 per cent. Thus, even under the British colonial rule the economic performance of the region was better than the rest of the country and this shows its vast developmental potential (DoNER 2008).

During the period 1990-91 to 2004-05, on an average, while the aggregate GSDP of all States in constant prices increased at the rate of 6 per cent per year, the corresponding growth in the region was 4.4 per cent. Similarly, the region's growth rate of per capita income (2.5%) lagged behind the average growth rate of the country (4.0%) during the period by 1.5 percentage points. In 1990-91, the NE Region's per capita income at current prices was lower than the national average by 20 per cent, a gap which is further widened to 31 per cent by 2004-05 (DoNER 2008).

The aggregate picture presented above, however, hides vast differences between the urban and rural areas, the hills and the plains and among the other States. In the region, except for Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim which recorded marginally higher growth rates than the country average, per capita income levels in all other States were lower by varying magnitudes. Assam, the largest among the North Eastern States had the lowest per capita income at Rs. 15,661.00 which was lower than the country average by 40 per cent. Furthermore, even in the three States with per capita income levels higher than the national average, much of the income generated was in public administration. This underlines the overwhelming dependence of the population on the government for generating income and a lack of productive economic activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy.

A comparative analysis of the GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) across the eight states and the sector wise contribution along with the future projection to enable the region to catch up with the galloping growth of the nation has been depicted below (see Table-5 & 6).

**Table - 6 : GSDP of NER states during 2000-2008**

| Parameter | Arunachal Pradesh | Assam | Manipur | Meghalaya | Mizoram | Nagaland | Sikkim | Tripura | All India |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GSDP as a % of all states' GSDP | 0.1 | 1.8 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.06 | 0.3 | 100 |
| Average GSDP growth rate (%) | 12.9 | 11.2 | 5.9 | 10.9 | 10 | 12.1 | 13.9 | 12.9 | 11.6 |
| Per capita GSDP (Euro •) | 584.136 | 454.78 | 411.692 | 570.988 | 562.02 | 389.728 | 749.97 | 542.108 | 758.556 |

Source: CMIE, 2008 – Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy

**Table-7: Projected GSDP Growth Rates of NER States during 2007-2020**

| States | Growth rate of GSDP in % | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 2007 - 12 | 2012 - 17 | 2017 - 20 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 8.751 | 1.90 | 14.25 |
| Assam | 10.00 | 16.00 | 20.25 |
| Manipur | 10.75 | 13.25 | 15.75 |
| Meghalaya | 8.75 | 11.35 | 14.25 |
| Mizoram | 9.50 | 9.50 | 9.50 |
| Nagaland | 8.50 | 8.50 | 8.50 |
| Sikkim | 9.00 | 9.00 | 9.00 |
| Tripura | 9.00 | 9.00 | 11.50 |
| **NER** | **10.00** | **13.67** | **16.37** |
| **India** | **9.00** | **9.00** | **9.00** |

Source: http://mdoner.gov.in/index1.asp?linkid=111

**FDIs and Externally Aided Projects**

During 2000-2009, 40.17 million Euro worth of FDIs have flown into the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura (www.ibef.org). Special Projects are being identified by the Ministry of DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region) including North East State Road Project (NESRP), North Eastern States Trade and Investment Creation Initiative (NES-TICI) and NER Livelihood Project (NERLP) to procure Assistances from ADB (Asian Development Bank) and World Bank.

**Trade Performance**

The Region has been host to INR 4 Billion (Euro 68.8 Million) worth of Trade for the past few years. 91% of the exports are from Tea and Coal as given in the chart below. The prime importable items are viz., manufactured products, processed food items like fish, dry ginger, yellow peas, cement, etc.

**Table - 8 : Leading Exportable items from NER**

| Exportable Items | Share (%) |
|---|---|
| Coal | 45 |
| Tea | 46 |
| Ginger | 05 |
| Limestone | 03 |
| Others | 01 |
| **Total** | **100** |

Source : Planning Commission 2006

**Government initiatives**

DoNER formed in 2001 - is dedicated solely to the development of the region and to act as the nodal Department of the Government of India. It is catalyzing the focus and efforts in accelerating the development of the region. DoNER is given budgetary allocation for sanction of infrastructure development projects in the North Eastern States. **Non-lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR)** for the North Eastern Region was put in place in 1998 so that the financial resources from the Government of India meant for North East remain committed to the Region. The broad objective of the NLCPR scheme is to ensure speedy development of infrastructure in the North Eastern Region by increasing the flow of budgetary financing for new infrastructure projects/schemes. Both economic and social infrastructural sectors, such as, power, roads & bridges, education, health, water supply and sports are considered for providing support under the Central Pool.

Out of 982 projects initially taken up for implementation by funding from NLCPR, only 42 projects are entailing an approval cost of Euro 1.26 Billion as of March, 2009. State wise and sector wise break up of number of projects and their approved cost is tabulated in table-9.

## North East India – SWOT Analysis

### *The Strengths*

(i) **Human Development Index:** The hill tracts of North East India accounts for 7.8 % of the total land space of India. The colourful diversity of 209 unique ethnic tribes represents 70% of the region's population (Samanta, 1994). The low density population at 45.56 million accounts for only 3. 7 % of the total population of India (2011 census). The low economic load factor on dependency ratio due to active participation of females in economic activities, lower aging ratio than in the country, more male sex ratio and high overall literacy rate above the national level are indicators of high social indices (Samanta, 1994, Nayak, 2005). In terms of Human Development Report 2003 (UNDP 2003), based on the three components of longevity, education and standard of living, the highest value at 0.944 in Norway corresponds to India's figure of 0.59. The highest figure in North East at 0.55 is very close to the national figure (Nayak, 2005).

(ii) **Institutional Support:** The North Eastern Council (NEC) is the regional advisory agency set up in 1972 and it was given an advisory and planning role for the region in 2005 to promote economic development. The establishment of Ministry for Development of North-Eastern Region (MoDONER) at the Central Government in 2004 is a very significant institutional support to help the region in policy formulation and implementation.

(iii) **Policy Support:** With the government's engagement on the 'Look East' policy, the region is gaining importance not only as military strategy but in tapping the economic potential. The government has now included Tourism Development in the region from the 11th Plan period (2007- 2012) onwards.

(iv) **Financial Support:** The numerous financial support and concessions to the regions include (i) earmarking 10% budget allocation from central ministry to support the region; (ii) Prime Minister's economic packages; (iii) special category treatment of the North East states provisioning the additional central plan allocation with grant and loan ratio as 90:10 in place of the general scheme of 70:30 ratio; (iv) tax exemption of tribal areas; (v) subsidies in financing for setting investment project in the region from Ministry of Commerce; and (vi) subsidy in equity support for tourism infrastructure from Ministry of Tourism. The creation of resource base for the region will help prioritization of spending on tourism sector, which previously had been low budgeted.

(v) **Improved Security:** The states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya are traditionally peaceful. Mizoram has become peaceful, consequent upon its attainment of statehood and the signing of the peace accord, 1986. The Tripuri tribal insurgents of Tripura state, unsatisfied with their impoverished condition also became peaceful after receiving 20 seats reservation in the Assembly representation (Samanta, 1994). The tripartite accord with the Government was signed in 1988. These states are one of the most peaceful states in the country with evidently low crime rates.

(vi) **Strategic Location and Look East Policy :** NER is a rugged territory consisting of 225,000 sq. km. of hills and plains located between Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar with 4500 sq. km. of international border. Therefore, there is an extra

advantage for India to utilise this strategic space in the interest of the nation and in the interest of the NER's people. The Look East policy can offer a frame of reference for 'imaging' the North East in a strategic sense.

**(vii) Natural Resources:** The North East is one of the most picturesque regions of India. Its rivers, hills and valleys are a tourists' paradise. Natural resources like oils, tea and agricultural goods are exported in large quantities. Mineral resources like coal, limestone and uranium can also serve the country's interest.

***The Weaknesses***

**(i) Physical Condition**: The single most adverse physical condition is the landlocked nature of the region. The eastern boundary comprising 98% of its border is with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Only 2% of the border is marked by a narrow strip at Siliguri in the state of West Bengal which links the remote region to the Indian heartland. The physical disadvantage has been aggravated by partition of India that fractured connectivity causing serious market disruption leading to geo-political and emotional isolation that had already suffered administrative exclusion under the British Raj (Thomas, 2006).

**(ii) Absence of Planning and Strategy:** The backwardness of the region is mainly attributed to geographical isolation, while some even attribute the alienation to provincial bigotry. But the administrative exclusion by historical circumstances in pre-independence and lack of developmental concern and appreciation of the uniqueness of the region in post-independence reflect lack of economic interest in the region (ICSSR-NERC Report, 2005). Underdevelopment is accompanied by commercial exploitation in forest resources, tea and crude oil. Monopolistic trade practices by investors from outside the region drained the economy, giving rise to market distortion due to inflow of goods and outflow of savings, which in turn led to low credit –deposit ratio, thus hampering investment in the region.

**(iii) Poor Governance:** With no adequate exposure to basic discipline of administration, the abundant money injected into the economy without due accountability creates a regime of corruption, encourages nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and militant groups that begets mushrooming of more militant outfits attracting unemployed youth who assumed the exploitation as an industry. The interference in the form of strikes paralyses administration, hampers economic activities leading to economic deceleration, acute unemployment problem and fosters growth of insurgency. The distorted market-economy, poor infrastructure and weak governance, lack of accountability mechanism, insurgent problems have left the region undeveloped and insecure.

**(iv) Weak Capacity:** Weak capacity is well evidenced from the inability of the state governments to make land available in time, lack of expertise to prepare project proposals and delay in implementation of projects (NEC Report, 2007).

**(v) Poor Infrastructure:** With no resource to invest in physical infrastructure such as power, communication, transport, irrigation and market, frustration by unemployed youths increased.

**Table-9: Sector wise Distribution of Sanctioned Projects and Approved cost Under NLCPR** (Euro in Millions)

| States | Nos. | Economic Sector | | | | | Social Sector | | | | | Grand Total | Total Cost % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Agriculture & Allied* | *Power* | *Roads & Bridges* | *Irrigation & Flood Control* | *Total* | *Education* | *Water Supply* | *Health* | *Total* | *Misc.*** | | |
| Arunachal Pradesh | Number | | 14.0 | 39.0 | 16.0 | **69.0** | 21.0 | 11.0 | 5.0 | 37.0 | 3.0 | **109.0** | **13.3** |
| | Cost | | 25.5 | 78.0 | 11.0 | **114.5** | 25.0 | 15.0 | 5.9 | 45.9 | 7.5 | **167.9** | |
| Assam | Number | | 47.0 | 131.0 | 40.0 | **218.0** | 12.0 | 11.0 | 7.0 | 30.0 | 20.0 | **268.0** | **20.2** |
| | Cost | | 31.8 | 82.8 | 37.3 | **151.9** | 36.7 | 16.7 | 7.2 | 60.6 | 42.2 | **254.7** | |
| BTC* | Number | | 1.0 | 28.0 | 2.0 | **31.0** | 5.0 | 2.0 | 7.0 | 4.0 | 42.0 | | **6.13** |
| | Cost | | 0.8 | 49.0 | 8.4 | **58.2** | | 6.9 | 7.5 | 14.4 | 14.6 | **77.2** | |
| Manipur | Number | 1.0 | 29.0 | 14.0 | 2.0 | **46.0** | 11.0 | 24.0 | 13.0 | 48.0 | 5.0 | **99.0** | **11.8** |
| | Cost | 1.2 | 55.7 | 24.1 | 1.1 | **82.1** | 9.0 | 32.0 | 20.0 | 61.0 | 5.0 | **148.1** | |
| Meghalaya | Number | | 12.0 | 23.0 | | **35.0** | 16.0 | 5.0 | | 21.0 | 6.0 | **62.0** | **7.38** |
| | Cost | | 35.0 | 25.0 | | **60.0** | 11.6 | 15.9 | | 27.5 | 5.4 | **92.9** | |
| Mizoram | Number | 5.0 | 9.0 | 17.0 | | **31.0** | 10.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 18.0 | 33.0 | **82.0** | **8.37** |
| | Cost | 3.8 | 27.4 | 25.7 | | **56.9** | 14.3 | 15.0 | 8.6 | 37.9 | 10.6 | **105.4** | |
| Nagaland | Number | | 40.0 | 39.0 | 5.0 | **84.0** | 11.0 | 3.0 | 4.0 | 18.0 | 5.0 | **107.0** | **12.1** |
| | Cost | | 29.0 | 87.7 | 4.2 | **120.9** | 12.7 | 3.3 | 12.6 | 28.6 | 2.9 | **152.4** | |
| Sikkim | Number | | 11.0 | 65.0 | 91.0 | **167.0** | 9.0 | 13 | | 22.0 | 6.0 | **195.0** | **8.8** |
| | Cost | | 27.4 | 33.9 | 5.8 | **67.1** | 8.7 | 20.1 | | 28.8 | 7.1 | **103.0** | |
| Tripura | Number | | 23.0 | 4.0 | 2.0 | **29.0** | 12.0 | 5.0 | 8.0 | 25.0 | 2.0 | **56** | **12.2** |
| | Cost | | 44.1 | 31.4 | 2.0 | **77.5** | 30.3 | 5.4 | 27.5 | 63.2 | 12.8 | **153.5** | |
| **Common to NER** | Number | | | | | **0** | **2** | | | **2** | **2** | **4** | **0.27** |
| | Cost | | | | | **0** | **1.93** | | | **1.93** | **1.53** | **3.46** | |
| **Total** | Number | **6** | **186** | **360** | **158** | **710** | **104** | **81** | **43** | **228** | **86** | **1024** | **100** |
| | Cost | **5** | **276.7** | **437.6** | **69.8** | **789.1** | **150.2** | **130.3** | **89.3** | **369.8** | **99.63** | **1258.6** | |
| **% of Total cost** | | **0.4** | **21.99** | **34.77** | **5.55** | **62.7** | **11.94** | **10.35** | **7.0954** | **29.39** | **7.916** | **100** | |

(*) Projects Retained for Sanction under BTC ( Bodo Territorial Council) Package

(**) Includes Projects for Sports, Market Buildings, Construction of Airport, Auditorium

Source: Annual Report DoNER 2008-09

(vi) **Restricted Policy:** The current impediment is the policy of restrictive entry into some states like Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, which clearly are peaceful now.

(vii) **Ineffective Environment Laws:** Another weakness is the ineffective enforcement of the environment laws reducing drastically the country's good forest area to only 10% (Mitra, 1998). The region's forest area comprising 66% of the total area in the region is reduced by 2% in the last three decades because of weak enforcement of environment laws resulting in indiscriminate commercial exploitation and inability of the local people to give up the practice of 'slash and burn' (Jhum) cultivation when terrace cultivation, that is an alternative form of cultivation requiring heavy capital input is unaffordable. Another reason of forest degradation has been the mindless clearing of Jungles to clear militant's hideouts.

(viii) **Low Economic Profile:** The region is predominantly an agrarian economy with traditional low investment method. The primary sector in agriculture and mining / quarrying constitutes 35% of the total domestic product which is higher than the national figure of 28.78% during 1991-2001. The secondary sector comprising manufacturing, construction and gas/ electricity supply which provides the capital base of the economy hinges around 18% compared to the national average of 28%. The tertiary sector contributes 47% of the region's net domestic product which is again higher than the all India figure of 43 %. The predominance of primary and tertiary sectors over secondary sector, low urbanization, low real per capita income below the national average and the high percentage of people below poverty line characterized the low economic profile of the region (Samanta, 1994, ICSSR-NERC, 2005).

***The Opportunities***

(i) **Rich Biodiversity**: The region lies between 21.57 N and 29.30 N Latitudes and between 89.46 and 97.30 E longitudes, and enjoys a pleasant and moderate subtropical climate. Being in the eastern part of the Himalayas, it is considered a cradle of flowering plants harbouring about 8000 species (Sundriyal et.al., 1998). Economic value and importance of biological diversity is enormous even if it is considered only in relation to the production of medicinal drugs. There are two World Heritage sites namely, Kaziranga and Manas (Assam), and the government is looking for more such sites. Exotic and rare species like the Siroy Lilies, Antlered deer and birds of the region have attracted attention of wild life conservation. UNESCO's research programme from January 2001 to December 2005 identified Namdapha and Kameng area of Arunachal Pradesh as hotspot of global diversity with over 100 culturally distinct ethnic societies hosting a wide range of forest types as well as National Parks and Wild Life Sanctuaries (UNESCO, 2005).

(ii) **Abundant Natural Resources**: The forest cover of 65.19% of the total area in the region representing 25.97% of India's forest based on satellite imagery is a tremendous opportunity for earning from ecotourism. Tea cultivation accounts for 55% of the region's area and 53% of the total nation's production; rubber plantation in Tripura and Assam covers only 13% against the potential of 4.5 lacs hectares. The region has

potential for coffee plantation and cultivation of spices. The hydropower potential is estimated at 57,000 Mega Watts (MW) or 60% of the country's 84000 MW at 60% load factor (ICSSR- NERC, 2005), out of which only 2% has been harnessed. The region has abundant resource in coal, oil and gas for thermal power generation.

**(iii) Improved Connectivity**: The Special Accelerated Road Programme (SARDP) is expected to improve Road connectivity in the region. The National Highway Development Programme (NHDP) linking Gujarat with Tripura through the East-West Corridor will link Porbandar in Gujarat (West) to Silchar (East) which will serve connectivity of the region with the mainland effectively. The construction of 5 airports in addition to the existing 11 Airports, declaration of Guwahati airport as an International Airport and plans for national waterways in Brahmaputra and Barak River will boost infrastructure support for tourism development. The Ministry of External Affairs has been conducting a feasibility study to connect Mizoram with Myanmar and Kolkata port by waterways.

**(iv) Favourable foreign policy**: India's 'Look East Policy' towards strengthening political-economic cooperation with South East Asia has brought the focus of attention in the region (Singh, 2008), leading to gradual emergence of requisite space for development of the region. The launching of regional economic cooperation with Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand (BIMST) is for promotion of infrastructure, trade, investment, energy and tourism. The proposal for Asian Railway network through Imphal-Tamu Highways and a Gas Pipeline Grid also look promising. Quadrangle regional project in cooperation with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) prioritized tourism among other things. Another cross-country sub-regional cooperation having long-term implication is the Mekong-Ganga Initiative (MGI) with Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to strengthen friendship, solidarity and cooperation with the Asian region. In this initiative, tourism has been identified as an immediate priority area for joint research in which the region is the gateway to the Mekong Basin Region. To facilitate trade in agriculture and food processing projects with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, Export Development Fund has been created to extend financial support to entrepreneurs in the region. India and Myanmar signed a border trade agreement in April 1995 that opened the border town of Moreh (Manipur, India) and Tamu (Burma). Kolodyne multi-model transport link between Mizoram and Sittewe Port in Myanmar will open up new opportunities for tourism between North East India and Myanmar (Thomas, 2006, NEC Report, 2007). Sikkim is expected to become a hub linking Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet through Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh. Nathula in Sikkim has become a tourist destination after reopening of trade with China in 2006. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is keen to reopen its border trade with China via Tibet at border town Tawang. In an effort to enhance trade in the region, both China and India are attempting to repair the Stillwell road of the Second World War era, connecting China (Kunming, Hunan province) and North East India (Ledo, Assam) through Kachin hills of Burma. The government of India has already declared the road as National Highway-153. On April 4, 2006, the Guwahati-Bangkok flight was

inaugurated and the weekly air flights between Yangoon and Calcutta were restored from December 7, 1995 after a gap of more than two decades.

***The Threats***

(i) **Insurgency**: The mushrooming of insurgent outfits in the North East Region impedes growth and development. It is estimated that a one-day strike causes loss of more than 50 crores of Indian Rupees due to disruption of economic activities (ICCSR-NERC Report, 2005). The Jungles of these states have become hideouts for militants. The militants virtually run a parallel government in these states. The violent secessionist movement since 1953 has posed a serious security threat to both domestic and foreign tourists. Though there had not been a single instance of harassment, not to speak of threat to life to any tourist, the general impression about the deteriorating law and order is enough to ward off tourists (Thomas, 2006).

(ii) **Illicit Drug/HIV Problem**: According to UNDP Report 2006, out of 3.5 million HIV infected in India, over 15000 are in North East India, mostly in Manipur and Nagaland, constituting 8% of India's total (Thomas, 2006). The transmission is reported to be mainly through injection. The high incidence of drug use reflects the vulnerability of the frustrated unemployed youth to the proliferation of arms and drugs trade from across the border. The proximity of the region to the Golden Pentagon Area (formerly Golden Triangle linking, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam) and the region being used as international route to smuggle opium from Burma which accounts for 80% of South East Asia and 60% of the World's supply; many youths were attracted to the trade profit for purchase of arms. The illicit drugs and arms trade sustained insurgency and the drug addiction had caused rapid spread of HIV/ AIDS in the region. The health negative impact could deter tourist arrivals. Conversely, tourist arrivals may promote the illicit trade causing more social and health hazards as happened in Philippines and Thailand.

**Look East Policy**

The *Look East Policy* of the Government of India has been evolving since early 1990s and India has significantly deepened her interaction with ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). There has been phenomenal 858% rise of trade (from Euro 1.752 Billion in 1990 to Euro 16.79 Billion in 2005) between India and ASEAN region and 745% rise (from Euro 5084 Billion in 1990 to Euro 49.35 Billion in 2005) between India and East Asian countries as a result of the Look East Policy.

As the North Eastern Region of the country shares a land border with Myanmar, several cross –border development projects in diverse areas such as roads, railways, telecommunications, IT, science & technology and power are underway so as to improve the region's connectivity and market access for the benefit of the North Eastern Region. The *Look East policy* is pursued in a multi – faceted manner. The Government supports the idea of benefiting the remote regions of the North East.

**North East Region – Vision 2020**

North Eastern Council (NEC) in 2008 released "North Eastern Region - The Vision Document 2020" which narrates a six pronged strategy drawn up by experts and policy makers

of National Institute of Public Finance and Policy for the comprehensive development of the region (http://www.nipfp.org.in). An Investment of Euro 215.44 Billion is required to achieve the required growth of the region in between 11th and 13th Plan (Planning Commission). Seventeen Thematic Groups were constituted to translate the objectives enunciated in the Vision into concrete 'Action Plans'. Following are the six pronged strategies:

1. **Empowerment of people** by maximising self-governance and participatory development through grass-roots planning. Decentralized governance from the village level onward, built with maximum participation of the people should ensure people's role in decision making and help create a responsive system. This should help in creating the provision of public services according to the needs of people and in building of infrastructure to harness the resources of the region for people's benefit.
2. **Creation of development opportunities** for a majority of the people living in villages through rural development initiatives. This calls for a rise in agricultural productivity through an expansion in the area under cultivation and increase in crop intensity. In hilly areas, it is important to expand horticulture, floriculture, plantation crops and organic farming. An expansion in agricultural extension and the creation of cold storages and market infrastructure are necessary to link markets to agriculturally productive areas in the region.
3. **Developing sectors with comparative advantage** so as to utilise the resources of the region productively for the benefit and welfare of the people. In particular, the focus is on agro-processing industries, modernization and development of sericulture, investment in manufacturing units based on the resources available in the region, harnessing the large hydroelectric power generation potential and developing services such as tourism that will help to accelerate development and create productive employment opportunities.
4. **Capacity development of people and institutions** is an extremely important component of the strategy. Human development increases capabilities and with it enhances political and economic freedom of the people. Creating state-of-the-art hospitals and higher educational institutions in the region could also attract people from neighbouring countries to avail the benefits, besides improving education and health security to the people of the region. It is also important to develop people's capacities to equip them to participate productively in economic activities. Capacity building of the institutions should address both government and market institutions. Responsive governance and planning from below require significant augmentation of capacity. Considerable efforts are also needed to create markets and to improve them.
5. **Creating a hospitable investment climate** is equally important. An enabling environment for private investment in the region would require significant public investment to create state-of-the-art infrastructure, especially connectivity both within the region and with the rest of the country, translation of the Look East Policy to promote economic relationships with East Asian and South East Asian economies and beyond, and for ensuring proactive governance. Augmentation of the transport and communication networks and ensuring adequate stable power supply will improve

the quality of people's lives, and attract the private investment needed for development. There is much to be gained by removing trade barriers with the neighbouring countries to enable access to seaports and inland waterways.

6. **Public Private Partnership** is required for realising the vision 2020. In the initial years, much of the investment required for strengthening physical and social infrastructure will have to come from governments—both the Centre and States; and with the passage of time and progress it may be possible to forge public-private partnerships. Ensuring adequate resources for public investment in infrastructure, implementing a framework for private participation in augmenting infrastructure and creating an enabling environment for the flow of private investment to harness the physical resources of the region are the issues that need to be addressed on a priority basis for the welfare of the people. It is also important to ensure—for reasons of both efficiency and accountability—that States in the region do not depend entirely on outside capital, but also generate resources from their own tax and non-tax sources.

People of the region have an ambitious vision: by 2020, they aspire to see their region emerge peaceful, strong, confident, and ready to engage with the global economy. They would like to march on the path of economic, social and cultural progress towards prosperity and well-being, to participate in governance and determine the allocation of public resources and public services they receive. Political empowerment in evolving responsive governance would help to achieve social and economic empowerment as well. They want to banish poverty and illiteracy and ensure that every family in the region has the opportunity to live a healthy and secure life with dignity and self-respect. Moving away from the dependency syndrome, people in the region would like to acquire the capability and self-confidence to shape their own destinies. They would like to enjoy their freedoms – freedom from hunger and poverty, the freedom to exercise choice in their avocations, income-earning and spending decisions, and political, economic and social freedoms without fear. They would like to enjoy peace and achieve sustainable progress and prosperity.

## Conclusion

Institutional change supporting economic enhancement and growth at a social level requires economic incentives, supported by political will. With India moving into a new era of economic liberation, the region should not be left out. The framework for development of the region can be broadly based upon four vital components. The first component of this development plan should be social empowerment. It needs to empower rural communities, create sustainable institutions so that they manage common activities around microfinance, livelihoods and natural resource management. The second component needs to be economic empowerment. The objective of this component should ideally be to develop the capacity of rural communities to plan and manage funds for various economic initiatives and common activities for the public. The third component will be partnership development. The objective of this component should be to partner with various service providers, resource institutions and public and private sector organisations to bring resources such as finance, technology, and marketing into the project so that the community groups are able to improve their

livelihoods. The fourth and final component will be project management. This will facilitate various governance, implementation, co-ordination, learning and quality enhancement efforts in the projects.

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# PERPETUATION OF FOLK CRAFT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN SIKKIM : AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF MONASTERY

SUMAHAN BANDYOPADHYAY

Abstract : Sikkim[1] is a land of monastery and beautiful crafts. Very often these crafts are used to decorate the monasteries or have grown up in close association with monasteries. An estimate shows that Sikkim has around one hundred monasteries distributed in all four districts of the state. Besides these, a village may have its own monastery for lay worship. Each monastery has elaborate Lama organization that manages the affairs of the monastery. The Lamas or Buddhist monks also have an important role in the socio-religious life of the Sikkimese who follows Buddhism. Some of the Lamas are fine craftsmen. Right from the wall to the seat of the shrine, the monastery is itself a living museum of folk craft. On the inside walls of the monastery elaborate paintings about myths and stories of Buddhism are seen. The *thanka* or paintings on clothes, very large to small, are found hanging on the walls. The musical instruments are also craft products that are used in the monasteries only. There are utensils used on the religious occasions in the monasteries and other ritual objects like *dorje*, *thil-bu, thipo.* Wood carvings particularly of various religious or auspicious designs bear ample testimony to the craftsmanship of the Sikkimese people. The Buddhists observe a number of festivals in the monasteries. On the eve of these festivals, mask dances of the Lamas are performed.The mask is another very important craft. Masks of different materials and descriptions are made by the craftsmen living in the monasteries and outside. Therefore, it is quite clear that the monastery has a great role in the perpetuation and development of the folk crafts in Sikkim. The present paper deals with the monastery organization, organization of craft production and inter-relation between religion and folk craft.

Key Words : Craft, Monastery, Lama, Organization, Buddhism, Sikkim, Cultural Production

## *Gompa:* Monastery in Sikkim

There is confusion about the exact number of monasteries in Sikkim. As early as 1894, Waddell mentioned that there are thirty five monasteries in the state (Waddell 1972 : 285 first published in 1894). The number increased subsequently in the following years. Kandell and Salisbury (c.f. Dasgupta et. al. 2014 : 13) informed us that the number of monasteries in Sikkim is sixty seven.

The travel guidebook furnishes an estimate of one hundred and forty monasteries (ibid). I came to know from informed individuals during my early fieldwork in 1999 that the number is well above one hundred. However, the list supplied by the Ecclesiastical Department of Sikkim Government returns the number as seventy. Not involving much in numerical exactitude, we may just infer that the number of monastery has steadily increased after the

first establishment of monastery in 1697 A.D. This growth of monastery also indicates a concomitant growth of craft items as the monasteries themselves house a large number of craft objects in its precincts. The craft objects of the old days are valued things that add prestige to the monastery. In fact, the monastery building is itself an epitome of architectural craft. The organizational arrangement in the monastery appears to lend support in the perpetuation of the tradition.

**Physical structure of the *Gompa***

A *gompa* forms a complex of buildings with lama schools, residential quarters for the lamas, office of the monastery besides the *gompa* proper which is the seat of worship. Inside the main *gompa* building, there is a large prayer cum assembly hall in which gods and goddesses of Buddhist pantheon are kept on a raised platform mostly covered with a glass case opposite to the main entrance door. These idols include *Guru Thamer, Dorji Phurba, Sanga Chomdende, Hlatsun Chempo, Guru Rimpoche* and *Chereji*(Bodhisatwa). These idols are made of clay and examples of good craftsmanship. These are painted with bright and glossy colour. Selection of pantheon is done according to one's own sect.

The monastery building is marked by certain architectural features that cannot be seen in the houses of the residents. These features include *genjen* and *banrer. Genjen* is a spire like structure seen on the top of a monastery building. *Banrer* are usually four in number and found at the four corners of the slanting roof. Sometimes these spires can be seen in a row on the top. Wood carving is done on wooden frames and panels, seats of lamas, doors and windows.

Besides wood carving, the elaborate paintings are seen on the inside walls of the monastery. The subjects of these paintings are chosen from the various mythical characters of Buddhist texts. The gods and the goddesses of their pantheon are depicted. The protective deities are painted on the vestibules. In the Pemayangtse monastery, images of *thimpapinji* and *michiring* (Golden Life) are seen on the walls of the two sides of the main entrance door. Similar paintings are found on the walls of the main prayer hall (*du khang*).Therefore, it can be inferred from the foregoing discussion that the *gompa* is itself a living museum of folk art. This craft tradition is fostered by the monastery organization, too.

**Monastery organization**

Each lama is affiliated to a particular monastery. Therefore, in a monastery, hundreds of lama may be affiliated. For example, there are four hundred lamas registered with Phodong monastery. The lamas may have his family and may live with them outside the monastery. Only during rituals, they assemble in the monastery.

*DorjeLopen* is the spiritual head of the monastery. *Chikhyapo* is executive head. *Chitimba* is responsible for maintaining discipline in the monastery. *Nepo/Ngpo* is manager of treasury. The post of *Adda Lama* is that of a public relation specialist. Besides them, there is *Kienge* who does the cleaning of the altar, offers water to the deities and shows lamps to the shrine. *Umje* reads the sacred texts in the prayer hall daily, *Kansapo* does the ritual services to *Mahakala*. There are two other officials in the monastery whose role is important with regard to the perpetuation of craft tradition. These lamas are called *Chengibo* and *Champe.Chengibo* is the keeper of masks, dress, costumes etc. *Champe* organizes dance during various festivals.

The dance performances are public displays of the craft items like masks, thanka, musical instruments, votive objects, etc.

*Lharipa* is the most important lama in the monastery in connection with craft work. *Lharipa* lama is actually the craftsman lama. *Lharipa* means 'painter of god'. This lama makes clay idols of Buddhist gods and goddesses. He applies paint on the old idols, the colour of which has gone and repairs and paints the old ones like masks, wood carvings and paintings on walls. He also carves wooden masks and other wooden furniture following the instructions of the sacred scriptures. Importance of painting in the life of the Buddhist follower in Ladakh has been noted by Mann(1985). Among the Ladakhi Buddhists, the religious persons, as a part of their methodology, advise to go in for the making of painting that is believed to ensure general prosperity, better health and better future. In his study Mann has dealt with the monastic organization. However, we do not find any information about the craftsman lama. The training of lama in craftsmanship is not everywhere present among the monastic Buddhists (Hori and Sogen, 1994 ).

However, from the above discussion it is quite clear that the monastery in its physical setting as well as through organizational arrangement functions to perpetuate craft tradition. Now let us see the types of crafts found in the monastery.

**The craft works**

The craft works may be divided on the twin bases – one on the basis of material used in the making of craft objects and the other division rests on the utility or purpose. The materials used in the making of crafts include wood, clay, paper, cloth, and metals. Accordingly, the following classification emerges:

i. Wooden craft – wood carving (panel, draguchesum i.e., dragon panel, tashitagey), mask
ii. Clay craft- mask and idol
iii. Cloth craft – thanka, du
iv. Metal craft- musical instrument, utensils, prayer wheel, bajra/dorjee
v. Shell craft- dhung i.e., conch

The classification may also be done on the basis of the purpose for which the craft objects are used. The types thus come out as the following :

i. Ritual craft objects- prayer wheel, bajra, mask, *thipo* (bell), *mendekhorlo* (small container), *phika* (elongated lipped copper container), *chappe ting* (bowl for offering water), *pehung pho* (water container with kettle –like sprout), *thil-bu* (wooden hang), *chabdi.*
ii. Decorative craft objects - Thanka, masks, wall paintings, roof hangings, flag, wooden panel (*draguchesum*)
iii. Musical instruments- *gyaling, radung* (trumpet), *kayling* (flute), *ngari* (drum), *nga* (hand drum), *rem* (symbol).

In this connection, it can be mentioned that these classifications are somewhat overlapping because sometimes they contain features of two categories. For example, a decorative object like *thanka* is also significant on ritual ground. Du is a cylindrical type of decorative flag which is made of cloth. It is seen in the main altar. Another decorative flag called *phoney* is also seen in the shrine. Chempen lama known to be the tailor lama is the maker of these flags.

The craft work is perpetuated by the ritual and festivals. One of these events is the colourful mask dance. *Phanglhaso* is held in the month of September. Mount Kanchenzhongha is worshipped in this occasion. *Gutor* is another event when *Mahakala* is propitiated. It is held in the last month of Tibetan calendar. It is a seven-day festival in which mask dance is performed for two days. Most common of the masks is that of *Mahakala* which is worn by the dancers at this event. Masks are of various types.

**Mask**

Waddell (1894) mentioned about five groups of masks. These are – i. King of Ogres ii. Angry Ogres iii. Ghouls iv. Earth-Master Demons v. Teachers. In our study we have identified four major types of masks. These types are – i. *Mahakala* mask ii. Animal mask iii. *Markuta*(skull) masks iv. *Achora* (teacher/ acharya). The masks can also be classified into two broad divisions:

I. Mild masks - *Chering* or Long-Life masks, *gyapokhasang* – laughing Buddha etc.
II. Wrathful masks – Guru Drolo, Guru Singhi, *Mangamgarsam* (*Mahakala*).

These masks are worn by the lamas at the time of dance. They also wear colourful dresses during this performance. The monastery is decorated with thankas, flags of various descriptions. Incense is burnt in the premises. Paint is applied on the pictures the colour of which has become fade. Trumpet is blown, flute is played with the drums, cymbals and conchs. High pitched sonorous tune of these instruments fill the atmosphere with awe and solemnity. The sound echoes in the mountains and is heard from distance.

**Role of government**

It has been mentioned earlier that the Sikkim Government has a separate department to look into the religious affairs including monastery. Apart from religious matters, the government takes active interest in the development of traditional crafts in the state. Directorate of Handicraft and Handlooms and the Department of Small Scale and Cottage Industries are the nodal agencies in this regard. The former agency runs a craft center in Gangtok, capital of the state. It is a training center cum selling outlet. There are sections for weaving, carpet making, mask making, wood carving, painting etc. Instructors are appointed for particular craft. Some lharipa lamas work there as instructors in this center for the trade of mask making and thanka painting. However, the items they produce for sell after training show an admixture of tradition with innovation. The products for sell include small ladies hand bags, purse, pen stand, basket for encasing dorji, envelop, autograph pad, long ladies gown, mask, tashitagey, wooden furniture, carpet etc. They have transplanted the traditional design on the articles of everyday use. This craft work involves many apart from the lamas and it helps in their economic development by providing means of subsistence. The trainee craftsmen come from the tribal communities like the Lepcha, the Bhutia, the Tamang, etc. The trainees later may return to monastery or start a new business in craft.

Training centers are also functioning at the village or district level. One such center is operating at Pelling in West Sikkim. In this center training is imparted on carpet making, weaving and wood carving. Training for making traditional Lepcha dress is also imparted at this center. Trainees are given stipend by the government. There are nineteen such training centers in the state.

In this regard, it can be mentioned that the craft center at Gangtok has been itemized as a center for tourist attraction. It has been given wide publicity through booklets published by the tourism department.

## Concluding observations

In a paper on production of culture perspective, Peterson and Anand (2004) have focused on how symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught and preserved. They have identified six facets of this production, which include technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational careers and market. If we see the production of craft items in Sikkim, we would surely notice that these facets are so orchestrated that they lend great support to the craft production. Here the technology is indigenous. The extant law of the land favours the producers. The geo-climatic features are conducive to growth of small and cottage industries rather than large industrial set up. We do not fail to notice that industrialization of craft production is gaining pace and getting diversified. The division of labour in monastery organization has also been done to accommodate the craftsmen in the formal system. It standardized the craftworks following the tradition. The government agencies are entering into this field of culture production. The growing tourism industry has effectively shown that the craft production can be a rewarding career for the youth in Sikkim. Mahon (2000 : 468) has studied the cultural productions and mentioned its importance.

'Anthropologists have approached these productions as sites of the re-inscription of dominant ideologies and also as contestory interventions with the potential of contributing to social transformation.'

Mahon has indicated the significant role of media and popular culture behind cultural productions. The media and the popular culture are the sites of the production as well as the consumption of culture. The consumption is itself a cultural production. From his discussion it appears that media and popular culture form the arenas where social actors struggle over social meanings. His work also addresses the social, political and aesthetic dimension of cultural production. The craft producers are creative persons. In anthropological studies of creativity, the role of socialization in the making of creative individuals, implicating processes of social reproduction has been mentioned (Wilf: 2014). In fact, the lamas are socialized in the monastic environment with the appropriate training of craftsmanship. In fine, the following observations can be made with regard to the organization of craft production and its embedded role in the development of communities in multifarious ways in Sikkim. Firstly, the monastery plays a crucial role in the production and perpetuation of traditional crafts. Ch'en (1976) has studied the monasteries of T'ang China to find that the monasteries emblematically carry the nationalist fervor. The ceremonies they stage reflect the national tradition. Here he found that the monasteries are engaged in extensive economic activities. Secondly, these crafts are now being diversified through innovation as we find that new craft items are being added in the selling outlets in the states and outside where the Sikkimese products are sold. Therefore, the role of ideologies in cultural production is significantly shaping the arena that fosters the linkages between different actors. But the concomitant theoretical import is that this increasing secularization does not mean that the role of religious institution has been diminished. Thus

the inverse relationship between secularization and sacredness cannot be substantiated. The sacred sphere of monastic events constructs the image of Sikkim. This is also portrayed in the characteristic crafts. Thirdly, with the growth of tourism, road connectivity has increased opening up the interior parts of the state that got exposed to the more westernized life-style. Apparently this may be detrimental to the national identity of the people of Sikkim which seeks other avenues of semiotic sphere through performances and discourse to keep the very Sikkimese identity undisturbed. Side by side, the state is benefited from the crafts that are not confined in the precincts of the monastery. Thus the craft production *inter alia* a cultural production opened up manifold economic possibilities significant for the community development in Sikkim. The emerging scenario is a kind of negotiation between perpetuating tradition and market realities.

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## Note

1. Sikkim shines as jewel in the crown of 'seven sisters' of the North-Eastern states. She is called 'BeyulDemazong' that means the 'country of hidden treasure'. Looking at her colourful and enticing arts and crafts, one would surely feel that the conclusion is a just one. Sikkim was included in the union as the 22nd state in 1975 following the 38th Amendment of the Constitution of India, that bestowed some special features to the state (Shukla,1976; Kotturam,1983; Dutta, 1991). Of these, particular mention can be made of its having Ecclesiastical Department that caters to the affairs of the Lamas and *gompas* (monastery). In fact, the monasteries flourished in Sikkim as centers of Buddhism like none other state in the country. These monasteries play a very important role in the perpetuation of craft tradition.

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# MAN AND NATURE : THE PLACE OF FOREST IN PRE-COLONIAL ADI SOCIETY

SRIJANI BHATTACHARJEE

Abstract : An attempt has been made here to study the intimate relationship that existed between the traditional Adi tribe of North East India with their natural surroundings. The Adis were dependent on nature and natural elements in almost every sphere of their life. They depended on forests for food, agriculture, hunting, and for their livelihood. Forests and its resources not only formed an essential ingredient of Adi inter-tribal trade, but also occupied an integral position in Adi folklores and myths. The interdependent relationship made it easy for the Adis to utilize natural resources for satisfying their wants on the one hand, and protect nature through the imposition of societal norms and religious practices on the other. This strong sense of mutual interdependence and belonging towards the natural environment of their immediate surroundings slowly began to show signs of disintegration with the introduction of monetary economy in the region. Initially, it had begun with the arrival of colonial administration in the region in the first decade of the twentieth century. The felling of *Simul* forests of North East Frontier for making tea chests was the initial step in exploiting the forests of the region for commercial profits. Prior to this, instances of commercial exploitation of timber and forest resources in the Adi territory were unheard of. Unlike other parts of India, the British did not embark on implementing its regular policy of forest administration over North East Frontier till the third decade of the twentieth century. The region was incorporated in British India mostly on political ground. Large scale exploitation of forest resources for commercial purpose began only after Independence. Poverty, lack of education and scarcity of job opportunities in the region prompted the people to take up timber business. They had to shed off their previous forest based taboos and beliefs to earn their livelihood. The rate of forest exploitation in Arunachal Pradesh had increased so much after independence that in 2006 the Supreme Court of India had imposed a ban on timber felling in the region.

Key Words : Forests, Pre-colonial, Environment, Interdependence, Exploitation, Tribe

## Introduction

The tribal communities of North East India have developed intimate relationship with forests since early times. Forests and forest based products have been connected with every aspect of tribal life in an integrated manner. A relationship of interdependence between the people and the natural habitat existed right from the beginning. Like other tribes of North East India, this had been true to the Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as well, who constituted the

largest tribal population of the region. Literally the word 'Adi' denotes hill men. It is an umbrella word that includes a number of specific sub groups namely *Ashing, Bokar, Bori, Gallong, Karko, Komkar, Milang, Minyong, Padam, Pailibo,Pangi, Pasi, Ramo, Shimong, Tagin* and T*angam*. The Adis are divided into two major subdivisions namely the *Boums* and the *Bomis* and under each sub-division there are a number of sub tribes as mentioned above. The *Galongs* are another group of Adis having seven sub groups.[1] There is no social hierarchy among these Adi sub groups. Earlier the Adis were termed as '*Abor'* a word basically of Assamese origin which meant savage or unruly. George D.S. Dunbar has provided us with valuable information regarding the origin of the different sub-sections among the Adis and their migration towards their present habitat. According to him, the desiccation of central Asia may possibly have driven their ancestors through the passes of the north down into the mountainous zone they now occupy.[2] According to the existing legends of the Subansiri *Daflas* , the Adis had originally come from the east. Dunbar suggests that the *Minyong* Adis were the original inhabitants of a place called Telilideng, while the *Pasi* clan of the same community had come from the banks of the Siring river and gradually descended to a place known as P*asi* from which this group of people derived its name. As regards the *Padam* clan, Dunbar observes that they have gradually crept down the Yamne Valley on the one side and towards the Dibang on the other.[3] In terms of their language, tradition and culture, the Adis belong to the Tibeto Burman group. At present they occupy the entire east, west and upper Siang Districts, a part of Dibang Valley and Upper Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh, also known as the land of the rising Sun.

The territory of Arunachal Pradesh is a prosperous region in terms of its forest resources and, with its varied altitudinal and climatic conditions, the region harbours all the important tree types described in Indian Forestry. The tropical rain forests of Tirap and Lohit districts have magnificent evergreen forest types such as *Terminaliamyriocarpa*, *Amoorawallichi*, *Cancriumresiniferum, Cedrelatoona, Artocarpuschaplasha, Michella species,* etc. The Siang and Subansiri districts have semi evergreen and sub-tropical forests and are also rich in various species of the genera *Canerium, Ailenthus, Terminalia, Schima*, and species of *Magnoliaceae.* Above this zone, comes the massive temperate zone of blue pine, silver fir and *tsuga* that extend between 1500 metres to 4000 metres. The extreme limit of the Lohit district is composed of *Pine merkusii(Tennesrin Pine).* Above the belt of around 4000 metres, the vegetation gradually merges into Sub-Alpine and Alpine levels. This zone lies in the lower Sela area, Jhang valley and above Tawang and Mego in Kameng districts. This forest type gradually leads to the snow line where rhododendron and its associates abound. As regards the forest type found in the Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Champion and Seth have classified the forests into thirteen categories. These are : (1) Assam Valley Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, (2) Upper Valley Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, (3) Assam Valley Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests, (4)Sub Himalayan High Alluvial Semi Evergreen Forests, (5) Secondary Moist Bamboo Brakes, (6)Eastern Hillock Forests, (7) Eastern Himalayan Wet Temperate

Forests, (8) Eastern Himalayan Moist Temperate Forests, (9) Cypress Forests, (10) East Himalayan Dry Temperate Coniferous Forests, (11) Larch Forests, (12)East Himalayan Dry Juniper Birch Forests, (13) East Himalayan Sub Alpine Birch Forests and (14) Moist Alpine Scrub Forests.[4] As many as 550 types of orchids are found in Arunachal Pradesh.

Forests constituted an indispensable element in the social, cultural, economic and religious life of the Adi people in every phase of their life. In the pre-colonial days, forests and natural products played an important part in all aspects of Adi life. Social and cultural norms were related to forests; economic dealings were based on natural products and religious beliefs mostly revolved around forests. Clearly, in the traditional Adi society dependence on forests was almost total. This article intends to discuss the role of forests in traditional Adi society on the observations made and information gathered in the course of the present study. It also makes an attempt to have some idea about the intimate relationship that the people shared with their natural countryside during the period before the arrival of the British administration in the region. Though the people used forests and natural products for their regular day-to-day requirements, instances of rampant destruction of forests by the Adi people for fulfilling their needs are not found in the course of the study. Their relationship with the forest was more of interdependence than oppositional. The close relationship that the people shared with their natural habitat can be discussed under the following heads:

**Forests in the Social and Cultural Life of the Adis**

As indicated earlier, forests occupied an important position in the social life of the Adi people. The mode of agriculture practiced by the people was shifting cultivation that was usually carried out in forests. However, in recent times terrace and wet rice cultivation are also being practiced by the Adi people. Though the shifting mode of cultivation was the usual form of agriculture in the pre-colonial days, the people were not nomadic in nature as we find in the case of some other tribes of North East India. The Adi villages were permanent in nature and the people did not change their habitat with the change of their site of cultivation. Along with agriculture, flocks and herds of cattle were largely domesticated for food and for other purposes. Earlier, before the circulation of money as a medium of exchange, livestock animals were used for economic and social transactions. Pecuniary punishments, transfer of assets, food, and bride price were paid in the form of livestock.[5] Hunting, fishing and collection of natural products like wood, thatching grass, fruits and other things formed an important part of Adi occupation. Each community had their own hunting areas defined by natural boundaries. There were individual forest areas as well as the homestead lands known as '*Eda'*. The hunting expeditions were collective efforts where animals and birds except tigers were snared, trapped and hunted by large parties with bows and arrows. Dogs were also used in hunting. There was a hunting ceremony among the Adis where a competition among the individual hunters to hunt in their individual hunting grounds, known as '*Edas',* would be organised. Eating the flesh of tiger was considered to be a taboo by the Adis, while other

animals hunted were mostly consumed.[6] The people performed community hunting thrice a year on various occasions. Community fishing was also undertaken on various occasions. Several festivals connected with community hunting were organized of which mention may be made of '*Dorung Kiruk'* and '*Unying Aran'*. The former was a group hunting festival performed thrice a year and the later was the spring festival celebrated in the month of February-March of every year. The male folk went to the jungles for trapping birds, squirrels, etc. and made a stay in the jungles for two three nights, but came back to the village before the commencement of the celebration.[7]*Unying Aran* was an individual hunting festival where there was a competition among the village folk to hunt within their own '*Edas'*, which meant individually owned forest land. These hunting festivals are still in vogue among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh.[8]

Forest lands were divided into three segments according to the Adi system of land classification. Land within the jurisdiction of a village belonged to the people residing in it. It was considered as a communal property and was distributed on the basis of the following conditions : (a) land kept for residential purpose, (b) land reserved as hunting ground, (c) and lastly, land set aside for agricultural use. Every year fresh selection of lands for agricultural purpose was undertaken by the headmen (*gam*) of the village in consultation with the village elders and with the blessings of the spirits. The selected plots were then properly distributed among the villagers. The *Padams* (a sub-group of the Adi) classified the soil into five varieties according to their gradation of fertility, namely, *mane, marak, mongham, leru* and *liyak*. Agricultural lands, when kept fallow after the shifting cultivation process, were often used as grazing grounds. The Adi calendar was divided into twelve months depending on the agricultural activities undertaken in different seasons.[9]Agricultural land was known as '*patat'*, which after being allotted to a clan was further sub-divided into small segments called '*ariks'*.[10] Since the Adi society was patrilineal in character, land was usually inherited by the male member of the family who was the actual progeny. Transfer of land was mainly done through lease, sale and exchange. But it seems that land was never rented out.[11] Along with land, slaves also formed an important part of Adi households. They were mostly obtained by the victorious parties in their raids or attacks on neighbouring areas and the captives were turned into slaves, often due to their inability to pay the imposed fines. Slaves were also bought who were mostly children and would cost up to Rs. 160 or equivalent to a *mithun*, *danki* (these were objects made in Tibet and ornamented with Buddhist symbols and were often used as a mode of transaction by the Adis) and other material property. They were properly treated and looked after by the owner of the house. But he had also the authority to kill a slave if the situation so demanded. Although slave owners had complete power over them, the act of killing slaves was strongly disapproved by the community.[12]

The political institution of the Adis known as *Kebang* played an instrumental role in deciding issues relating to lands and forests belonging to the people. It was a democratic body where all male members of the village could participate in the deliberations and proceedings with

full freedom of expression. It also acted as a court of justice for local tribal people, which consisted of two types of members : general members and the *gams* (or village headmen). All male members , by virtue of their birth in the village, were general members of the '*Kebang'* with the authority to express their opinions. The '*gams'* were chosen by villagers on the basis of their personal merit, abilities, and knowledge of traditional lore. They were also referred to as '*Kebang Adus'* and they exercised considerable influence over the affairs of the village and administration of the '*Kebang'*.[13] Four tiers of '*Kebang'* functioned at various administrative levels, such as, (a) the family, (b) the village, (c) a group of six or more villages known as the *Bango*[14] , (d) a section called *Bogum Bokang* that dealt with inter-tribal wars and also decided disputes and cases relating to lands and forests.[15]

The Adi village was a self-contained and self-sufficient unit with its own economic and political functions. The village produced its resources for its own consumption. Within the village, resources were allotted to individual households in order to increase the household level production, while theoretically the ownership of land rested with the community. The residents of the village kept a vigilant watch over the natural frontiers and communal resources consisting of land, forest and water bodies within the village. No outsider could encroach or poach on resources lying within the jurisdiction of the village.[16] Most of the Adi villages were located on hilltops which provided natural security to the villagers from inter-village feuds. The Adi system of governance was based on democratic principles. Each village was independent and self-governing in nature. It had its own administration, both legislative and executive. The '*Kebang'* was the village court of justice. The people felt as if they were the masters of their own affairs. As stated earlier, any male member of the village who had attained the age of maturity could become the member of the '*Kebang'* assembly. The villagers elected their village headman known as '*Gam'* who administered the village for five to six years. If any one of them died before the expiry of his tenure, his son succeeded to his office or the vacancy was filled up by fresh election. Laws pertaining to the welfare of the village were framed by the villagers and the *Gam* had no authority to modify them but only could approve and enforce them.[17] Everything given on public ground was regarded as a public property intended to benefit the whole village. Anyone committing damage to such properties was regarded as a public disgrace.[18] All decisions regarding the village were taken in consultation with the village elders and the members of the *Kebang*. Even after India's Independence this institution was retained, considering its importance and influence over the local inhabitants. Describing the significance of the *Kebang* in Adi life in the post-Independence period, Verrier Elwin has made the following observation :

> 'The *Kebang* still settles administrative matters such as when and where to clear the forests and sow the seed, when to go on hunting and fishing expeditions, when and in what manner a festival will be performed and sacrificed offered. They have judicial powers and offenders of all kinds are brought before them and sentenced to various kinds of punishments'.[19]

Apart from the *Kebang*, other forms of social institution, such as, dormitories existed within Adi society that played a vital role in forest-based activities like hunting. The male dormitory of the Adis known as '*Moshup'* functioned in multifarious ways. It was used as the training centre for the various hunting expeditions undertaken by the people. It was the place where the hunting gods were propitiated and the skill of chase was taught to amateur hunters. It was also the platform where the deliberations and proceedings of the '*Kebang'* took place. In this sense, the '*Moshup'* was also a meeting area of the 'Adi' youths where they slept until they got married. '*Moshup'* based on the dormitory pattern formed a ready defence force against any external attack.[20] This institution had a ubiquitous presence within the Adi community although it was referred to by different names by the various Adi sub-groups. The *Minyongs* called it '*Dere'* while the *Padams* called it '*Moshup'*. According to Dalton, the *Padams* also called it '*Morang'*. The other allied groups called it '*Ngaptek'*, while the Boris and the Ashings termed it '*Byango'*. There was a separate dormitory for girls known as '*Reshing'*. These dormitories played a significant role in the marriage system of the Adis. Dormitory life provided the basis for selection of partners which ultimately materialised into marriages. Payment of bride price was an important element in Adi marriage system, which still continues, though in a different form.

**Forests in Adi Religious Belief System**

Faith in the existence of natural spirits formed the most important element of traditional belief system of the Adis. Forests were the abode of spirits and those were intimately connected with the social and cultural norms of the people. In the Jamo village of Arunachal Pradesh, the Minyong Adis believed that it was the habitat of '*Gumin Soyin'*, the guardian god of the village.[21] Apart from felling trees for building and domestic purposes, the Padam Adis also cut trees to retaliate the spirits of woods in case of disappearance of a child from a village.[22] The people believed in the existence of a number of malevolent spirits residing in forests and considered them responsible for sickness, death and various other forms of misfortunes. According to them, these malevolent spirits could be propitiated by sacrifices and certain rites. The spirits of air, water and earth were called by various names and propitiation to avert the wrath of the spirits was an important phenomenon of the traditional Adi religion. In the words of George Dunbar,

> 'His [the Adi's] untutored mind sees a demon everywhere, in the sun and in the thunder, in the earth and in the water. It is a spirit of evil that takes life from all things that have breath that smites with sickness that, in a questionable shape of a kinsman from some distant villages, lures the unfortunate to his doom in the dark recesses of the forest. And the beginning and end of his religion, in sickness and in health, in seed time and in war, in the agonies of death and in the burial that follow, is to appease the malevolent spirits of an unseen world.'[23]

Forests bore great religious significance in Adi life. The '*Hollok*' tree was regarded as the abode of the wood spirit which was also believed to be the most sinister spirit that often took

the disguise of a kinsman from a distant village and lured people into the jungle and killed them. So when anyone was found missing in the village, the people usually went to a *Hollock* tree armed with swords, bows and arrows and said, 'Oh Holok Tree, give us back our brother and we will make to you a sacrifice'. After this demonstration of faith and reliance, they went back to the village and it was expected that the missing person would return. If the man returned, a *mithun* or a pig was sacrificed as a thanks giving feast.[24] It was believed that the spirits responsible for sickness, death, destruction existed everywhere in the forests, particularly in certain trees like *Hollok*, rubber and plantain and in earth, sky and water. If anybody fell sick during the time of clearing of jungle for shifting cultivation, it was attributed to the anger of the spirits at the destruction of its home which could only be satisfied by the propitiation with a sacrifice. Pig was usually the animal dedicated by the Adis to *Nipong*, the spirit of the forests.[25] Along with the sinister spirits, various elements of nature such as the earth, air and water were worshipped. They believed that the supreme power of the universe was the source of all heavenly objects like the sun, moon, stars, earth and also source of the organic elements like air, water, heat and light necessary for human existence and therefore, should be revered. Their curiosities to know the creator and controller of natural phenomenon led the Adi people compose a number of legends, hymns, myths, etc. on various aspects of nature.[26]

Though they worshipped various spirits, the presence of a Supreme Being was recognized. The belief in the worship of the natural elements in the form of spirits had probably led to the emergence of the indigenous religion of the Adis known as *'Donyipolo'*. The Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh follow this religion according to which there is an unseen supreme power in the universe manifested by heavenly objects like the sun, moon, stars, earth, which is also the source of organic composition of elements like air, water, heat and light. This Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient Supreme Being is *'Donyipolo'*. In Adi language, the term '*Donyipolo'* carries different meanings. Firstly, it refers to the Almighty. Secondly, it is used to denote the sun and the moon and lastly, it also denotes the traditional belief system of the people.[27] All the meanings illustrated under the term *'Donyipolo'* form the components of this indigenous religion of the Adis. The myths and legends of the community also contribute to a great extent in shaping the basic elements of '*Donyipolo'*. The festivals of the Adi society are *'Mopun', 'Pombi', 'Lune Solung'* and *'Aran'* which are celebrated in connection with the beginning, cutting and storing of the harvested grains. On these occasions the domestic spirits are propitiated and sacrifices of pigs are made.

## Forest Products in Adi Trade and Economic Transactions

Forest- based products constitute vital ingredients of trade among the Adis with their neighbouring frontier communities. The Adi community had flourishing trade relations with communities across Assam and those of the bordering countries of Burma (now Myanmar), Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, and China since the first quarter of the 17th century. Along these trade routes, Tibetan cultural elements and tenets of Buddhism passed into the region. The principal

trade routes passed through *Bori* and the *Bokar* countries to *Gallong*. On the right bank of the Siang River beyond Ripa and Damoro on the left bank, the Yamne trade flowed to a great extent from the north. The trade routes which connected the Assam plains with these hill men were known as '*Duars'* and was managed by officers known as '*Duaries'*. Sadiya was an important market for the exchange of trading products. Annual fairs were held at Udalguri and Doimara. Pepper, ginger, *mishmitita*, wax, iron, masks, Tibetan salt, utensils, etc. were bartered for glass, beads, cloth, salt, utensils etc. The tribes carried on trade on forest products also. Rubber, ivory, and timbers formed essential articles of trade. The Wanchos and the Noctes of Namang, Borduria and Kolegaon had trade relations with the plains and the chief articles of commerce were salt and ivory. Endi silk cloths and metal products were exchanged for salt from the Assamese. With the arrival of the British in the region, fairs in the different places of the foothills were encouraged and a variety of items like rubber, timber, opium and elephants along with ivory were traded.[28]*Mithuns* and slaves had great commercial value and were exchanged for commodities from the plains. The mode of economic transaction used by the people mainly consisted of articles like metal, domestic animals, hides and skins of wild animals. All types of metal utensils were used in the mode of transaction. Amongst them, the '*danki'* or the bell metal cauldron imported from Tibet was considered to have the highest denomination. The next in importance was '*mithun'*. The latter was an animal which played a very important role in the socio-economic life of the people. The possession of '*Mithun'* indicated the social status of the possessor and was an essential animal to be sacrificed in the religious rites, festivals and feasts of the Adi people. It was also a necessary item to be used as the mode of exchange.

**Forests Manifested in Every Aspects of Adi Life**

Apart from the uses mentioned, forest- based products were utilized for such purposes as making houses, bridges and artefacts. It was their regular practice to build houses with timber, bamboo, cane and thatch. The dormitory building was a magnificent structure made of timber, thatch and bamboo. Timbers of special significance, such as *Eyum*, *Siput* and *Galing* were used for the construction of its pillars and the roofs were thatched with '*tak'* a kind of particular leaf also used for thatching houses, huts, and granary etc. The wall was made of timber and the floor was constructed with bamboo. Among the Padams, Minyongs and Pangi Adis, the fire places in their houses were constructed by fixing wooden trays in gaps between floor matting and covering them with earth. Over the hearth a three tier bamboo shelf hanged for drying fish, meat and for keeping fuel. The fuel consisted of tree branches and bamboos. The Adi also made utensils from bamboos.[29] The bark of trees was also used as clothing. They wore a kind of dress made from the bark of the *Uddal* tree which performed the dual purpose of clothing as well as a carpet to sit upon. It also served as a pillow while sleeping at night.[30]

Forest products, such as bamboo and cane were used for making hats of various types. Verrier Elwin had mentioned that some of these hats were worn as crash helmets during wars

while others were worn during dances and other social occasions. The Adi tribes always constructed their villages over difficult and not easily negotiable parts of the hills and protected them with bamboo palisades and stockades of wooden trunks. The personal forest lands often consisted of bamboo and palm groves. Wood, cane and bamboos were often used for making weapons, bridges and agricultural implements.[31] They also had immense skill in constructing different types of bridges. They constructed cantilever bridges made of bamboos, suspension bridges with rigid bamboo footways, trestle bridges and combination of both types. Verrier Elwin had described these bridges as 'marvels of untutored engineering skill'.[32] Apart from the above, shifting cultivation undertaken in the forests was an integral part of their economy. Forest products like ivory, rubber, cane, etc. were traded by the Adis with the neighbouring areas. Along with forest products, other natural products like iron and stone were used by the people for the making of weapons and implements. Workers on iron implements existed in every villages but they cannot be termed as smiths as their anvil was made of stone. In the areas neighbouring the plains, the Adi women engaged themselves in weaving. They made coloured cloths and rug like fabrics with cotton ginned in a machine made by them. They also produced cane works like hats, baskets and mats. The Adis manufactured some pottery works as well. They also made bows, arrows and fishing nets used by them in their hunting and fishing expeditions. [33]

Herbs, barks, seeds and leaves collected from forests served the medical needs of the people. They consumed opium for curing dysentery. The fauna available in the forests were used for various medicinal purposes. Kasturi, (*Kasturi Mriga*) a species of deer was found in the high altitudes of the Himalayas. The people killed them for curing body pains. *BhalukTita* was the stomach of bears which was used for treating dysentery and malaria. Fox meat and gall bladder were used as remedies to body pains. The oil prepared from Horn Bill was an important tribal medicine for different ailments. Apart from these, different herbs found in the forests were used by the people for treatment of common ailments. Aconite, *jaja* plants, wild garlic and *mishmiteeta* were some of the important plants used for medicinal purposes. *Mishmi Teeta* was a common article of inter-tribal trade. [34]

Natural forces and phenomena held a significant position in the oral literature and folk lore of the Adi community. It was found that the people rarely applied scientific analysis and knowledge to explain the natural phenomena and preferred to look at them with awe and wonder. Such a mental orientation was reflected in their strong belief in the evil spirits that were supposed to be present in natural objects. In a way, belief in the spirit world helped protecting nature from frequent human incursions. Natural phenomena, calamities and creation of the world were explained as the contributions of forest gods and natural spirits. As a justification for the creation of this world, the *Minyong* myth suggests that 'Polung Sabbo (the *mithun*) had dug a pit with his horns and when the water (of the universe) had poured into the pit, the dry land appeared and earth came into being.[35] In the same way, the rainbow is compared to a ladder by which god climbs from the earth to meet his wife in the land of moon,

high in the sky, or to a bridge by which a bride goes to her husband's house, or of the four water spirits white, black, yellow and red who live in springs among the hills and wander across the heavens for seeking wives for themselves.[36] The folk lore of the Adis dedicate a major section of stories about the creation of the world, the sky, sun, moon, thunder and lightning, water and earthquake. In the Adi mythological characters, gods, human beings and animals are accumulated in a single whole where the gods were portrayed as having human qualities, animals were shown to speak and behave like humans with human beings resorting to animal sacrifices to appease those spirits which were held responsible for natural events.[37] Thus the Adi world view is centered around natural objects and elements which are intimately and inseparably connected with human life, and whose actions could be explained in terms of cause and effect phenomena involving the organic world.

The symbiotic attachment of the Adi tribe with their natural surroundings remained intact till the arrival of money economy in the region that initially began with the appearance of British administration in the territory. The people had a strong sense of possession for their natural countryside and resisted with all their might, the attempts of external encroachments and poaching over their natural frontiers. This was reflected in the clashes that took place between the Adis and the colonial government when the later encroached into the Adi territory for collecting *Simul* timbers for the manufacture of tea chests for Sissi saw mills. The clashes culminated in the murder of Mr. Williamson, the political officer stationed at Sadiya and Dr. Gregorson by the *Minyong* Adis with the majority of their party members on 30th March 1911. In retaliation, an expedition to the Adi country under Major General Bower was sent in 1911-12 to impose peace on the offending villages. Between December 1911 and January 1912 peace was established and the whole of the Adi land was brought under British occupation.[38] The entire region was named as the North East Frontier. With the implementation of British control over the region, the forests and the natural resources of the country came under colonial jurisdiction. A political officer was stationed for the area who exercised control over the forests demarcated as 'protected'. Some forested areas were administered under the *Assam Forest Regulation* of 1891. By the first decades of the 20th century, a preliminary examination of the types of forests existing in the region was undertaken and by 1923-25 a report was submitted by Mr. Cooper, the Divisional Forest Officer stationed in the region, on the categories and kinds of forests found in the area. On the basis of information provided by Mr. Cooper, commercial forest types were identified and forest conservation was started in the North East Frontier since then.

Till independence, the commercial exploitation and form of forest administration in North East Frontier remained at the minimal level. The commercial exploitation of the forest species of the region began on a larger scale after India's independence. The tribal people who once resisted felling of timbers for commercial purposes began to indulge in such activities for economic gains. This was mostly so because the region lacked in offering jobs and opportunities for people who had lesser options but to indulge in such activities. Now, the previous inhibitions

on the felling and killing of certain natural elements are gradually on the wane and forests are being felled for commercial profits. The *Hollock* tree, which was previously believed to be the abode of sinister spirits and anyone causing damage to these trees had to suffer the wrath of the spirits, are being felled for financial gains as a single tree fetched around Rs. 65,000. The people do not show slightest hesitation in cutting trees for pecuniary profits. In this context Mamang Dai states:

> 'Once to cut down a big tree was taboo. Today however change has taken the state in a major way. The commercial extraction of timber has resulted in a marked reduction in forest area raising urgent environmental concerns. In the heyday of timber operations a single *Hollong* tree fetches a price of Rs 65,000. In this lucrative business vast tracts of forests have been destroyed forever. Development, road building and influx of migrant labourers have contributed to habitat fragmentation which has resulted in the disruption of stable biotic communities.'[39]

## Conclusion

Thus we find that forests, which held a significant position in the traditional life and culture of the Adi community, are of lesser importance today. In the pre-colonial days, forests were related to and connected with every aspect of tribal life that depended on nature for the satisfaction of its essential requirements and needs. The type of relationship demonstrated a sort of interdependence where men in return of using natural products to meet their needs also revered and protected nature through the practice of societal norms and religious beliefs. The taboos on certain natural elements and religious faith connected with some trees and animals acted as means to protect the natural landscape. The sense of attachment that the people felt for their natural surroundings safeguarded it from external encroachments and attacks. This relationship between man and nature began to show signs of disintegration with the beginning of monetized economy in the region. This had initially begun with the arrival of colonial administration in the region. The felling of *Simul* forests of North East Frontier for making tea chests was the initial step in exploiting forests of the region for commercial profits. This was, however, a one-sided policy of the colonial government that had encroached over Adi forests for commercial exploitation. In the course of study, no specific instance of indigenous Adi resorting to commercial exploitation of timber and forest resources could be established. The British however did not adopt any regular policy of forest administration over North East frontier till the third decade of the twentieth century, unlike other parts of India. The region was emphasised to be incorporated within British India mostly on political grounds. The exploitation of forest resources for commercial purposes began on a larger scale after independence. With the introduction of money, a large section of the people have become economically poor which, coupled with lack of educational skill and scarcity of job opportunities in the region, prompted the people

to go for timber business. They had to shed off their previous forest-based taboos and beliefs to earn their livelihood. The rate of forest exploitation in Arunachal Pradesh had increased to such an extent after independence that in 2006 the Supreme Court of India had imposed a ban on timber felling in the region. It is not that everything has changed automatically after that and the people no longer indulge in any illegal activities detrimental to forest protection and preservation, but it at least has a salutary effect on the way things were allowed to move so long. It has strengthened the hands of tradition-loyalists. But not all Adis are tradition-loyalists today, nor can it be said that all Adis display a strong sense of commitment to forest treating it as an inseparable component of their collective existence which takes the form of an integrated whole. A political value is now attached to the forest by the people who use it as a symbol of identity. This particularly involves control of forest and its disposition, keeping in view their self- interest and fixed priorities. In a sense, this is a reminder of the pre-colonial situation when the onus was clearly on community ownership.

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# INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF GALO : A PRELIMINARY OBSERVATION OF THE ORAL NARRATIONS AND FOLK SONGS

BINA GANDHI DEORI

Abstract : Arunachal Pradesh is a hilly terrain in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is home to diverse ethnic communities. These ethnic communities have a rich repository of cultural heritage that are mostly intangible in nature. Oral narratives and folksongs are an important part of the Galo intangible cultural heritage. Through oral narratives, the indigenous knowledge and values of the community are acquired over the years and are passed on to the next generation. Therefore, these oral narratives and folksongs, if interpreted applying suitable analytical approach, can be immensely useful as a source for writing the history of the communities.

Key Words : North-East, Ethnic, Indigenous, Heritage, Folk

## Introduction

Awareness of the significance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a recent phenomenon. Traditionally, heritage in general was restricted to tangible aspects of culture. Preserving cultural heritage meant conserving buildings, historic places and monuments. However, by 1960's with the growing appreciation of diverse cultures and modes of expressions, performing arts including music, song, dance, theatre and storytelling, language, traditional crafts, social practices, rituals, festive events, etc. also became an important part of human heritage.

The essence of cultural heritage is composed not only of tangible properties, but also and especially of the essential elements representing the living culture of human communities, their evolution, and their continuing development. Therefore, it includes all immaterial elements of a given community as essential components of its intrinsic identity as well as of its uniqueness and distinctiveness in comparison with all other human groups. In other term, the culture of a people is composed by the totality of elements representing the very heart of its distinctive idiosyncrasy (Lenzerini 2011:101).

It was only from then intangible cultural heritage attracted worldwide attention because modern societies were fast losing their valuable traditions and practices due to rapid globalization and cultural homogenization. That was the beginning of intense international awareness for preserving the Intangible Cultural Heritage for the next generation.

## International Status

The attempts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage began in 1960's with the help of UNESCO's acceptance of the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural

Heritage. In 1989, UNESCO issued a Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore in Countries of Asia. The main objective of this recommendation was to encourage its Member countries to take legislative measures to initiate projects that sought to preserve traditional culture and folklore around the world. This led to a series of more effective UNESCO sponsored programmes for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

From the mid -1990s , intangible cultural heritage has attracted particular attention, as evident from UNESCO's work on Living Human Treasures Systems (1993) and the Proclamation of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (1998, 2003 and 2005). The Living Human Treasures Systems (1993) is to recognize brilliant folk artists who save and transfer the intangible cultural treasure to the later generations. It particularly aimed at the youth in order to encourage them to pursue and continue the works of the old artists. The Proclamation of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity was established with the aim to evaluate and listing the world's oral and intangible heritage and to encourage its member countries to take legal and administrative measures for the protection of their oral and intangible heritage. The Proclamation had a great impact in drawing government and public attention to the need to safeguard this heritage.

Another milestone was the UNESCO "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage"(2003).With this Convention, the promotion of safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage increasingly gained momentum. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is one of the legal instruments used by UNESCO to protect the universal heritage. In this Convention, "intangible cultural heritage" is defined as

> *the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith –that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.* (UNESCO 2003).

It aims to protect and promote respect for the heritage of communities, groups and individuals; raise awareness at the local, national and international levels about the importance of intangible cultural heritage; promote mutual appreciation and seek international cooperation and assistance in these efforts. The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage calls for its Member states to take measures to ensure the preservation of international cultural heritage and to strengthen cooperation and solidarity between the international and regional levels. The notion of intangible cultural heritage covers a vast field:

1. Oral Traditions and expressions, language
2. Performing Arts
3. Social Practices, rituals and festive events

4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
5. Traditional Craftsmanship

This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generations to generations and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO, 2003, Article.2).

The Convention does some very good things. It reinforces the idea that the practice of one's culture is a human right. It seeks government recognition and respect for the varied cultural traditions practiced by people within its jurisdiction. It seeks to bolster the idea that all cultures give purpose and meaning to lives and thus deserve safeguarding. (Kurin 2004:75).

**National Status**

In India, continuity of indigenous crafts, beliefs and traditions have survived over centuries. For many communities in different regions of India, the intangible cultural heritage is the essential source of an identity, deeply rooted in the past. India's vast cultural diversity is itself an essential component of its intangible cultural heritage.

India supports the aims and safeguarding measures that are promoted through UNESCO'S Convention of 2003. This is reflected in India's ratification of the 2003 Convention in the autumn of 2005, several months before it came into force worldwide as well as its involvement in the promotion of the Convention through several international meetings. A year after the ratification, the UNESCO office in New Delhi hosted a meeting to promote the Convention and encourage its ratification amongst Asian Member states (Bedekar 2014: 90).

Because of the effective implementation of the 2003 Convention, eight Indian performing-art forms are enlisted for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India and in the year 2013, *Sankirtana*, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur was nominated in the list.

**Significance of the study of the intangible cultural heritage of the Galos**

The significance of Intangible cultural heritage in the promotion of cultural diversity is felt worldwide. There are also attempts to bring into the "new voices", those of indigenous and local communities, along with the "established voices", of scholars and practitioners. Following this measure, this paper presents the preliminary investigation of the Galo intangible cultural heritage with specific focus on their folk songs and oral narration. The UNESCO Convention of 2003 recognized the importance of the oral narrations as symbol of intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

North East India is home to many different ethnic communities with rich oral tradition. The Galos of Arunachal Pradesh are one such tribe. They are one of the most prominent tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, mostly found in the West Siang and some parts of East and

Upper Siang districts. According to 2011 Census, the Galo population is estimated as 1,12, 272. The Galos have rich collection of oral traditions mostly in the form of folk songs and tales.

The Galos do not have a script of their own and their material culture is mainly perishable in nature as it is entirely based on wood and bamboo; therefore, in the absence of a written script and lack of archaeological findings, the intangible heritage becomes an important cultural heritage of the native of the region.

The intangible cultural traditions of the Galos are not well documented. Modernization is taking its toll due to rapid process of globalization that has given rise to the phenomena of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage. As the younger generations are more oriented towards the modern and western education, the traditional rituals and festivals are losing their original place of importance and priority in their minds.




Fig.1.1: Map of Districts and Headquarters in Arunachal Pradesh

Source: www.eindiatourism.com

As these younger generations are mostly studying in schools and colleges outside their respective villages, gradually their contact with the community and its cultural practices is getting lost and this poses a great danger for the disappearance of their intangible cultural heritage. The rural urban migration is also posing a great threat to the culture and tradition of the communities.

## The Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Galos

The primary aim of the work is to study the importance of oral traditions especially folk songs in preserving the culture of the Galos. Dances and folk songs are inseparable part of the life of the Galos. None of their social, cultural or religious function is complete without dance.

The Galos have a rich collection of traditional folk songs that represent their vibrant and dynamic cultural life. Dance and folk songs are not only means of recreation but also have great importance in reinforcing social life and strengthening group -feeling. They also play an important role in upholding the tribal identity. All Galo ceremonies, marriages, festivals, rituals are associated with traditional folk dance and songs. The Galo folk songs form an important part of their culture and play an important role in preserving their cultural identity. Any traditional musical instruments except *roksi* do not usually accompany the folk songs of the Galos during *Ponu*. Male or female singers perform these folksongs voluntarily, individually or in a group.

### *Ponu*

*Ponu* dance is the traditional dance of the Galos. It is quite popular in the state of Arunachal Pradesh among other tribes too. *Ponu* dance is accompanied by *Ponu* songs or folk ballad. These ballads are orally transmitted folk tales told through song. These *Ponu* ballads are quite popular which are performed in different occasions.

*Mopin Ponu* is performed during *Mopin* which is an agrarian festival of the Galos. *Mopin Ponu* consists of a team of dancers and a *Ponu Nyibo* (Ponu priest) who is usually a person well-versed in the folklores. Some of the examples of *Mopin Ponu* are "*AnyiPinku Ngo Piriko, Anya Le Pinku a, HaePopire*etc. Through these ballads, the greatness of the *Mopin* is glorified and celebrated.

The *Ponu* priest narrates the legend in singing while the participant dancers repeat the refrain after each line of the song sung by the priest. A machete *(roksi*) is held upside down in the hand and along with the singing, s/he shakes the machete and rattles the iron discs loosely fitted to its hilt for the music. Apart from this traditional performance, *Ponu* is also performed by the young girls and the boys as a means of merriment during festivities or social events. *Ponu*is, in fact, was performed during all celebrations and in welcome functions for honored guests also. The dance remains the same; however, the genre of the song changes according to the social context. The *Ponu* sung during *Mopin* festival is more meaningful and substantial in its content than *Ponu* performed for merriment. The lyrics are often impromptu. The *Mopin Ponu* is based on important and well-known legends. These are orally transmitted from generations to generations. These ballads are based on oral transmission. Therefore, with the reducing number of the shamans and well-versed elders of the Galo tribe, many such important ballads are on the verge of disappearance.



Fig.1.2. Mopin Ponu

### *Kaben*

*Kaben* is performed by the female members of the community. It is performed during important ceremonies like *Mopin, Togu* and *Mari*. Kaben is followed without any musical instrument.

### *Nyaan*

*Nyaan* is performed only by the male members of the community. It is usually performed in a group after the successful completion of any activities, like the completion of sowing seeds in the field, harvest, completion of a new house or marriage.

### *DelloNyitom /DelloMennam*

In a marriage, which involves *mithun* sacrifice, *DelloNyitom* is performed. It is predominantly a male group performance though some women can also participate. It is mostly in the form of chanting in which the migration story of the tribe and the concerned clan is narrated. Through such narration, the clan lineage of the groom and the bride is established.



Fig.1.3.The shaman chanting incantations during the performance of Jed-Mod, an agricultural ritual.

*DelloMennam* can continue for hours as the narration starts from the beginning of the world, until their coming to the present settlement. It includes a lot of information regarding their migration from the original homeland followed by extensive details of their sojourn, the names of the mountains and rivers where they settled for some time before embarking on their next journey in search of a better place to settle down. It is the narration of the unabridged history of a clan. These narrations, if studied meticulously can give clues regarding the original homeland of many different tribes that is still a matter of mystery.

Involvement of the young Galo boys in such performances is a highly positive approach because through their involvement in such socio-cultural activities of the community, a feeling of appreciation and belongingness to one's culture develops.

Apart from these, there are rich collections of the songs of the shaman that are mostly ritualistic in nature, which can be collectively categorized as *NyiboAgom.*

The shaman recites Songs that are ritualistic (in content) only during the performance of rituals assisted by a co-shaman. Shamanic songs or ritual chants form a huge corpus of the Galo oral tradition. A large portion of the ritualistic chants consists of shamanic healing

songs. Through these chanting the shaman connects the world of spirit, engages in dialogue with the spirit as what is to be offered in exchange for the well-being of the possessed or sick person and finally seals the deal with the offerings that has been concluded between them. Every ritual or any important social or cultural event in the life of a Galo person is not complete without a song or a chanting.

The songs of the shaman are important as it reflect the belief system of the Galos, their philosophy, their relation with nature and their understanding of the cosmology.

Therefore, the documentation of the Galo Intangible Cultural heritage is necessary in order to record the important aspects (as defined in the UNESCO Convention) before its disappearance and to create awareness about the preservation, protection and promotion among the younger generations. The International Convention for safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage attempts to help local cultural traditions to survive and even flourish in the face of globalization. Intangible Cultural heritage provides a sense of identity and continuity and promotes respect for cultural diversity which is the need of the hour.

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# ROLE OF INDIAN MUSEUMS IN SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF NORTH EAST INDIA : A PROACTIVE APPROACH

SHILPI ROY

Abstract : North East India is a place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity among many communities, faiths and cultures. Commonly known as the "Seven Sisters" as comprised of seven states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura of which each state reflects rich intangible heritage manifested by its communities' vigorous art and craft tradition, festivals and colourful celebrations and other modes of their living and livelihood. Due to the rapid social changes taking place in many parts of this region, however, a significant part of this rich heritage is on the verge of extinction. A wide range of problems like poverty, poor health condition, lack of connectivity/road ways, dearth of power supply and transportation, unemployment, illiteracy, border insurgency, drug trafficking, identity crisis are also responsible for under representation and under development of this region including proper dissemination of its intangible heritage. It is therefore one of the most urgent needs to conserve intangible cultural heritage of this region and hand it down to future generations. Museum, as a unique institution of the society, concerned to care and preservation of cultural heritage with its chief worldwide organization, International Council of Museums (ICOM), has been focusing more attention on intangible heritage at least for the last decade. In India there are many museums not only in North East region but throughout the country which contain rare collection of North Eastern textiles, bamboo and cane crafts and pottery as well as musical instruments etc. These museums should play the role of a mediator or Communication Bridge to fill up the gap between generations and the diverse range of visitors by their multifarious activities. These museums should also collaborate with various organizations engaged in safeguarding the rich intangible heritage of North Eastern region for effective service. Thus, there lies great potential for undertaking activities in this area. This paper gives a list of Indian museums holding rich collection of intangible heritage of North East region and urges the need for a proper strategy that is required to be taken up by these museums which will ensure systematic identification, authentic documentation and effective dissemination of such heritage of North East region.

Key Words : Dissemination, Documentation, Identification, Intangible Heritage, Museums

## Introduction

North East India commonly known as the "Seven Sisters" comprises of seven states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura of which each state has its distinct cultures and traditions due to their historical,

archaeological, ethnographical, religious and artistic endeavours and craftsmanship. The region has been the epitome of variform human creativity in terms of tangible and intangible heritage along with its lushness of landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity which altogether makes this region a unique place of the subcontinent. North East India is the homeland of several ethnic groups of the Indo-Mongoloid origin with multiple dialects. The topography and ecology of the plains and hills have influenced almost every sphere of the life including socio-cultural activities of the people of this region. Art and craft have been integral to tangible heritage as well as intangible heritage reflecting emotions, perceptions, beliefs, experiences and world views with multiple meanings and in different forms responding to rituals, festivals and social occasions. The traditional craftsmanship of North East India is rich and comprises textile weaving, wood work, pottery making, mask making, doll making, basketry making, metal craft, etc. A vast unwritten oral knowledge has been carried across the diverse communities to keep these traditions alive through generations.

Over the years, our country has a number of museums especially anthropological museums administered by the agencies of both the public and private sectors which through their thematic display techniques along with other curatorial activities reflect the life and culture of people. It showcases the harmony of their body-mind-soul, material, technique, art, energy, harmony between grace and power, beauty and utility. In many Indian museums, not only in the North Eastern region but throughout the country, there are rich collections of objects made of bamboo, cane, clay and stone. Various headgears, textile, musical instruments and other items for daily use of North Eastern people unveil the anthropomorphic physiognomy of the characters of the folk narratives, performing arts of vivid religious traditions and practices and traditional craftsmanship. These also reveal the role of women in shaping the culture of the region, contribution to small scale industries, freedom movement of the country and many such other aspects of the society. Not only in India, there are many objects in foreign museums, too. According to Samiran Baruah, a researcher in the Assam State Museum, manuscripts of Brahmabaibartta Purana belonging to the 18th century is in the British Museum. He also added that Vrindavani Vastra, the figured silks from Assam, from the 16th-18th century are found preserved in the British Museum, Chepstow museum in UK and Gemau Museum in France.

**Intangible heritage and Museums**

The adoption of the 2003 Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations) was a major step for developing new policies in the field of cultural heritage throughout the world. The Convention has several systems for safeguarding at the international level such as preparing the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, the

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices, etc. In the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003, art: 2, para: 1) it is said:

> The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

India ratified the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on 09.09.2005. To fulfil the aims and obligations, under this convention, the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, initially assigned this work to the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) and later to the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA). So far, a Representative List of 341 items of ICH has been drawn up by UNESCO. India has eleven items on this List:

1. Chhau dance of Eastern India
2. Kalbelia: Folk songs and dances of Rajasthan
3. Mudiyettu**:** Ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala
4. Ramman: Religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas
5. Novruz celebrated by Persian communities of India
6. Kutiyattam: Sanskrit Theatre of Kerala
7. Ramlila: Traditional performance of Ramayana
8. The Tradition of Vedic chanting
9. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh
10. Sankirtana: Ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur
11. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab

The "new museology" movement understands cultural development as an ecosystem where museums serve as focal points of identity formation and tools for social intervention. At its general conference in Barcelona, Spain in 2001, ICOM (International Council of Museums) emphasized the importance of intangible heritage in museums and the urgent need for the definition of accurate safeguarding methodologies. In October 2002, the 7th Asia Pacific Regional Assembly of ICOM was facilitated as a strategic initiative in Shanghai, China and ratified the Shanghai Charter in which it is stated:

> We, the coalition of participants, at the 7th Asia Pacific Regional Assembly of the International Council of Museums convened between 20-24 October 2002 in Shanghai, affirming the significance of creativity, adaptability and the

> distinctiveness of peoples, places and communities as the framework in which the voices, values, traditions, languages, oral history, folk life and so on are recognized and promoted in all museological and heritage practices, recommend that museums as facilitators of constructive partnerships in the safeguarding of this heritage of humanity.

Again in 2002, CIDOC (ICOM's International Committee for Documentation) organized international conference on the theme "Preserving cultures: documenting nonmaterial heritage" which held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In 2004, ICOM declared "Museum and Intangible Heritage" as the theme for the International Museum Day and later (October, 2004) deliberated on the same theme at the 20th ICOM General Conference in Seoul, Korea. Finally, ICOM in 2007, at the 21st General Conferences in Vienna, Austria, adopted the modified definition of museum, perceiving the importance of intangible heritage. The modified definition (ICOM Statutes art.3 para.1: 2007) of museum is:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

**List of Museums holding tangible materials related to North East Indian Intangible Heritage**

A list presented below contains general information about the Indian museums (based on available information) which have collection of tangible aspects of rich Intangible heritage of North East India. A unique number has been assigned to each individual museum following bipartite system of which first part contains code indicating location of the museum, and second part contains serial number of museums within that code. For museums in North East region code 'NE' is used and for museums outside North East region code 'O' is used.

**1. Museum Code No: O1**

*i) Name of the museum :* National Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Janpath, New Delhi

*iii) Administrative Control:* Ministry of Culture, Government of India

*iv) Year of Establishment:* 1949

*v) Type of Museum:* History Museum of National importance

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* A Total of 327 excellent tangible materials such as dresses, apparel, ornaments, basketry, wood carvings and personal adornments, etc., related to rich intangible heritage of several tribal groups inhabiting the land of "Seven Sisters" are on view in the gallery 'Tribal Life Style of North East India'. Many of these exhibits are Luthra's collection and Dr. Verrrier Elwin's collection.

**2. Museum Code No: O2**

*i) Name of the museum :* National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum (NHHM) also known as Crafts Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Bhairon Road, New Delhi

*iii) Administrative Control:* Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1952

*v) Type of Museum:* A specialized Art and Craft Museum of National importance

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts and Textiles of North East India. Museum's Village Complex (which is a remnant of a temporary exhibition on the theme of rural India, set up in 1972) includes village dwellings of Arunachal Pradesh.

**3. Museum Code No: O3**

*i) Name of the museum :* Museum of Performing Arts, Sangeet Natak Akademy

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Feroze Shah Road, New Delhi

*iii) Administrative Control:* Ministry of Culture, Government of India

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1952

*v) Type of Museum:* Museum of Performing Arts

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Musical instruments related to performing arts, festive events and rituals of North Eastern people. These instruments can be classified as: Wind instruments (aerophonic) including Pepa, Siphung of Assam, Tangmuri of Meghalaya, Murai Sumui of Tripura ; String instruments (chordophonic) including Dendung, Dotara, Gintong, Sananda, Sarinda of Assam, Chempreng, Sarinda, Tok-Du-Treng of Tripura, Lha, Pena, Sananta of Manipur ; Percussion instruments (membranophonic) including Dagar, Dhol, Kharam-Dubang of Assam, Bom, Dama, Ksing Shynrang of Meghalaya, Pung of Manipur, Dama, Kham of Tripura, Naga Drum of Nagaland and (idiophonic) including Bortal, Tokka of Assam, Ksing-Phong, Mieng of Meghalaya, Senmu, Sheng Kheng of Manipur, Lebang-Ti, Rang-Thali of Tripura, etc.

**4.Museum Code No: O4**

*i) Name of the museum :* Tribal Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Ahmadabad, Gujarat

*iii) Administrative Control:* Tribal Research and Training Institute, Gujarat Vidyapith

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1962

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Textiles of North Eastern India

**5.Museum Code No: O5**

*i) Name of the museum :* Calico Museum of Textiles

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Ahmedabad, Gujarat

*iii) Administrative Control:* Sarabhai Foundation

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1949

*v) Type of Museum:* A specialized museum for Textiles

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Collection of the tribal costumes from North Eastern India

**6. Museum Code No: O6**

*i) Name of the museum:* Museum of Folk and Tribal Art, also known as K.C. Aryan's Home of Folk Art

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Gurgaon, Haryana

*iii) Administrative Control:* K.C. Aryan's Trust

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1984

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Tribal sculpture and traditional textiles of Assam and Nagaland

**7. Museum Code No: NE1**

*i) Name of the museum :* Nagaland State Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Kohima, Nagaland

*iii) Administrative Control:* Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1964

*v) Type of Museum:* General Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and Cane Crafts especially Basketries and Pottery

**8. Museum Code No: NE2**

*i) Name of the museum :* Anthropological Museum, also known as Madhab Chandra Goswami Anthropological Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Guwahati, Assam

*iii) Administrative Control:* Department of Anthropology, Guwahati University, Government of Assam

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1948

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and Cane Crafts including Fishing baskets and basketry, comb, flint box, smoking pipe, headgear, agricultural implements, hunting implements and musical instruments

**9. Museum Code No: NE3**

*i) Name of the museum :* Purvabhararti Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Nalbari, Assam

*iii) Administrative Control:* Nalbari Sahitya Samaj

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1972

*v) Type of Museum:* Art and Craft Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Collection of the tribal costumes, Pottery and Bamboo and Cane Products

**10. Museum Code No: NE4**

*i) Name of the museum :* Commercial Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Guwahati, Assam

*iii) Administrative Control:* Guwahati University, Government of Assam

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956

*v) Type of Museum:* A specialized museum for handicrafts

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Specimens of handicraft products especially of bamboo and cane made by the people of Assam

**11. Museum Code No: NE5**

*i) Name of the museum :* Assam State Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Guwahati, Assam

*iii) Administrative Control:* Directorate of Museums, Government of Assam

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1940

*v) Type of Museum:* General Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Collections of tribal sculpture, paintings, metal, ivory and woodwork, costumes. There are exhibits of reconstructed huts of Assamese tribes. There are also displays of weavings and musical instruments.

**12. Museum Code No: NE6**

*i) Name of the museum :* Cottage Industry Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Guwahati, Assam

*iii) Administrative Control:* Industrial Department, Government of Assam

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1955

*v) Type of Museum:* Art and Craft Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* This museum displays many colorful items from the Sattriya culture and indigenous art and craft. The Museum has two main sections: Textiles & Handicrafts. In the handicraft section there are specimens of wood-carving, clay works, ivory work, etc.

**13. Museum Code No: NE7**

*i) Name of the museum :* District Museum, Barpeta

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Barpeta, Assam

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Assam

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1987

*v) Type of Museum:* General Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* It has a collection of the textiles based on the Sattriya Vaishnavite culture

**14. Museum Code No: NE8**

*i) Name of the museum :* Ethnological Museum, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Guwahati, Assam
*iii) Administrative Control:* Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes
*iv) Year of Establishment:*1977
*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum
*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* A variety of ethnographic objects including ornaments and costumes, agricultural, fishing and hunting implements, etc.

**15. Museum Code No: NE9**

*i) Name of the museum :* Sonitpur District Museum
*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Tezpur, Assam
*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Assam
*iv) Year of Establishment:*1986
*v) Type of Museum:* Archaeological museum
*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Traditional Assamese textiles

**16. Museum Code No: NE10**

*i) Name of the museum :* Bomdila District Museum
*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Bomdila, Arunachal Pradesh
*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh
*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956
*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum
*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works and textiles of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh such as Apatani; Adi; Bangni; Dafla; Digaru; Gallong; Hill Miri; Monpa; Mishmi; Mininyong; Nishi; Nocte; Pasi; Padam; Sherdukpen; Tagin; Tangsa; Wancho, etc.

**17. Serial Number of the Museum: NE11**

*i) Name of the museum :* Ziro District Museum
*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh
*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh
*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956
*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum
*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works and traditional textiles of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

**18. Museum Code No: NE12**

*i) Name of the museum :* Along District Museum
*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Along, Arunachal Pradesh
*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh
*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956
*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum
*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works and traditional textiles of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

**19. Museum Code No: NE13**

*i) Name of the museum :* Pasighat District Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works and traditional textiles of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

**20. Serial Number of the Museum: NE14**

*i) Name of the museum :* District Museum, Changlang

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works, textiles and the costumes of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

**21. Museum Code No: NE15**

*i) Name of the museum :* Tezu District Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Tezu, Arunachal Pradesh

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works and traditional textiles of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

**22. Museum Code No: NE16**

*i) Name of the museum :* Khonsa District Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Khonsa, Arunachal Pradesh

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1956

*v) Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, clay works and traditional textiles of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

**23. Museum Code No: NE17**

*i) Name of the museum :* Jawaharlal Nehru State Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Arunachal Pradesh

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1980

*v) Type of Museum:* General Museum

vi) *Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Wood carvings, musical instruments, textiles, handicrafts of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It also holds a handicraft center which specializes in traditional cane manufacture.

**24. Museum Code No: NE18**

i) *Name of the museum :* Mizoram State Museum
ii) *Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Aizawl, Mizoram
iii) *Administrative Control:* At present Department of Art & Culture, Government of Mizoram
iv) *Year of Establishment:*1977
v) *Type of Museum:* Anthropological Museum
vi) *Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Bamboo and cane crafts, tribal utensils, musical instruments, weapons and tribal textiles

**25. Museum Code No: NE19**

i) *Name of the museum :* Manipur State Museum
ii) *Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Imphal, Manipur
iii) *Administrative Control:* Government of Manipur
iv) *Year of Establishment:*1969
v) *Type of Museum:* General Museum
vi) *Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Textiles, art and craft objects of different tribes of Manipur

**26. Museum Code No: NE20**

i) *Name of the museum :* Manipur University Museum
ii) *Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Imphal, Manipur
iii) *Administrative Control:* Manipur University
iv) *Year of Establishment:* 1980
v) *Type of Museum:* General Museum
vi) *Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Traditional Manipuri and tribal earthen wares, traditional musical instruments, traditional ornaments, weaving implements, traditional Manipuri textiles, traditional costumes, basketry items collected from different parts of North East India

**27. Museum Code No: NE21**

i) *Name of the museum :* Meghalaya State Museum, now known as Williamson Sangma Museum
ii) *Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Shillong, Meghalaya
iii) *Administrative Control:* Department of Art and Culture, Meghalaya
iv) *Year of Establishment:*1975
v) *Type of Museum:* General Museum
vi) *Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Traditional tools, traditional musical instruments, arts and crafts of local people of Meghalaya

**28. Museum Code No: NE22**

*i) Name of the museum :* Tripura Government Museum

*ii) Location (State/Union Territory of India):* Agartala, Tripura

*iii) Administrative Control:* Government of Tripura

*iv) Year of Establishment:*1970

*v) Type of Museum:* General Museum

*vi) Preserved tangible items of North Eastern ICH:* Tribal textiles of Tripura

Following list contains some other museums (including upcoming museum projects) holding tangible materials related to North East Indian Intangible Heritage:

29. **Museum Code No: O7:**Arts and Crafts Museum, Bhavnagar, Gujarat
30. **Museum Code No: O8:** Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad
31. **Museum Code No: O9:** Tribal Museum, New Delhi
32. **Museum Code No: NE23:** RIWATCH (Research Institute of World's Ancient Traditions Cultures & Heritage) Museum, Arunachal Pradesh
33. **Museum Code No: NE24:** Peoples Museum, Kakching, Manipur
34. **Museum Code No: NE25:** Koirei Museum, Ukhrul, Manipur
35. **Museum Code No: NE26:** State Kala Akademi Museum, Manipur
36. **Museum Code No: NE27:** Ragailong Museum, Manipur
37. **Museum Code No: NE28:** Mutua Museum, Keishampat, Manipur
38. **Museum Code No: NE29:** Tribal Research Institute cum Museum, Imphal, Manipur
39. **Museum Code No: NE30:** Leimarel Museum and Research Centre, Imphal, Manipur
40. **Museum Code No: NE31:** Anthropological Museum, Manipur University, Manipur
41. **Museum Code No: NE32:** Auniati Satra Museum, Guwahati, Assam
42. **Museum Code No: NE33:** Sibsagar College Museum, Assam
43. **Museum Code No: NE34:** Tribal Research Institute, Shillong, Meghalaya
44. **Museum Code No: NE35:** Don Bosco Museum of Indigenous Cultures, Shillong, Meghalaya
45. **Museum Code No: NE36:** Naga Heritage Museum, Kohima, Nagaland

**Strategy for safeguarding intangible heritage in Museums**

Museums which are listed above should develop certain strategy to provide careful consideration to the relevance of intangible heritage in relation to their collections and impact on the curative practices. In present practice, some contextual information related to tangible collection is recorded by some museums mentioned above. But data on specific intangible heritage, stored in this way is undervalued and difficult to use as a resource in its own right. Therefore, documentation on intangible heritage in these museums need to be made more explicit to ensure that all information requirements are adequately dealt with.

The UNESCO provided a format for inventories of intangible cultural heritage which includes the following information categories :

1. Identification of the element
   1a) Name of the element as used by the community or group concerned;
   1b) Short, maximally informative title (including indication of domain(s));
   1c) Community(ies) concerned;
   1d) Physical location(s) of element;
   1e) Short description
2. Characteristics of the element
   2a) Associated tangible elements;
   2b) Associated intangible elements;
   2c) Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved;
   2d) Perceived origin
3. Persons and institutions involved with the element
   3a) Practitioners(s)/performer(s): name(s), age, gender, social status, and/or professional category, etc.;
   3b) Other participants (e.g., holders/custodians);
   3c) Customary practices governing access to the element or to the aspects of it;
   3d) Modes of transmission;
   3e) Concerned organizations (NGOs and others)
4. State of the element: viability
   4a) Threats to the enactment;
   4b) Threats to the transmission;
   4c) Availability of associated tangible elements and resources;
   4d) Viability of associated tangible and intangible elements;
   4e) Safeguarding measures in place
5. Data gathering and inventorying
   5a) Consent from and involvement of the community/group in data gathering and inventorying;
   5b) Restrictions, if any, on use of inventoried data;
   5c) Resource persons(s): name and status or affiliation;
   5d) Date and place of data gathering;
   5e) Date of entering data into an inventory;
   5f) The inventory entry compiled by….

**References to literature, discography, audiovisual materials, and archives**

In using display techniques to showcase intangible heritage the following consideration should be kept in mind.

1. It should consist of tangible objects related to the specific intangible heritage: the strengths of original objects over other forms of media are: aesthetic qualities,

resolution and density of information, appreciation of scale; their authenticity- sense of personal connection between the visitor and practicing communities or individual concerned.

2. Different visual media such as photographs, documents, maps, etc. can be used for contextualization.
3. For focusing various aspects of intangible heritage, a sensible ambience can be created by using interactive table divided into parts by a series of vertical screens. The interactive settings should be supported by "natural interfaces" like devices that react by using common means of communication - touching, treading, and emitting sound, etc.
4. The interactive multimedia contents may include motion silhouettes showing the lifestyle of people, working of a craft person, a 3D model of the site concerned, etc.
5. The potentialities of using new multimedia technologies in order to facilitate people's interaction and participation in the fruition of the intangible heritage is a matter of consideration which, for its immaterial nature, needs to be supported and understood in a narrative structure.

These museums should arrange various in-house and outreach programmes in collaboration with other Government/private organizations to build up techniques, training method and repertoire of the dance styles and the musical component related to the North East Indian intangible heritage. Lecture-demonstrations, seminars and conferences should be arranged for interaction with the practioners, experts, and scholars with a view to expand the academic work including the work of documentation, survey and workshops with focus on specific subjects such as training methodology, techniques of craft making, textile weaving, etc. The museums may introduce an integrated course on some of the distinctive North East Indian intangible heritage in collaboration with Government universities to provide the opportunity to the interested people including the practicing communities. This will help to perceive those unique traditions through an extensive learning experience with theoretical and practical methods.

## Conclusion

North East India has 42% of nation's tribal groups and it is a home to 200 (approx.) tribal groups. Each group retains its individual cultural identity which is manifested by their tangible and intangible heritage. A museum holding tangible materials related to rich intangible heritage of the communities of this region can be successful by providing pro-safeguarding measure for such intangible heritage. Institutionalized construction of the physical space by utilizing communities' own belongings will engage sufficient participation and active communication. This can also motivate local constructivism to imagine and create a better cultural centre, a tourist spot and neighbourhood. Therefore, such museums of our country should take some initiative for authentic and effective dissemination of rich

living heritage of this region. The practices through sustainable development will help the practicing communities to understand in an innovative way, the ecosystem, people and memories.

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# THE STORY OF WOMEN IN THE NORTH EAST VERSUS INDIA : LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM EACH OTHER

GARIMA SARKAR

Abstract : It is believed that men and women share the same space, but in reality women are given a lower status in the society with respect to their male counterpart. The Northeastern Region of India is considered as a backward region in terms of growth in per capita income. However, there is a perception in common that the role and status of women in the Northeast regions is higher compared to the rest of India. This paper is trying to analyze the status of women in two of the Northeastern states, namely Sikkim and Manipur in terms of female participation in education, labor market, freedom of movement and political participation. An attempt has been made to study the status of women in the Northeastern region i.e., the states of Manipur and Sikkim in comparison to the rest of India. The indicators reveal that women have a very low degree of freedom of movement and low level of control over themselves in the Northeastern region. The present paper will analyze the status of women in the states of Manipur and Sikkim in comparison to India as a whole, and also attempt to review the aspects in which women from these two Northeastern states can influence the women of India. The study has used four basic indicators of development based on secondary data. The study elucidates that the Northeastern states are better off compared to the nation as a whole in terms of gender equality and status of women per se. However, the study will attempt to review the gender inequality within the two states of Northeast as inequality between women and men exists in the Northeastern region in spite of the presence of various matrilineal and matriarchal ethnic groups who by and large do not believe in sex discrimination. The study would however reveal that gender gap exists in terms of education, labor market, freedom of movement and political participation in the region. A large gender gap exists in political participation among the populations of the two states both at the levels of state and nation. The secondary data reviewed for the purpose of the present paper reveals that among Northeastern states, Manipur shows relatively lesser degree of gender inequality in terms of work participation, literacy and sex ratio; the situation is however different in Sikkim. Although Sikkim is considered as a much safer state compared to Manipur which further helps in evaluating the indicator which involves freedom of movement and political participation of women in the region. Thus, the study concludes with a question on how these two states can influence the gender dynamics of the country as a whole and also observes that access to education and employment are not the only enabling factors that guarantees gender equality. It primarily prescribes to change the mindset of the people in order to bring about gender equality in the Northeastern states and also in India as a whole.

Key Words : Struggle, Gender, Education, Inequality

## Introduction

The Northeastern region of India, consisting of the seven states and the newly included state of Sikkim, faces not just political, economic and cultural marginalization but even emotional alienation from the so-called mainland of India. Every passing day witnesses scenes of violence enacted on its soil, undermining the already fragile texture of national consolidation in the region. The turn of the century has seen turbulence of increasing intensity, adversely affecting socio-economic development and political normalization. The withdrawal of the British was not the end of the dark tunnel for India as the future posed serious challenges. The Northeast region remained secluded for multiple factors and came to focus much later in the eyes of the policy-makers in India. The people of the Northeast were juxtaposed with a window to the so-called civilized world and at the same time confined to their own areas through devices like the Inner Line Regulations and later the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. This part of India has been witnessing unacknowledged armed hostilities over the last 60 years between the State and indigenous people's armed opposition groups. In the recent past, there has been a suspension of civil rights and a veritable state of military rule existing without a let-up. The conflict-ridden states have given rise to disturbed law and order conditions which meant that social and economic systems are also continually disrupted, and the education and health care systems are not in a very good shape, if not entirely non-existent.

Political violence and armed conflict have been largely male domains, executed by men, whether as participants in the armed forces, guerrilla forces, paramilitary or peace keeping forces. This has resulted in literatures which are largely gender blind, with women's participation simply not visible. The lack of recognition of women's involvement during armed conflict whether as perpetrators or victims means that they are doubly discriminated in re-integration interventions for conflict-affected populations.

The present paper primarily focuses on the status of women in terms of educational attainment, their participation in the labor market, freedom of movement and political participation in Sikkim and Manipur in particular with reference to the rest of the country.

### Political Scenario

In the category of small states, Sikkim was among the first three best performing states in the field of law and order, health and investment and has been doing well in terms of general well being of the people. Sikkim has recorded several significant gains in the human development indicators after merging with India as a 22nd state of Indian Union. Under the measurement of HDI (Human Development Index), the women of Sikkim have been given special place in GDI (Gender Development Index) and GEM (Gender Empowerment Measures) calculations. Women enjoy freedom and recorded significant gains in the race of overall human development. However, like in many parts of the world, they still live in an unequal world. In Sikkim, women enjoy relatively greater freedom than in other parts of the country. According to the census of India 1991, close to 38% of the women participated in the work force as against the national average of 20% (National Family Health Survey II for 1998-1999). The median age at marriage is 19.8 years, more than 3 years higher than the

national average of 16.4 years. Some 79% of women have access to money as against the national average of 60% and 28% in Nagaland. Married women (42%) do not need permission to visit friends and relatives; the proportion is 24% in India as a whole. Another striking feature of Sikkim is the absence of gender differentials along many indicators of human development. For instance, in 1998-99, 83.2% of boys and 82.6% of girls between 6 -17 years attended school. In contrast to unfavorable sex ratio in population as a whole, the number of women in Government employment is greater than men. They are more visible in public sphere in Sikkim than a norm for India and South Asia as a whole. One of the most important issues concerning Sikkim is that there has been no reported case of gender discrimination, inequality, sexual harassment, infanticide or dowry related death here.

The fact that in 1999-2000 the number of women headed houses in Sikkim rural areas (142 per thousand) was higher than national average, indicates not only the impact of migration but also the status accorded to women in the state. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Indian Constitution (1/3rd reservation in Panchayat is implemented) have ensured equal access and increased participation in political power structure of women. The Panchayat Raj Institution and local self Government, will be actively involved in the implementation and execution of the National Policy for women, at the grass roots levels.

The State government has taken some important decisions for the up-liftment of women in the state. The steps taken are : one woman MP out of two to represent in the parliament, two women MLA's out of 32 to represent in the State Assembly. Both the Central and the State government have introduced a number of schemes such as Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, Balika Samriddhi Yojana, Small Family Scheme and other women-specific welfare and empowerment programmes to promote women's welfare and their empowerment.

Within these favorable conditions, women empowerment has still not reached its desired direction and women still face unequal opportunities in a variety of spheres, namely, a woman is considered to be an asset in the household and commands a bride price but she has no right of inheritance. It is only when a daughter remains unmarried that parents customarily transfers some property to her. If a Sikkimese woman married a person, who is not a Sikkim subject holder, the husband and the off spring born of that marriage shall acquire no right in any immovable property which she may hold in Sikkim by virtue of Section IV of the Regulation. Since Sikkim has become a part of India, this law has now lost all its force and has no longer any field to operate. In the present day, the regulation has not yet been repealed by the legislature. On the contrary, women in Sikkim still remain largely involved in traditional and unpaid or meagerly paid economic activities mostly as agricultural labors and in lower rung of other activities as well. Girls are typically denied the opportunity to pursue higher studies/ education since it often involves moving out of the villages, districts and even the state. Socio-cultural and family considerations often deny women the opportunity to pursue employment outside the state.

**Socio-Economic Conditions**

As per the statistics, Sikkim's literacy rate of 69.68% (2001) is well above the national

average of 65.38% supported by the monthly expenditure of Rs. 960 per student. This is far above the all India average of Rs. 210 per student. In Sikkim, teacher/pupil ratio is 1:19 at the primary level which was good compared to all India ratio of 1:46 in 1995. Even though the state performs well on its Gender Development Index (GDI), the enrolment of girls is lower than that of the boys at all levels except in the middle school.

In the sphere of employment, Sikkimese rural women are fully engaged in agriculture and allied activities including small farm agriculture, livestock, food processing, gathering, small trading and vending. Women successfully diversify their farm activities such as poultry farming, animal husbandry, beekeeping and tailoring. In construction sites and factories, they provide cleaning, washing services, etc. Hence besides agricultural sector, they contribute a large workforce at par with men. More than 50% women are employed in agricultural sector as wage laborers.

The women in rural areas are either engaged in agriculture or allied activities making their potential for income generations more confined. This is further depressed by involving them in small activities like sowing, weeding, and cutting of fodder, harvesting and processing which earns a small value profit. Since the introduction of considerable mechanized farming in Sikkim, the demand for farm labor (constitutes mostly of women) has reduced affecting directly or indirectly both the opportunities for work and income of the rural women.

Sikkim shares a common gender division of labor as prevalent in almost all parts of India in maintaining their household and community activities, with the women attending their home and family responsibilities as wives, mothers and home maker, with a shared responsibility of child-rearing, shopping and community activities, etc.

Thus in Sikkim, women constitute nearly 47 percent of the total population. Sikkim is probably the only state in India where instances of infanticide or dowry-related deaths have not been reported. Women also play a major role in trading activities which allows them to participate in decision-making far more than in most other States in India.

The practice of polyandry among tribal communities could be one of the variables explaining the higher value attached to women. Similarly, local religious practice also plays a role in influencing the status of women. Women's work is an important underpinning of society and economy in Sikkim as it is elsewhere.

As already mentioned earlier, a woman is considered to be an asset in the household and commands a bride price, but she has no right of inheritance. Participation of women in economic activities is pretty high in Sikkim. The women, especially in the rural areas, are involved in agricultural operations from sowing to harvesting. It has been their responsibility traditionally, to collect fuel wood and fodder for the family, and fetch water from dharas (springs) in vessels which they carry in a doko ( basket) on their backs. They are responsible for all domestic tasks including the caring for domestic animals. Women also work as paid agricultural laborers, construction workers, and take part in economic activities like selling of vegetables

in the market place. They contribute to the income of the family also through their traditional skills in spinning and weaving.

Traditionally there has been no discrimination against the girl child in Sikkim's society. Girls and boys are given equal status in the family. Unlike many other States, no female foeticide has been reported from Sikkim. Sex-determination tests are unheard of. Nevertheless, girls in Sikkim are underprivileged in terms of their education, early marriage and health.

The reasons for the slow spread of education among girls in Sikkim are, as else, poverty, social customs, negative parental attitudes, poor accessibility to schools and the non-availability of schools which have women teachers. The State Government is considering several measures to address these issues. These include the establishment of separate primary and junior high schools for girls, wherever there is a demand, and the expansion of facilities for higher secondary education in the exclusive girls' secondary schools at Gangtok, Deorali, Namchi and Gyalshing.

The introduction of free education in government schools in terms of books, uniform and mid-day meal up to the age of 5 years, have definitely attracted more and more girls to the schooling system. These benefits are extending to all the girls in a family, whereas in the case of boys, the benefits are limited to two per family.

Low participation of girls in education has a direct impact on their social chances and future prospects. This is reflected in the prevalence of early marriages, in both rural and urban areas, as well as in all the three communities, the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalis.

In rural Sikkim, 32 percent of the girls were married before they were 18 years and another 34 per cent got married by the time they were 20. This implies that 66 per cent (60 per cent in 1997) of the girls got married by the year they attained 20 in 1989. The average age of marriage for girls is 14-20 years, while for men it is between 18-25 years.

**Women's Representation in the Government**

The role of women's empowerment for a just society was highlighted in the Beijing Conference (1995). Sikkim has a tradition of collective decision-making by communities through the institution of the 'Dzumsa'. However traditional institutions do not witness a significant role for women. The empowerment of women however, has to be at the core of the state strategies and action.

Both the Central and State governments have introduced a number of programme, e.g., Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, Balika Samriddhi Yojana and the Small Family Scheme, to promote both women's welfare and their empowerment. Gender concerns have been addressed in the State through an array of women-specific welfare and empowerment programmes.

Though the stipulated one-third reservation for women in Panchayat has been fully implemented, in reality the situation is characterized by low participation in Panchayat meetings and surrogate representation. There is a need to encourage women members to meet separately and discuss major policy and development issues, as well as strategize them to tackle domestic violence. Gender issues that rose in Panchayat meetings mostly pertained to violence, such as

wife beating by an alcoholic male member and husband bringing home a second wife. These issues which are usually pushed under the carpet in other States are openly discussed in Sikkim, and it is an encouraging sign.

However, in the absence of either a comprehensive study on gender related issues in Sikkim or any gender audit of the development programmes of the State government, it is difficult to make a correct assessment of the situation of woman. In order to mainstream gender concerns into the core of development planning and action, public debate on gender issues need to be encouraged, with the involvement of media, NGOs, researchers and social activists, along with the government and international development partners. It is hoped that with the setting up of State Women's Commission, the agenda of gender equality will be placed at the centre of the State's development strategies.

Women of Sikkim over the years have changed significantly due to global flow of ideas and cultural interactions which is driven by communication, technological revolution, flourishing tourism and a cooperative society. At the same time, there is strong initiative from the state government in bringing change in the grass roots level to empower the women. The cooperative society in the form of SHG's which are the basic concept of western world are widely implemented by the state and accepted by the women community in general. There is inclusion of indigenous knowledge in preserving and promoting traditional culture and heritage which shows strong and positive trend towards empowerment among the Sikkimese women.

Women in the Northeast and Manipur, in particular, enjoy a unique status in society. Like most women, they perform the triple tasks of housework, agricultural and livestock labour and meet socio-cultural obligations of the family. Yet, they are socially visible outside the home front. Indeed, in the fields of education, health and work they are known to have done far better than their counterparts elsewhere.

Historically, women in this region played a major role in the affairs of governance, economy and civil society. There was an exclusive court for women called the 'pacha court', where the queen conducted the trials. Even in the king's court, where he was the ultimate authority, only a woman could convert his order of death penalty to life sentence.

Later the spate of invasions and conquests compelled the male members to leave their homes due to their involvement in the war. The void caused by their departure and the uncertainty of their return led the women to take upon themselves the task of bringing up children, taking care of their economy and ensuring that the social order was maintained. In 1904, the women of Manipur rose against the British political agent Lt.Col.Maxwell, who ordered the people of Imphal to supply teak wood from Kabaw valley for reconstructing the house of a British official. They forced their entry into the Residency, thus compelling the British to withdraw their order. In 1939, in protest against the British decision to export rice in connivance with the local traders which led to acute shortage of foodgrain, the women gheraoed the British Residency. This was the second ' Nupilan', a women's movement directed against the British.

In recent times, their activism has been demonstrated in social movements to combat drug abuse, alcoholism, child marriage, etc. The blatant forms of sexual discrimination that prevail in many other parts of the country are not found in Manipur. The discriminating practices are subtler in nature, though needless to say, this does not make them any less serious.

In terms of education, according to the 2001 figures, the male literacy rate increased to 77.87 per cent and that of female to 59.7 per cent while the overall rate remained at 68.87 per cent. Senapati and Tamenglong districts are traditional under performers in this respect. There has been a marked disparity between the male and female literacy rates, especially in the lower income groups. The achievements at the primary education level are almost diluted by the high rates of dropouts in the secondary and higher secondary levels. Manipur has the lowest dropout rate (43%), though there is a wide gap between girl and boy dropout rates. This is mainly attributed to household responsibilities and the high cost of education, which has barred girls from attending schools. By and large the education status of girls ( in terms of their enrolment) is far from satisfactory.

**Economy for Women**

Manipuri women contribute substantially to the economic development of the state. A notable example of such an activity is the Ima-Keithel or an exclusive women's market. The only one of its kind, consists mainly of women vegetable vendors and cloth merchants who mostly sell their own products. The vendors are backed by strong organizations, which protect them from any harassment by the police authorities. Historically, it has played an important role in serving as a launching pad for the women's movement against colonial rule.

In the famous women's market, known as Nupi Keithel at Imphal, a large number of women from different parts of the valley engage in household economic activities. The period 1971-1991 saw a significant increase in the participation of women agricultural workers in the total workforce rising from 1.31% to 3.98%. In respect to the other services, their share raised from 0.76% in 1971 to 2.47 % in 1999. By and large, women are confined to lowly paid labor intensive jobs like paddy sowing, while more skilled jobs like ploughing and harvesting are handled by men.

In the farming sector, teams of women workers undertake transplantations, weeding and reaping, and work as collective labourer in rotation for each member's field. In Manipur, very few women participate in industrial activities, except for Imphal where the participation of women in non-household activities was the highest. The participation rate in these activities increased from 4.27 % to 8.88 per cent in 1991, while in household sector it correspondingly declined from 13.19 % to 10.01 % per cent. In all other districts it was almost negligible.

In the valley of Manipur, an organization named ' Meirapaibis' is involved in initiating various measures like banning the sale of alcohol, drugs, etc. It demonstrated its potential for achieving social objectives, following the extension of ceasefire in the state between Government of India and Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland and the vehement protest against the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Power Act in Manipur.

However, despite these initiatives the position of women with regard to social and political

rights is far from satisfactory. Unlike sons in a family they are not allowed to inherit property and can exercise property rights over their father's land, only till the time of their marriage. A widow can exercise her right over her husband's land till her death and if she remarries, she ceases to have such a right (especially among the Naga Tribes). However, women have full ownership right on their wealth, which is even returned to them after divorce. A woman who is widowed or divorced is given landed property by her parents so that she retains her links with her parents' home.

There are very few women representatives in the Assembly. In 2000, only one woman candidate out of nine candidates put up by the political parties was elected. However, at the local government level, women are well represented, sometimes crossing the 1/3rd mark. Their capacity to exercise political influence is restricted because their husbands act on their behalf. In the hilly districts women are not allowed to have any representation in any political institution.

**The Contributions of Irom Chanu Sharmila and the Movement against Armed Forces Special Powers Act**

Manipur was formed as a constituent state of the Indian Union in 1972. There was a discontent among the Manipuri's right from 1949, the widespread perception that the Indian nation state had forced the merger upon Manipur. This was also a moving factor for insurgency in Manipur. The systems introduced by the colonial rulers seemed to continue even under the jurisdiction of the Indian government. The one nation theory and the colonial divisive policy were particularly designed to construct integrity through projections against the threat from external enemies which the Indian state experienced from other nations. This was not the need of the Manipuri people and nationalist feelings were also imposed on the indigenous people which were gradually resisted by them through various means, both violent and non-violent. Violence, barbarism and exclusion embedded in colonialism penetrated into indigenous people's lives. Forceful integration, as in the case of Manipur, unleashed a series of movements for secession from the Indian Union.

In Manipur, Irom Chanu Sharmila was born on 14 March 1972, the same year Manipur got the status of a separate state. From her childhood, she used to listen to the tales of Manipur, its history and culture from her grandmother. She learned that Manipur was a home to a self-sufficient economy and grandeur of peace and non-violence which she constantly looked for. As she grew up, she became an example for the youths of Manipur. In Manipur, Irom Sharmila ruptured the equilibria through her struggle for love, peace and justice by questioning the hegemony of the Indian state and its strategies of oppression through AFSPA. Her, 'worldview' emerges from her lived experiences, her deep understanding of people of Manipur and her belief of the innate goodness and empathy for all human beings.

Sharmila's protest was the protest of the common people, although her protest was not planned or organized. It was a reaction against the oppression, which she refused to accept. The Malom massacre was the deciding event, which acted as the precipitating factor for her to end the oppression which was meted out to the civilians in the name of security and defence. The AFSPA Act needs to get nullified because of its draconian nature. It has led to the

militarization of the state due to which mostly women, children and youth have suffered tremendously. The Malom massacre acted as reaffirming and legitimizing the hegemony of the Indian state and Sharmila's voice echoed the voices of dissent of everyone. This was the strongest part of her struggle and the weakest part-strong, because it reflected the praxis and transformation of an individual and combined beautiful poiesis.

At the same time, it was weakest because the collective transformations did not follow with equal verve and intensity as it should have been, which reduced this legend into a symbol of people's movement, non-violent protest, emancipation for women with her main demands still manipulated by the Indian state. Sharmila's image is deliberately distorted in the public through mainstream media to shed the demands laid down by the people of Manipur.

Irom Sharmila's struggle today requires a process of rigorous conscientisation, dialogue, articulations compounded with organized action to counter this political domination through hegemony, combination of consent and subtle repression of 'public' rather 'people' voices. Thus, Sharmila has portrayed considerable strength against the AFSPA Act and the struggle continues to grow with each passing day.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the status of women in the states of NER is better in some indicators than the status of women in rest of India. However, puzzling contradictions occur within each state. Workforce participation is considered to be an important variable of women empowerment. The statistics show that the percentage of married women who usually participate in household decisions is more in the states of the Northeast than the national average. The level of freedom in terms of entrepreneurship which a Manipuri woman enjoys is beyond the national standards. The percentage of women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use is less in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland than the national average. These indicators reveal that the women have a very low degree of freedom of movement and low level of control over themselves and ability to make change in NER. Economic development does not guarantee gender equality.

The level of freedom of movement in Sikkim and Manipur for women varies greatly, due to political and social factors. In informal sector, the status of women is even more vulnerable. Only gender aware policies of the policy makers and change of the mindset of the people can help in this regard. The change in the mindset will come about through education and creating the concept of oneness among the Northeastern states where each state will make an effort to learn from each other and also from the country as a whole. The need of the hour is to collaborate on policy initiatives to bring about constructive change and development in the lives of women living in the Northeastern regions. A rise in the share of regular wage employment could signify an improvement in the quality of female employment only if this rise is faster than the rise in the share of other two categories namely, self-employment and casual worker.

Therefore, it requires state specific own individual policy to achieve gender development and gender equality within its borders. A detailed examination of women's status even at the district level is necessary to have the right information for effective planning and

implementation of government policy. A more gender sensitive approach towards law making concerning NER should be adopted both at the State and National level, since development in the NER is dependent on the development and growth of the women population within the region due to their socio-economic role.

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# TAI–AHOM COMMUNITY OF ASSAM : HISTORICAL TO CONTEMPORARY

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Abstract : Historical review suggests that Ahom community of Assam, originated from China. One branch went to Burma while the other branch settled down in the banks of Brahmaputra. In course of time, they began to mix with the local Hindu culture and thus converged with this culture. As a result, we find that this community almost lost their grip on their mother language. Thus they speak the local Ahom language of Assam. In this paper I would like to trace the historical journey of this community and find out whether they have any similarity with the Tai community of the Southeast Asia. The present paper will also discuss the efforts which are taken by the community to uphold the long-lost tradition especially through literature, by preserving the manuscripts and through social media.

Key Words : Ethnic, Identity, Chronicle, Revivalism

## Introduction

The issue of ethnicity is closely related to the notion of the border. The implications of an inter-relationship of cross border migration, ethnicity, culture and identity are important. It is therefore, imperative to map a cultural construction in working out the relation between ethnic minorities and the nation-states within which they are located. The people of the Indian sub-continent and South-Asia and the numerous tribal groups living in China are co-heirs to an ancient and glorious civilisation. History tells us that from the early times various races and tribes had been coming to this region in successive stages and settled here permanently. In course of time, they were assimilated with the indigenous inhabitants of this land and through this process a unique civilisation is born. As Monirul Hussain (1980) points out, the clans of Assam, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley, have historically contributed towards the emergence and growth of the Asamiya community and its language, literature and composite culture. A large number of clans have identified themselves with the Asamiya and have given up their mother tongue. One such dominant migrant ethnic group is the Tai which is found across South and Southeast Asia and China. They moved from China to South & Southeast Asia during 13th century.

## Tai-Ahom History and Culture

The term 'Tai' refers to the people and language spoken over a large area of Southeast Asia. They belong to the Tibeto-Chinese language family in the same sub-

group with the 'Thai's' of Thailand. The Tai people are mainly the inhabitants of a large area of the Malaysian Peninsula, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India and also China. In India the south-western Tai came and settled along the banks of Brahmaputra. Though there are few variations in Tai dialect, they are mutually intelligible. The Tai groups have different names in regional spectrum, like in Myanmar they are known as Tai-Shan, in Assam they are known as Tai-Ahom and in Arunachal they are known as Tai- Khamti.

History tells us that in 1226 AD, the Tai king Su-Kha-Pha, the founder of the Ahom dynasty, came from the Yunnan province of China, crossed the Patkai range of Burma and settled in the banks of Brahmaputra. This kingdom remained independent for 600 years before the British finally annexed them in 1826 AD. This Tai-Ahom kingdom was the largest Tai kingdom besides Ayutthaya of Thailand. As early as the 17th century AD, with the influence of the Aryan speaking community, the Ahom began to adopt Hinduism. Though the Ahom were converted, they refused to give up all their cultural heritages. They still believe in their own religion and adhere to the important customs like marriage, birth & death and rituals which are different from those of the Hindus. The Ahom kingdom gradually expanded even during the Sultanate and Mughal period. In fact, the Ahom defeated the mighty Mughal army in the battle of Saraighat in the mid 16th century. The system of administration was monarchy and was never caste prejudiced. The Ahom slowly began to adopt Hindu customs and beliefs. The population of Ahom were exactly not known and their status is also quite debatable. During ancient time, Ahom had fairly large population because they expanded their kingdom, but it was in 1931 census that Ahom was considered a special sub-group by the British government. It was believed that there was around five hundred thousand Ahom people who dwelt in Assam. In 1980's and 1990's it was believed that the population was little more than one million. The demand of Ahom for 'scheduled-caste' status in Assam was not recognized by the Indian Census. This created a debate with Ahom fraternity. The Tai-Ahom language was spoken by small groups of people in the region of Dibrugarh and Sibsagar. The language of Tai-Ahom is found in manuscripts limited to chronicles only. The language is used for rituals by the priests who have the control of these manuscripts. But presently the Tai-Ahom people are the speakers of the local Assamese language. The most important contribution of Ahom was the compilation of all the important political events that have taken place in Assam. These events are depicted in the chronicles, starting from the ancient times to the Burmese invasion and subsequently to the British rule. These chronicles are called Buranji. These are large scale historical accounts attesting the language, script, literature, culture and religion of this group of people. The accounts reveal how the community slowly converged in Hindu community incorporating a vast modification of the language as well. The change in the Tai-Ahom language is because of the political as well as social factors. These factors were due to the fact

that the rulers who came from outside with different culture and language wanted to be friendly with the local indigenous people, as a result of which we saw assimilation with the existing culture of local people in many aspects. The Tai language, religion, rituals, dress, food habits, and socio-cultural institution passed to oblivion. The gradual changes in the names of Ahom kings provide further information about the evolution. As mentioned earlier, Ahom had monarchical system where the king was the head and had council of ministers, chiefs and nobles. The Ahom king was called *"Chao Pha*", where *'Chao'* means great and *'Pha'* means heaven. In Ahom society there was no caste system. The Ahom people are broadly divided into two classes, the Paik and the Chamua. The labourers and the soldiers were called Paik and the officers were called Chamua. Kinship was an important feature of the hierarchy, e.g., the person who attains higher position in the family is honoured in any social function or special occasion by the family members. In Tai-Ahom clans, we find a change from the time of *Suakapha* (13th century). There were only eight clans and they all had Tai names. But now except a few clans such as *Ciring Phukan, Phukan, Ciring, Bailung Phukan, Tai rai,* and *Lao Kham*, all other clans have undergone change in their names. They are Buragohain, Borgohain, Borpatragohain, Raj kowar, Hazarika (*ru-ring*), Gogoi (*ko-koi*), Bora (*rucau*), Chetia (*cau-sung*), etc.

**Religion**

The most important aspect of Tai-Ahom culture was the religion. Though we find that Ahoms worship Hindu gods and goddesses, there are two aspects which they have kept intact. These are mentioned in the following points :

a. Ahom cosmogonical gods and religion
b. Ahom concept of soul

**The nature of Cosmogonical God**

The Tai-Ahom have a belief in the concept of an omnipotent God, the Great God known as *Pha Tu Ching Frong Hum*. The Ahom philosophy of an omnipotent God is found in the Ahom chronicle *Lit Lai Peyn Ka Ka*, it says :

'*Chao Nu Ru Chao Kao,*
*Fra Tu Ching Frong Hum,*
*Fa Lai Bet, Fa Pin Bet,*
*Fa Fu Ra Ta Ra A Long,*
*Si Ki A Ra Ni Pan'*

Romesh Burgohain later translated it in English which says :

God is the supernatural lord of Universe,
God is the Supreme Being, He is Absolute,
God is above empirical knowledge,
God is omniscient,
God is not limited by space and time/ God is eternal.

Another important element in the Ahom religion is the worship of nature Gods. Ahom gave the highest place to *'Fa'*(sky God). An idol called *Chum-fa-rung-saeng-muang* was believed to represent *'Fa'*. During the coronation, the king used to bring the Chum out, worshipped it, and hung it from the neck. *Leung Don* ( Lengdon) is one of the chief Gods of Ahom pantheon. He is reported to have sent *Pu Phii Sue* to earth where he took his abode in a *Tungrung*, or Papal tree. Leung Don enjoins the Tai rulers to make buffalo sacrifice at the time of the eighth month of Tai. The most important communal Ahom sacrifice is one known as *Umm Phra*. During the reign of Ahom kings, there were reportedly two propitious time in each year for holding *Umm Phra*. One is the Tai new year festival which is in mid-April and the other is on the eighth month i.e., during the month of June or July. At present, the day is decided and declared by the committee of traditional Ahom leaders who use old astrological handbook to decide upon the auspicious time and date. During *Umm Phra* a great number of chief Ahom gods and goddesses are worshipped. There are other nature gods also, like *Sang Kam Fa, Chao-Sai-Fon, Nang-Sang-Dao, Leng Sang, Lao Khree and Khun Ban*. The sacrificial objects include duck , fowl, pigeon, buffalo, cow, pig and goose. There are certain things which are worthy to be mentioned in this context :

i) While performing the religious practices and rituals for Ahom cosmogonical gods, the Ahom priests chant hymns in the Tai language. These prayers are recited in the Tai languages imploring the spirits to descend and accept offerings and extend longevity, healthy life, security and prosperity of the kingdom.

ii) It is said that most of the Ahom gods and goddesses equate to Hindu deities, such as, *Lengdon* to the Hindu God *Indra* and *Yaa Singh Phra* to *Saraswati.* Though there had been a process of localisation, this is not always true.

iii) This is also a fact that Tai Ahom religious beliefs adhere to the Vaishnavite influence but this is due to localisation.

**The Concept of Soul**

The concept of soul is an important aspect of Ahom religion. The concept is based on two types of beliefs: One in natural spirits and another in the spirits of the ancestors. The ancient Tai system rests on the beliefs in *Phii*(spirit). They continued with this belief even after the introduction of Buddhism and Hinduism in the land. They believe in different types of natural *Phii*. *Phii Faa* (sky spirits), *Phii Naa* (spirits of rice fields), *Phii Nam* (water spirits), *Phii Bans* (village guardian spirits), *Phii Maung* (town spirit). Sometimes it stretches further to include *Phii-Houns*, the protecting spirit of each household of the village, on which *Phii-Bans* exercised its authority. But it may be noted that *Phii-Ban*, like the *Phii-Maung*, cover all the inhabitants. In keeping with the Tai belief system, from the traditional past to the contemporary times, the Ahoms pay respect to the natural spirits such as *Phii-din* (spirits of earth), *Phii-Lom* (spirit of winds), *Phii*

*Fai* (gods of fire), *Phii-doi* (god of the cloud). The Ahom people believed that in this world all visible objects have invisible spirits or gods presiding over them. Next to *Phii*, the phenomenon which needs an understanding for the sake of comparison, is the notion of *Khwan* and its ceremonial or divinatory practices. Tai people believed in *Khwan* soul or sign of vitality/ life. *Khwan* is an ancient Tai belief that predates Buddhism. Evidence of the belief in *Khwan* existed in Tai cultures long ago which is evident from their vocabulary. The original meaning of the word *Khwan* in ancient Tai society was a spiritual essence which leaves the body temporarily because of a shock or sickness but should be called back again after the body dies. It could exist without the body. In other words, *Khwan* may simply mean the element of vitality, either of a human being or of an object. The ancient Tai practiced a ritual to recover one or more *Khwan* which may have escaped the body during a moment of fright or lack of awareness, thus causing lethargy and lack of vigour. Every part in the body was believed to be endowed with a seat of power which assigned its own *Khwan*. Thus in this concept there is no element of synchronism or assimilation with Hinduism. Rather, the Ahoms are still out in upholding their traditional beliefs in *Phii* and *Khwan*.

**Ahom festivals and rituals**

There are certain important rituals and festivals that Ahom celebrate which needs to be discussed in this context.

Me-Dam-Me-Phi

*Me-Dam-Me-Phi* is the Tai-Ahom traditional ancestor -worship. It is said that this worship has been performed from immemorial past. This festival is the festival of the community. All the Ahom families follow this simultaneously on 31st January every year. The meaning of the word *'Me'* is 'worship', *'Dam'* means 'dead person', and *'Phi'* refers to the higher level of *'Dam'*. The *Dam* worshipping is performed by the sons of the *Dam* at their house. This ritual is called *'Lu Dam'* means 'the annual worship of the *Dam*'. Hence it is held annually. After the sons of the *Dam* die, the *Dam* worship ends and *Phi* worship begins.

Rik Khwan

In Tai-Ahom society there is another ceremony called *Rik-Khwan* (*Rik* means 'call' and *Khwan* means 'vitality'). The Ahom believe that *'Khwan'* of a human being is set off at the time he gets the place in his mother's womb and remains till the time of his death. The body and mind of a human being are governed by the *'Khwan'*. It is lost or decreased when the human becomes weak and is attacked by diseases. It is believed that *'Khwan'* can be relieved if the ritual of *'Rik Khwan'* is observed. *'Rik Khwan'* ceremony is similar to a kind of ritual which is called in standard Thai as '*Riak-*

*Khwan'*. '*Riak'* in Thai language also means 'to call' and the meaning of *'Khwan'* is not much different than 'power of life'. In Thailand, *'Riak-Khwan'* ceremony is performed in order to make the person secure and confident after having sickness, shock or fright.

The New Year Festival

The cultural background of the Tai-Ahom and the Thai people is similar to each other. It is an agrarian society and various festivals are significantly related to agriculture. The terms *Changkien* and *Songkran* originated from the Sanskrit words *'Sankranti'* . The festival takes place during 12th April to 15th April. This is celebrated in Thailand also as a national festival.

For Ahom, *Poi-Changkien* is a New Year festival which is also called *'Bihu'*. This is similar to *'Poi-Pi-Hu'* meaning 'the beginning of the year festival'. It is time for paying best regards to the elders in the society and their ancestors by the traditional rituals including thanks -giving to all of their cattle for their help in agricultural activities by sprinkling holy water on one another. Presently, *Bihu* is considered as an Assamese festival. The *'Songkran'* festival, the water festival in Thailand and '*Poi-Changkien'* or '*Bihu*' are the manifestations of the rituals of the agricultural community of these two groups of Tai people.

**Tai of Brahmaputra and the Thai of Chao Phraya**

Thailand is a meeting point of two cultural traits— the traditional Thai-culture and the modern global culture. As mentioned earlier, another branch of the Tai group of people known as Thai is genetically close to the Ahoms. They moved to the Chao Phraya river valley of Thailand. It is generally believed that traditional Tai- culture is intimately connected with rice-growing low land. Therefore, the Tai people were most likely close to the relatively safe edges of the lowlands where irrigation was simply a matter of tapping mountain streams in the direction of small level fields, each surrounded by a small dyke. The Tai people thus appear to spread this type of rice cultivation over the mainland of Southeast Asia and Assam.

The rural Thai community continues to use traditional Thai values, ideas and morals to make sense of rapidly changing circumstances that effect setting of their everyday lives. Almost similar kind of situation is observed in the Tai-Ahom society of the Brahmaputra valley.

The villages are the basic units of Thai social system, but people's habit and customs are mainly based on agriculture and religion. Each village has a Buddhist monastery unlike that of Ahom in Assam, but Ahom villages have gods and goddesses and local deity. However, agriculture is the main source of living for the majority of rural Thai and Ahom. Like the Ahoms, rice is closely associated with Thai culture as it is a major crop. The rites, rituals and folklores related with rice reflect a

way of life of the people in both the Thai and the Ahom societies. Before and during the cultivation, a rite is performed for the purpose of praying to Gods, the departed ancestors, imploring to protect the devotee against all hazards of life and to bestow upon them prosperity, blessing and riches in all dimensions for good luck, opportunity and confidence throughout the year. The rain-begging rites (*Khor phone*) is also prominent among the Thai and the Ahom people.

The traditional instruments used by the cultivators are quite similar in these two communities. Ploughing with buffaloes is considered more convenient than with bullocks. The use of bamboo fencing with a peculiar technique to protect the paddy fields from cattle, fishing techniques and even handlooms made of bamboo are the unique features of Ahom group of people. It is interesting to note that bamboo is used extensively by both the Ahom and the Thai people in their day to day lives such as making houses, fencing, fishing and making musical instruments.

As mentioned earlier, the festival of '*Pai-Changkien'* in Thailand and '*Bihu*' in Assam are the manifestations of the agrarian culture, so also the '*Rik Khwan'* which is common in both the Thai and the Ahom societies.

There is a great deal of affinities in the style of dwelling houses. Like the rural people of Thailand, the houses of rural Ahom families are made of wood and bamboo and roofs are typically designed by the thatching grass. Orchards and lands are situated near their houses. The houses are built in scattered fashion within the bamboo grasses. Earlier Ahoms built their houses called *Huan ren* (Chang Ghar) which was about two meters high above the ground level like the traditional Thai houses. The food habit is also one of the variables of culture. Most of Ahoms, particularly in the rural areas, still maintain a traditional food habit like the Thai people. Rice is the staple food and *Nam-Lao* (homemade rice beer) is the traditional drink. There are some food items which are quite similar to that of the Thais. Some of them are- *Handhahguri* (a kind of specially prepared fried rice powder), *Sewabhat* (vapoured rice), *Chunga chawal* (sticky rice cooked in green bamboo pipes), *Tillpitha* (prepared from sticky rice powder), *Haroom*, a specially treated rice which is very light and easily digestible. These preparations are quite common to both Thais and Ahoms. *Kumal chawal* (unboiled soft rice prepared from a special variety of sticky rice by a unique technique), *Tupala Bhat* (a kind of rice cooked by packing it with a particular kind of plant leaf having a good smell called *tara pat* and preserved in bamboo sauce) are some of the favourite food items of Ahoms. This is quite similar to the traditional Thai dishes. There are many dishes like *Hukati fish* (dry preserved fish mixture), *muga lata* (concoon seeds of endi and Muga worms) and there are also some kind of insects which are good dishes in Ahom culture. Like Thais, the Ahoms also prefer to take boiled food having no spices and directly burnt fish, meat and vegetables like brinjal and tomato.

Another very important ingredient of culture is the type of cloth worn by the people. The style of dress is a reflection of many aspects of lives depending on wearer's society and the place and position of men and women in a particular social setting. In modern Thailand, there have been a considerable western influence on Thai dress due to globalization. Women's tubeskirts or *Pha-Sin* came to be associated with the leisure wear in the home. With westernisation of Thai dresses, traditional attire continues to be a part of the culture. This indicates an eagerness to be a part of the larger contemporary world, while at the same time, traditional dresses indicate the desire to ensure their distinct Thai identity. The Thais usually wear traditional dresses during traditional festivals. On the other hand, Ahom also went through the process of westernisation particularly in the clothing of the women folk. But still, they have maintained their traditional dress to a considerable extent. The excellence and special character of textiles such as homespun dress made from cotton, Muga silk bear the testimony of Thailand's textile culture among the Ahoms. Weaving is a way of life with the Ahom society. Every rural girl is adept in weaving silk, cotton and endi cloths. Thus like Thais, the Ahom are adept in making thread from muga and endi worm. This practice of sericulture and rearing endi worms is quite similar to the traditional Thai agricultural society. The rural men folk of Ahom society wear dhoti or *Phanoi* (lungi) and the tight fitting jackets called *chapkons* made of cotton or muga silk. The Ahom women wear *Mekhala* woven with muga silk or cotton and *Selang sadar* and the third piece called *Reha* is worn in such a way that it serves as a breast band.

As regards language, the Tai-Ahom and the standard Thai languages belong to the same language family. They belong to the south-western group of Tai language family which is also shared by Shan and Laos. The Tais are found to have spread so widely that the various Tai groups have lost contact with one another. The Tai language of the Ahom is completely lost today. As mentioned earlier, it is used only for religious purposes by the priests, and few Ahoms who are interested in reviving the language through manuscripts and chronicles have intelligibility in the language.

Besides these affinities between Tai-Ahoms and the Thai, another interesting point of similarity between them is their primogenitural system. The Ahoms like the Thais, cling to their clannish behaviour based on primogenitural system where seniority and respect to elders does not only depend on age but also on familial lineage. It is also remarkable that in both the societies, the status of women is higher as they are considered symbol of creativity. The absence of dowry system in Assamese society is also the influence of Ahom culture. It may be noted that the general nature and appearance of the Ahoms are familiar to those of the Siamese of Thailand. In fact, the facial characteristics of Ahom indicate a link with the Thais particularly of northern Thailand. Short and blunt nose, elevated bone cheeks and erect hairs are some such physical characteristics of these people.

Another outstanding feature existing amongst the rural Siamese cultivators of Thailand and the Ahom cultivators is the collective manner of working. The villages of both the communities stand united during the time of rejoicing and merrymaking. The collectiveness is also noticed in times of fishing, hunting and also in building houses. Like the Aryans, they do not have social taboos like caste prejudices and untouchability. Uncompromising attitude in the matter of prestige and self respect is another remarkable trait in the character of both Ahom and the Thai people. They never yield to other, nor they make any pledge without thinking seriously. Once a pledge is made it is never left unfulfilled. They are steadfast and resolute in their views and are very confident and hospitable.

It must be said from the above discussion that the cultural affinities between Ahoms of Assam and Thais of Thailand are still prominent and strong even today in spite of western influence. Though there is no direct or indirect link between the rural Siamese farmers of Thailand and Ahom farmers of Assam, they exhibit a strong cultural linkage or bondage.

**The Revivalism of Tai-Ahom Community**

Recent years witnessed the revivalism of Tai- Ahom culture which led to the renewed connection with Southeast Asia. In 1968 the term 'Tai-Ahom' was coined by Prof. Padmeshwar Gogoi, a renowned Professor of Gauhati University in his book *Tai and Tai-Ahom Kingdom of Brahmaputra Valley* (Gogoi 1978). The Tai-Ahom community revived their religion by calling it *Phra Lung* which emphasised the worship of the ancestors. The endeavor took place in 1981under the supervision of Sachidananda Sahai during a UGC sponsored conference in New Delhi, known as 'International Tai Studies Conference'. A group of Ahom people and Thai scholars met to discuss strategies about how to re-establish the connections between the Ahoms of Assam and the Thais of Thailand. The issues of marginalisation and disempowerment of the Ahoms were discussed and efforts were made to find out their remote 'belongings' in Thai land and culture. The Tai-Ahoms founded an organisation called *Ban Ok Publik Muang Tai* (Eastern Tai Literary Society). Along with this, the cultural revival of the Tai-language was taken up by Tai Language Academy at Patsako, a newly established organization. New festivals and commemorative events took place such as *Sukapha Dibah*, *Jaymoti Dibah*, *Me-dem-me-phi,* etc. along with the academic discussion on Tai-Ahom history and culture of Assam. Suddenly, there was a huge interest from the Thai scholars from Southeast Asia for the revivalism of Tai language in Assam, during 90's. The activists of Tai-Ahom culture performed a critical task of revealing the restrictive limits of national identity and created new patchworks of contingents and a local narrative, linking Ahom community with Thailand to make pan-Thai identity. During 1981-1997, the exchanges between Thai and Ahom activities generated a transnational discourse and this created a real expectation to make Assam a meeting place of historical, cultural

and commercial exchanges between South and Southeast Asia. In support of this connectivity, a direct flight was introduced between Bangkok and Guwahati in 2002 and also a transnational roadway was proposed to link Assam and Thailand. During the last decade or so there is a vast improvement in the revival of Tai-Ahom language. The Institute of Tai Studies and Research, Moranhat (Assam) was setup under the directorship of Girin Phukan. Some important works done by this institute are mentioned below.

i) ICSSR sponsored Conference on 'Cultural Heritage of Tais of North-east' in 2006
ii) Documentation and Preservation of Tai Manuscripts in 2007
iii) Preservation of Tai Manuscripts in 2010
iv) Workshop on 'Preservation, Conservation of Tai Manuscripts and Tai Language Discourse' in 2013 and 2014
v) Publications like 'Indian Journal of Tai Studies', 'Documents of Ahom movement in Assam', '*Chao-Pha-Khao-Po-Luk-Siu-Khung-Pha',* ' Ahom Andoloniyo Aitihasik Dalil', '*Lit-Lai-Kwa-Moung* (Tai-Ahom manuscripts)', ' Tai-Ahom Sabdokosh' by Ponabam Mohan Phukan, '*Khyak-Liu'* by Gyananda Phukan are some of the important works.

There is also an institute named P.K Buragohain Institute of Tai and Southeast Asian Studies in Guwahati (Assam). The institute helps in promoting Tai-Ahom culture in Southeast Asia. In 2013 an International Conference was held on 'Thai Studies' highlighting similarities between the Tai language of Assam and Thai of Thailand. Short term course are also offered on Thai language by this institute and the auspicious day of Tai calendar are also celebrated.

Some publications of the institute are— *Pap-San-Lik-Tai* 'A primer of Tai-Ahom language' by Ai-seng Kyo Buragohain, '*Khwam-Lin-Khwam-Suw* 'A collection of Tai poems' by Kasturi Niva Gogoi. The Tai Ahom Development Council in Assam helps in providing scholarships to students of Tai Ahom community for research work on Tai studies. It also acts as a welfare organisation for the development of the Tai language and culture and spreading awareness about the importance of the Tai language and culture. In 2013 the Tai Ahom Development Council and Eastern Tai Literary Association signed an agreement with Ministry of External Affair to establish a Centre of Southeast Asian Studies in Dibrugarh University to teach six languages which are important in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. The Gauhati University recently launched a cultural exchange programme with Rajbhat University of Bangkok. The current honourable Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi is from Tai-Ahom community. He recently announced a grant of Rupees 50 hundred thousand to Tai Research Centre for the preservation of Tai manuscripts. The Assam government is also restoring several Tai-Ahom architecture and monuments mainly in Dibrugarh and Sibsagar district. Renovation of many ruins is also an ongoing work.

Apart from these, there are many Government and non-government organizations which are actually helping in the revivalism of Tai-Ahom culture in one way or the other. Among them are The Asiatic Society (Kolkata), Maulana Abdul Kalam Institute of Asian Studies (Kolkata), Netaji Institute for Asian Studies (Kolkata), Indian Association of Asian and Pacific Studies (Kolkata), Indian Congress of Asia and Pacific studies (Varanasi), Indian Society of Asia and Pacific Studies (New Delhi). There are also several Universities which are promoting the Tai and Thai studies, like Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), Delhi University (Delhi), Jadavpur University (Kolkata), Calcutta University (Kolkata).

In University of Calcutta, Prof. Lipi Ghosh, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, has pioneered in the study of Tai-Ahom. Prof. Swapna Bhattacharya Chakraborty is also engaged in Tai studies especially the Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh.

## Way Forward

The history of Tai-Ahom people have been the story of great revelation. They came from China, crossed Burma and settled in the Brahmaputra river valley of Assam (India). They went through the process of convergence with the local indigenous people and were converted to Hinduism. As a result, they gradually lost their mother tongue and merged with the Assamese speaking Indo-Aryan group. But recent endeavours are evident for the revival of the language. These efforts are also being supported by many Southeast Asian nations who are keen to make some connections with the Tai communities of Assam. Recently the Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi has told about connecting the 'countries with Buddha circuits'. Similarly, if such endeavour can be followed with the Tai circuits for connecting the Southeast Asian countries, it would not only be helpful for the Tai-Ahom society of Assam but also Tai-Khamti community of Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, since Shan, Lao and Thai belong to the same language group with that of the Ahom language, establishing a connectivity among these communities is expected to strengthen the bilateral relation between India and the countries of Southeast Asia like Myanmar and Thailand. This will inevitably lead to the development of North East region of India by opening avenues for cultural exchange and commercial relations. The social media or networking site like Facebook are also playing an important role in this regard. I have seen that there is a growing urge among the younger generation for the revival of Tai-Ahom language and culture. I have witnessed interactions among the Tai-Ahom people (especially the younger generation) with the Thai people of Thailand and Tai-Shan people of Myanmar. Thus I see a positive sign among the Tai-Ahom people in reviving their language and contact. So if the Government takes initiative then the Tai community can play a positive role in the India's Look East policy. So let us keep our finger crossed and hope that the Tai community of Assam would revive and thus build a bridge between North East India and Southeast Asia.

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# PROSPECT OF TOURISM PROMOTION AND REVENUE GENERATION IN NORTH EAST INDIA : A LESSON LEARNT IN YUNNAN, CHINA

SRIPARNA PATHAK RAIMEDHI

Abstract : The history of the globe is one of migration, and the North-eastern region of India is no exception. Linguistically and culturally, Northeast India is one of the most heterogeneous regions of the world and it has been a stage for a plurality of a transitional continuum from community and collectivity to nationality. Northeast India is the home of many tribes, sub-tribes, minority communities and ethno-political collectiveness that have been continuously moving through various formative and developmental phases. The region has around 430 languages and dialects of different language families that are used in a complex and wide ranging ethno and socio- linguistic configuration.

In China Yunnan at a similar level has been an impoverished and landlocked region characterised by an uncongenial terrain for a very long time. In all, Yunnan has 26 different minority groups including the Dais who are of Tai ethnicity and the Tibetans. Sporadically, the province has witnessed secessionist movements as well. (Plant and Huang 2011:3) In several ways, the region of India's Northeast and the province of Yunnan mirror each other in terms of socio-economic and political development. Nevertheless, fact also remains that both the regions are resource rich and have tremendous potentials and scope for economic development.

Beyond cultural similarities, Yunnan and Northeast India currently are also being emphasised as points of focus in bolstering trade and economic ties between India and China, as part of initiatives such as the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar forum for regional cooperation (BCIM) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which aims at greater integration of trade and investment between the four countries. However, to a very large extent benefits of the initiatives and the policies have not trickled down and a lot of scope for betterment remains. The case of the Kolkata-Kunming corridor is no different. While various possibilities for enhancing trade and road connectivity between Yunnan, the Northeast and West Bengal were discussed in 2012, and an action plan also was approved, not much has been done as of December 2014.

Beyond the existing proposals for trade, exchange and mutual benefit, there is another aspect from which India and the North-eastern region in particular could gain. That aspect is that of the promotion of tourism. China has benefited immensely from the display and preservation of the diverse cultures existing in various provinces and the example which stands out the most is that of the *Hakka* structures, or the Yunnan nationalities museum. Similarly, Northeast India has a lot to gain in the form of revenues, if tourism could be better promoted. While the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland is definitely one of the hugest festivals in Asia, but the fact remains that it is held once in a year. While the *Ahom* mounds in Sibsagar await declaration as

UNESCO heritage sites, aspects of North eastern history and culture continue to be dissipated in the sands of time. If a closer look at Yunnan's tourism and revenue gathering methods could be studied in detail and policy recommendations for Northeast Indian historical and cultural sites could be made, then tourism, which already is the fastest growing segment of the traditional services sector, could be of immense utility to the region.

This paper seeks to outline the promotion of tourism in Yunnan and seeks to arrive at lessons that could be utilised for historical and cultural monuments in Northeast India. The sources of information for the paper will include secondary and primary sources in Mandarin, Assamese and English along with interviews conducted with individuals from the Yunnan and Northeast India respectively.

Key Words : Potential, integration, Yunnan, infrastructure, revenues, tourism

## Introduction

The linkages between Yunnan and Northeast India date back first to 1228 A.D. when the Tai Prince Sukapha reached the *Brahmaputra* Valley and ruled the area for six centuries till 1826, when the British gained control of the region through the Treaty of *Yandabo* after winning the first Anglo-Burmese War. The kingdom established by the *Ahom* people gave Assam its name. Prince Sukapha was a prince of the *Mong Mao* kingdom of the Tai people in the present day Yunnan Province of China. When he began his journey in 1228, he was accompanied by 9000 followers, comprised mostly of men. After crossing the *Patkai* hills[1], they reached the *Brahmaputra* Valley in 1228 A.D. In his search for a seat, he moved from place to place across the valley. He did not attack the *Morans* and the *Borahis*[2] of the region and befriended them instead. The *Morans* were under the *Badanch* Raja, while the *Borahis* were under *Thakumtha* Raja (Prakash 2007:164). Initially, Sukapha defeated the tribes, but later he adopted conciliation with them. Sukapha established his capital in 1253 A.D. at *Charaideo* near present day *Sivsagar* and began the task of state formation.

In the 21st century, Northeast India and Yunnan are linked by political and economic initiatives such as the BCIM and the BIMSTEC, etc. The government of India launched the Look East policy in 1992 with a view to usher in development of the North-Eastern region by connecting it with the international neighbourhood. In addition, the initiatives like the BCIM, BIMSTEC and the Kolkata-Kunming corridor aim at greater integration of trade and investment between the four countries. However, the benefits of the initiatives and the policies have not trickled down to a very large extent and there is still lot of scope for betterment.

Within the North-Eastern region, three important border roads have the potential for an overall development of the region. These three roads are—(i) the Stilwell Road; also known as the *Ledo* Road which connects *Ledo* in Assam to *Kunming* in Yunnan; (ii) the *Numaligarh-Moreh* road which connects the three states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam; (iii) and the *Aizwal-Champhai-Zokhawthar* road which connects Mizoram and Myanmar. If direct overland routes between Northeast India and Yunnan could be opened, then it could reduce

transport costs by at least 30 per cent. It would also tremendously reduce the time required in transporting goods. The bilateral trade between the two in 2012 stood at US$ 66.5 billion (Embassy of the Republic of India in Beijing, 2014). Most of it is conducted by sea and this entails detours of several thousands of kilometres. Indian exports to China are mainly primary goods such as oil seeds, salt, cotton, dairy products, rubber, plastic, etc. Delays in transport end up in soiling and wastage of the goods. If routes between Northeast India and Yunnan could be opened up, India's chance of increasing bilateral trade with China is guaranteed.

Additionally, direct road linkage between Yunnan and India via Myanmar would ensure a journey from Kolkata to Kunming in only three days; a rail connectivity could reduce the journey time further to only 48 hours. Better and improved infrastructure would also enable North-Eastern region to transform into a tourist hub and would facilitate India's integration into the China-Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) tourist circuit.

**Tourism : A potent tool for resources accumulation in 21st century China**

The section discusses how much the tourism industry has contributed to revenues in China, followed by a section on revenues generated from tourism in Yunnan separately. If we take a quick look at the Tourism sector, statistics show that tourism revenue has grown 12.7 per cent annually in recent years, higher than the national average GDP growth rate of 7.4 per cent (People's Daily, 2001) and tourism as such has become the new growth area for the domestic Chinese economy.

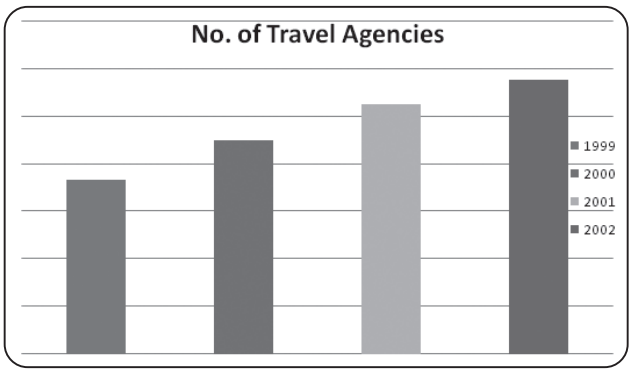
In 2012, the total tourism revenue stood at 2.57 trillion Yuan, an increase of 14 per cent. Domestic tourism markets reported 2.22 trillion Yuan of revenues in 2012, up by 15 per cent year on year. Domestic tourism consumption accounted for about 9 per cent of a resident's total consumption and the tourism sector provided 500,000 new jobs in 2011 (Xinhua, 2013).

Today, the tourism sector is substantially bigger than automotive manufacturing and created nearly as many jobs as in the mining industry of China. According to research undertaken by Oxford Economics, with 62 million direct, indirect and induced jobs, Travel and Tourism supports more jobs than the financial service sector's 48.5 million jobs in China. (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2012) At the beginning of the century, in the year 2000 alone, there were 740 million domestic tourists, which was 100 million more than that of the figure in 1995. At the same time, China's total number of international tourists increased by 14.75 per cent and foreign earnings from international tourism increased by 18.72 per cent between 1982 and 2000. The number of international tourists in China reached 83.48 million in 2000, which was 46 times more than the 1.8 million tourists recorded in 1978. (Liang, Guo and Wang, 2003) Earnings from domestic tourism services were valued at 317.6 billion Yuan, which was 2.3 times that of the figure in 1995.

A liberalisation of trade in services allows more specialisation and scale economy due to expanded market size. Developing countries such as China clearly have comparative advantages in labour intensive sectors such as construction industries and tourism sector. If trade in services are further liberalised, more constructive gains could clearly be achieved. The tourism sector of China already has exhibited the potential services liberalisation can produce.

In terms of employment, as stated previously, the sector of tourism has immense potentials.

The following graph shows the increase in the number of travel agencies in China, which is taken as an indicator of the development of tourism services. As a result of the growth in the number of agencies, the number of employment increased significantly as well.




Graph 1: Increase in number of travel agencies in China during 1999-2002
Data Source(s): China Statistical Year Books, 2000-08

Tourism has become the new growth area for the Chinese economy in recent years. In 2005, the country's travel and tourism accounted for 4.3 per cent of the global market share (World Watch Institute, 2005). China is also referred to as the 'holiday economy', given the impact its tourism industry has had in the recent past. As a result of the increase in disposable income because of reforms and opening up, the tourism industry benefited the most, which in turn has benefited the economy. Largely up to 1978, the country was closed to all except few selected foreign visitors. Deng Xiaoping decided to promote tourism to earn foreign exchange, as a result of which construction of hotels and guest houses began (and it was beneficial for the construction industry as well). Expansion of airline traffic facilitated the process, and over 250 cities and countries were opened to foreign visitors by the mid 1980s. In 1985, about 1.4 million foreigners visited China, which clearly exhibited the potential that the industry had.

As stated in the initial part of the paper, because of the advantages China has in labour intensive industries, the Chinese economy clearly benefits from labour intensive sectors such as those of construction and tourism are concerned. After China's WTO accession in 2000, foreign service providers were allowed to set up joint ventures and cooperatives in business units approved by the State Council (Mattoo 2003: 215). Also, foreign parties were allowed to hold majority equity in joint venture travel agencies. By the end of 2003, the government approved 10 foreign invested travel agencies with a total investment of US$ 8.47 million to operate in the country. As such, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into the tourism sector promoted the growth of tourism and spurred consumption. By 2007, FDI in China's tourism industry accounted for 25 per cent of the total tourist capital in China, covering several segments like hotel services, travel agencies, etc. (Xi 2010: 18).

Tourism and related services were out of the first ones to liberalise and grasp the

advantages of the 1978 reforms. It is observed that the 12 coastal regions benefited much more than interior regions even in the initial period of 1979 to 1990 (Cheng 1982: 27). According to statistics released by the National Tourism Administration, China (2009), the regions that received the maximum inbound tourists were Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Beijing, Fujian, Shandong, Yunnan, and Liaoning. All these are coastal regions receiving the maximum volumes of FDI with the exception of Yunnan. However, this is set to change with Yunnan's plans on promoting an accessible tourism zone in the Greater Mekong sub-region, and visa abolition agreement plans within the region.

**Tourism in Yunnan**

The benefit of the economic 'miracle' that has characterised coastal regions in China has not yet trickled down to Kunming, precisely because of its geographical location and terrain. The strategies for the economic development of Yunnan, as stated by the provincial government are based on its five pillar industries. Yunnan's focus lies in the development of the tourism, mineral, tobacco, power and hydro-electric industry. Yunnan, often presents itself as a 'green' province with a 'green economy', by emphasizing on the development of tourism. The effects of tourism as a pillar industry and its position and function in the overall economy have been gradually strengthened in the last decade. As such, the tourism industry is exerting a significant influence on the provincial industry and on the service industry— thereby becoming a focal point for economic growth in the province.

In the Western region of China, Yunnan receives the largest number of tourists. This can be attributed to the investment that Yunnan has made in building the infrastructure of its tourism industry. As such, Yunnan has the highest number of star grade hotels, even though it is yet to have any significant international hotel chain or five star hotels. Tourism in the province has also stimulated the development of other services, which has contributed to the growth of the tertiary sector, and in 2012, the contribution of the tertiary sector in Yunnan stood at 40 per cent of its GDP. In 2012, the number of overseas tourists increased by 16 per cent, which generated a foreign exchange earnings of US$ 1947 million, while the number of overnight domestic tourists reached 107 million, which brought in a revenue of 124.5 billion Yuan (Yunnan Statistical Yearbook, 2013).

In addition to strengthening the service industry, tourism in the province has made significant contribution to the adjustment of the industrial structure and furthered opening up to the outside world. Thus the revenues generated have been used towards eliminating poverty, and to ease the pressure of unemployment in Yunnan. Therefore, tourism is the most important prong for development in the province. Since the implementation of China's new tourism law in October 2013, more tourism companies and agencies are establishing alliance under the aegis of Yunnan provincial tourism authority to strengthen cooperation between tourism companies, operators and airlines.

There are 14 national or provisional scenic spots for display of civilisation, 10 national scenic spots or places of historical interest, one national holiday resort, which ranks third in the country, 48 other scenic spots and six provincial tourist holiday resorts. All these places

are with a total area of 13,000 square kilometres, making up 3.3 per cent of the total area of the province. In total, there are 1344 key places listed as units of preservation of cultural or historical vestiges. As a result of continuous improvement and perfection of the overall transport system and tourism services, the province has attained a comparative advantage over other provinces in China's Western region. As such, the solid foundation for the development of tourism in Yunnan was an important objective of the 10th Five Year Plan (FYP 2001-2005). It continues to be an important theme even in the 12th FYP (2011-2015). Besides listing of cultural and historical sites and relics for reservation, the State formulates various preferential policies for the development of the tourism sector, which include tourism national debt, opening up to the outside world, taxation and finance, loans and investment, construction of adequate infrastructure and biological environment.

Also in addition to these steps domestically, the province seeks to rope in the cooperation of neighbouring countries to promote tourism. The province also sought India's cooperation for mutual promotion of tourism between Yunnan and India. On September 24, 2014 a delegation of the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Development Commission, led by DuanYueqin, the Director General, visited India and requested cooperation from India for tourism promotion. According to Duan, Yunnan offers a range of tourism products for Indians, as it boasts of snow-capped mountains, tropical forests, hill stations, adventure destinations, festivals, Buddhist attractions, etc. The Yunnan Provincial Tourism Development Commission also plans to organise a familiarisation trip for Indian travel trade and media to promote the region (Punnackattu 2014).

India had a scope even during this particular meet to promote tourism in North-East India, since the region shares certain similarities and more with the province of Yunnan. So far, this scope was not capitalised upon. As such North-East India has an immense scope for revenue generation through tourism promotion and benefit from it in the ways Yunnan is getting benefitted. However, a lot remains to be done. The following sections discuss the present and prevailing nature of tourism in North-East India.

**Lessons to be learnt from Yunnan**

As a first step to improve its own economic stature, Yunnan has been using its cultural and ethnic diversity to develop tourism and has been also attempting to project the province as China's gateway to South and Southeast Asia. If India could learn from the Yunnan experience and tourism in Northeast India which has largely been left untouched by tourism, revenues that could bolster economic development of the region could be capitalised upon. Also, while trade between the regions is emphasised, the ways to ensure the absence of a prolonged trade deficit, which has been characteristic of Sino-Indian overall trade in the last decade, could also be sought and mutual benefits could actually be arrived at. For example, the case of Hong Kong markets in Siliguri or China Towns in several parts of North-East India is not new. However, the cases of Indian markets promoting goods produced in Northeast India are not heard of at all. If tourism and trade promotion between the two is

conceived of, then handicrafts from the North-Eastern region could also form a component of Indian exports to China.

Yunnan and Northeast India share several similarities. The difference lies in the way Yunnan has used its political and cultural heritage to bolster tourism and trade revenues, particularly because of its geographical location. But Northeast India, despite having similar abundant cultural and historical legacy has not been able to capitalise on it and use tourism – the most lucrative segment of traditional services to its own economic benefit.

As stated earlier, both Yunnan and North-Eastern region of India are similar in terms of their socio-economic and cultural heritage. North-East India is the home of many tribes, sub-tribes, minority communities and ethno-political collectiveness that have been continuously moving through various formative and developmental phases. The region has around 430 languages and dialects of different languages that are used in a complex and wide ranging ethno and socio-linguistic configuration. Yunnan, on the other hand, has 26 different minority groups including the Dais who are of Tai ethnicity and the Tibetans. Sporadically, the province has witnessed secessionist movements as well. (Wang 2013: 97)

Yunnan has an abundance of natural resources and the pillar industries of the province are concentrated in agriculture, development of bio resources, tourism, mining and hydro-electric power production. The key economic challenges faced by the province include an economy solely driven by investment from outside and low potentials for internal generation of investment. Mismatch between the industrial sector and employees' skill base arises, given the fact that the majority of the populace is still employed in the agriculture sector. Added to these, is the problem of low urbanisation rates. Additionally, income is not equitably spread across sectors and the social security system is weak. Public services including transport, postal services, radio broadcasting, etc. are still insufficient. Up to 2008, there were 5.5 million people living in rural and remote areas of Yunnan. However, one of the lucrative sectors which have benefited the economy of Yunnan is that of tourism. In the first half of 2012, the total revenue of the province increased by 24.6 per cent year on year, and by the end of the first quarter in June, the whole province received 4.091 million entries from overseas, and the revenue amounted to US$ 920 million. The number of domestic tourists increased by 20.8 per cent to roughly about 96 million, and the total revenue was US$ 11 billion, showing a growth rate of 24.1 per cent. (Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration, 2012).

Yunnan as such has been trying consistently to increase revenue from tourism for its economic development. In January 2014, it announced that 300 million Yuan (US$ 48 million) would be invested to promote tourism in the province (Wang, 2014). As such, a unified tourism brand is being promoted for the province. The plans are that, Yunnan will focus efforts on promoting an accessible tourism zone in the Greater Mekong sub-region, and visa abolition agreements will be concluded within the region. Additionally, efforts shall be on developing cross border tourism products and promoting routes linking the Indo-Chinese peninsula, the Middle East and the South Asian regions. Through such arrangements, Yunnan

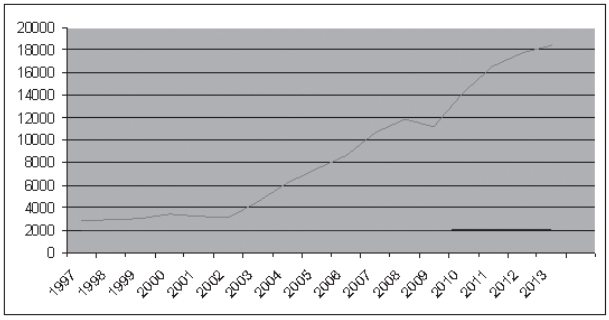
shall be created as a trans-national and a regional international tourism distribution centre.

As such, tourism on the whole has been immensely beneficial to China. According to the World Trade and Tourism Council, in China, 64.4 million people directly or indirectly were employed in tourism sector in the year 2013; and this was an increase from a figure of 63.8 million people in 2012. In 2013, the industry contributed US$ 850 billion to the China's economy, which was a 9.2 per cent of the nation's total Gross Domestic Product (Chen, 2014).

**Prospects of Tourism in Northeast India**

Northeast India is one of the most heterogeneous linguistic and cultural regions of the world, and has been a stage for plurality of a transitional continuum from community and collectivity to nationality. The economies of the eight North-Eastern States are simple, agriculture based and highly dependent on the rest of the country for several basic needs. Agricultural surplus is close to non-existent. Besides these, limited capital formation and entrepreneurial skills further proves to be a challenge for the region. Handicrafts are on a decline and are in dire need of modern design, marketing and inputs. Issues of power, transportation, infrastructure, finance and services are daunting challenges in the region as well.

The beauty and the biodiversity of the region can be channelized the way it has been done in Yunnan. The North-Eastern region contains more than one-third of the country's total biodiversity, and is one of the 18 hotspots of the world. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, "The region has at least 7500 flowering plants, 700 orchids, 58 bamboos, 64 citrus, 28 conifers, 500 mosses, 700 ferns and 728 lichen species. The region is equally rich in faunal diversity. An estimated 3624 species of insects, 50 molluscs, 236 fishes, 64 amphibians, 137 reptiles, 541 birds and 160 mammalian species have been identified so far. The region is also rich in terms of genetic and ecosystem diversity. Some of the important gene pools of citrus, banana and rice are reported to have originated from this region. The ecosystem diversity of the region ranges from tropical ecosystems to alpine ecosystems in the Himalayan ranges and also includes wetlands, flood plains, riverine and aquatic ecosystems" (Tourism Master Plan for North-eastern Region, 2012).




Graph 2: Foreign exchange earnings from tourism (Unit: US$ millions)

Sources: *Reserve Bank of India, 1997-2010; and Ministry of Tourism, Government of India*

India has immense potentials for tourism, and as predicted by the World Tourism Organisation, India will be a leader in using tourism as an employment generator. Since 1990s, a lot of foreign earnings have been generated and benefited the Indian economy on the whole. The following graph shows the increase in foreign revenue earnings from 1997- 2013.

Foreign exchange earnings through tourism in India, went up from a figure of merely US$ 2889 million in 1997 to US$ 18445 million in 2013. Tourism being a multi-sectoral activity, has the capacity to stimulate different sectors of the economy. Being a labour intensive sector, it opens up avenues for various employment opportunities, and can even be beneficial in environmental conservation, cultural enrichment, development of rural areas, etc.

As far as Northeast India is concerned, there are several factors that make it attractive for tourism. It is a variegated cultural mosaic of people and races, and an ethnic tapestry of shades and hues. Primitive cultures of the Neolithic age co-exist with modern and post-modern lifestyles of the 21st century. Additionally, it shares borders with China, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. All these endowments could be utilised for making the region a prospective hub of international tourism, trade and commerce.

However, tourism infrastructure is a major deficiency in the North-eastern region of India. Except for a few cities and destinations accommodation facilities are a major challenge— both in terms of quality and availability. Way side amenity centres are non-existent on the government approved tourist circuits. Tour and travel services still will have to improve a lot. Availability of internet services and ATMs becomes another arduous challenge in promoting tourism in North-eastern region. It is observed that not all the North-eastern states have specific tourism policies. The tourism policies of Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya cover focus areas as well as incentives while the tourism policies of Sikkim and Tripura have covered only focus areas. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram have not formed any tourism policies yet.

If an observation of the states visited most by tourists is considered, then the concentration is in Assam and Sikkim only. This could be attributed to the existence of a specific tourism policy in the two states, their own tourist spots, and as they serve as gateways to other regions. Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of tourist arrivals in the region.

However, the number of foreign tourists' arrivals is negligent compared to the number of domestic tourist arrivals. In 2005, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in the Northeast India was 37,380 only, while the number of domestic tourists was 35, 15, 792. In 2010, the number of foreign tourist arrivals was 50,950, while the number for domestic tourist arrivals was 61, 66, 269.

The percentage of foreign tourist arrivals in the North-eastern region in 2013 was 0.82 per cent of the total number of tourists in the region which is negligible in comparison to the other circuits in the country. A time period when the number of tourists increases in the

region is during December at the time of the Hornbill festival in Kisama, Kohima, of Nagaland state. The following section discusses the Hornbill festival tourist season and explores the possibilities to increase tourist presence in the region for such other cultural festivals as well.

**The Hornbill Festival in Kisama, Nagaland**

The Hornbills festival is organised by the State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments every year in Nagaland. The festival showcases a mélange of cultural displays in the heritage village of Kisama. The festival usually takes place between December 1st and 7th every year. The festival is an attempt to lay a better understanding of the people and the cultures of Nagaland and for the visitors it means an opportunity to experience songs, dances, food and customs of Nagaland.

In 2014, on December 1, the first day of the Hornbill festival, more than 500 foreign tourists and about 3,00,000 domestic tourists visited Kisama for the Hornbill festival. The state government of Nagaland has been facilitating locals to earn from the festival. In 2013, the locals earned a total of 25, 00, 00, 000 rupees (The Telegraph, 2014). In order to promote tourism, the state department in 2014 has added another item for the tourists, which is a visit to the interior parts of the state. The arrangement is called the Great Hornbill Adventure Trail (GHAT), and tourists will be able to visit districts like Peren, Zunheboto and Phek. This will boost sales of handicrafts to tourists besides bringing in revenues for the transport industry as well. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his speech at the Hornbill festival on December 1, 2015 stated that the Hornbill festival will definitely improve the tourism of Nagaland and the people of Nagaland would definitely benefit from the growth. However, the fact is that the Hornbill festival takes place only once in a year. While it definitely can improve tourism in the region, fact remains that other tourist circuits in the region also need to be promoted and improved.

Out of ten vendors selling various cultural artefacts at the Hornbill festival in 2013, nine said that their revenues see at least 70 per cent increase during the festival. Six out of the ten respondents lived outside Kohima, and agreed that the sale of handicrafts was on a decline, and tourism promotion in the entire state is a necessity and needs to be expanded beyond the period of the Hornbill festival. The vendors from Dimapur, who had better connectivity to cities like Guwahati and Kolkata, said that low earnings in Dimapur was always somehow compensated by sales of their handicrafts in cities like Guwahati and Kolkata. However, they agreed that transportation costs were a concern, and it would be better if sales in their own places of origin could be increased.

As such, the eight states in North-East India have various festivals during different months of the year. However, due to the lack of knowledge and the lack of adequate transport facilities, the tool of tourism has not been fully utilised to garner revenues for the North-Eastern region. However, if certain lessons could be drawn not just from the case of tourism

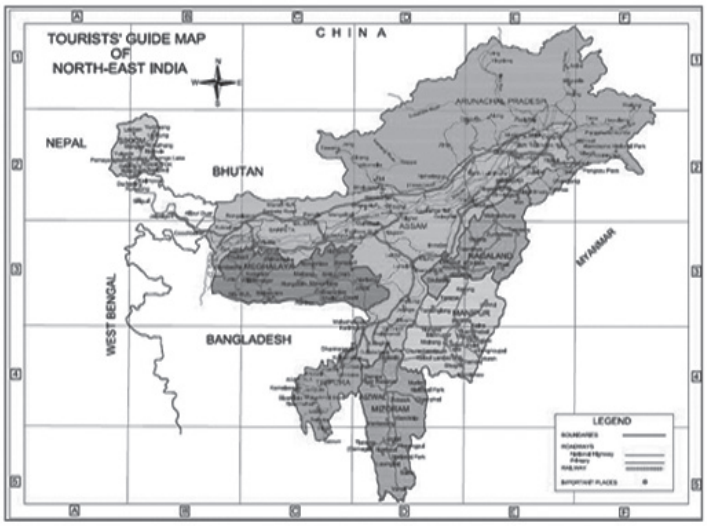
in the other parts of the country, but also from the case of Yunnan, better economic growth of the region could be aimed at. The concluding section discusses a few of the problems associated with tourism in North-East India, and tries to draw a few lessons from the Yunnan experience with tourism and revenue generation, and puts forth recommendations that could help the Northeast attract more tourism revenues.

## Conclusion

Starting from infrastructure facilities to low promotion of tourism for the region, Northeast India suffers from several constraints in the process of increasing its gains from tourism— these nevertheless are addressable constraints and can be done away with. There is a need to change the way history is taught at the school levels so that the history of Northeast India is also included, and knowledge of the region begins at the school level itself. The knowledge of the region will lead to long term outcome in the form of desire for travel/ visits to the places, or even the desire to tap the untapped resources in the region, to invest in industries in the region, etc. In history textbooks at the school level, a quick glance at the Indian School Certificate Examination (ICSE) syllabus, tells us that while there is a great deal of emphasis on colonial history, or even international history for that matter, the histories of the entire region of North-East India is completely ignored. Even within the context of uprisings against the British, no mention of any state or any leader from Northeast India finds a mention while fact remains that the World War II Museum is located in Kohima, Nagaland. Similar is the case with the Central Board of Secondary Examination (CBSE) syllabus. The Battle of Kohima was the turning point of the Japanese offense inside India in 1944 and is often referred to as the Stalingrad of the East and according to British Army, the decisive battles of Imphal and Kohima during World War II were the greatest battles fought in the history of the British Army. However, there is absolute ignorance about these battles when it comes to discussions on India's struggle against imperialism within India itself. Until and unless extensive research on the syllabus beginning at the school level is emphasised, India's Northeast will remain excluded from common Indian imagination. A number of properties in the region are either already UNESCO world heritage sites or are on the tentative list. Examples include the Kaziranga National Park, the Manas wildlife sanctuary, the river island of Majuli— all in Assam; the Namdapha National Park in Arunachal Pradesh; and the Kangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim. However, due to the lack of awareness about the region, tourism in the mentioned places is not adequate. Additionally, more research and studies need to be undertaken on the historical, cultural and natural sites of the regions so that more nominations for world heritage sites from India could be filed at UNESCO.

Infrastructure is a pressing issue, and the region is in desperate need of connectivity with the rest of the country. At the Hornbill Festival this year (2015), Prime Minister Mr. Modi stated that the region is located in one of the 25 hot biodiversity areas of the world

and that must be protected through sustainable development. Additionally, he stated that the region is the best tourism destination; all that is needed is rail, road and air connectivity. Even in the case of the Hornbill festival in Kisama, tourists either from within the country or abroad have to first reach either the Dimapur airport or the Guwahati airport, after which arduous road journeys to Kohima have to be undertaken.




Map 1: Tourist places in North-East India

Beyond infrastructure creation, the promotion of the region as a hot tourist circuit also needs to be thought of. Additionally, the region being surrounded by international neighbours, connectivity to the neighbouring countries through air, land and water routes have to be created, to facilitate exchange of trade, services and tourism. It would be also beneficial if a North-East Tourist Development Corporation is created in order to plan and promote the domestic and international tourism in the region. The potent tool of advertisement for promotion of the Northeast is also urgently required. As stated by the report of Planning Commission of India (1997) to the Prime Minister, "North-East tourism must be well advertised through tourist offices, travel agencies and airlines in all states and abroad". For this purpose, there is a need to enlist tourist sites as well. Map 1 shows the important places of interest in the region. But the fact remains that most of these places are unknown, which reduces the tourism potentials of the place.

The next problem which needs to be addressed to increase tourist revenues in the region is that of acquiring inner line permits (ILP) for domestic tourists to visit certain regions of Northeast India. Inner line permit is an official travel document issued by the Government to allow inward travel of Indian citizens into a "restricted" area for a limited period[3] The document is an off shoot of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations of 1873, which protected

the British Crown's interests in oil, tea and elephant trade, by prohibiting people from entering these "protected areas" to prevent them from establishing any commercial ventures that could compete with the Crown's own agents. The rationale behind independent government of India using these inner line permits is the protection of tribal culture in Northeast India. However, the fact remains that the region remains deprived of growth and development and to introduce integration with the development of the rest of the country, it is essential to facilitate movement of people, trade and goods. Restrictive regimes such as those of inner line permits need a serious reconsideration in the 21st century.

Additionally, after a certain basic minimum level of economic development has been reached in the region, taking cues from the Yunnan experience, a possible call on neighbouring countries for tourism cooperation can be imagined, along with visa abolition programmes for the citizens of select countries. Also, preferential policies for the development of tourism, such as investment and loans, finance and taxation and opening up to the rest of the country and neighbouring countries could be thought of. The mission as put forth in the Results-Framework Document (RFD) for the Ministry of Tourism, 2014-15 is to attain a level of 11.24 million foreign tourist arrivals and 1450 million tourist visits in India by the year 2016-17 (Ministry of Tourism 2014). A stepping up of tourism in Northeast India would definitely be beneficial not just for the region itself, but for the entire Indian economy on the whole.

## Notes

[1] Currently, the states of Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya lie on the Patkai range.

[2] The Morans and Borahis were petty tribes of Bodo affinities.

[3] Foreigners require a 'restricted area permit' to visit Arunachal Pradesh. The states of Assam, Tripura,Manipur, and Mizoram do not require permits. The requirement of a restricted area permit to visit Nagaland has been done away with as well. However, according to the new rules introduced in January 2011, foreigners from certain stated states have to register themselves at the local Foreigners Registration Office of the district they visit within 24 hours of their arrival. Citizens of Pakistan and China need to seek approval from the Home Ministry to visit these states.

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# THE APATANIS: AN INSIGHT INTO THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF A UNIQUE AGRARIAN COMMUNITY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH, NORTH-EAST INDIA

SHREYASHI CHAUDHURI AND KUNTAL NARAYAN CHAUDHURI

Abstract : North-east India is the home for numerous indigenous people. The Apatani people, inhabiting the Ziro valley of Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh, are one of the foremost tribes of this region. The Apatanis belong to the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock. Their folklores trace their descent from the legendary ancestor, Abotani. Unlike most of the other tribes in North-east India who practice shifting or slash-and-burn (*jhum*) cultivation, the Apatanis are settled agriculturists and practice permanent cultivation. Their sustainable agriculture is the source of an economy which is quite different from the surrounding populations. They practice environmentally sustainable, traditional sedentary agriculture in the form of the unique paddy-cum-fish cultivation (which is linked with animal husbandry), an example of a highly evolved indigenous farming system. The *Apatani* society is *patriarchal.* The participation of Apatani women in the paddy-fish cultivation and their socio-economic position has not been adequately explored. Gender inequality and violence against women, similar to the rest of the country, prevails among the Apatanis. This paper briefly investigates their language, beliefs and practices with the focus on the role of women in this traditional micro culture.

Key Words : Heritage, Tradition, Inequality, Ecology, Knowledge

## Introduction

Heritage may be defined as a legacy inherited from our past that we pass on to the future generations to learn from, marvel at and enjoy. There exists interconnectedness among all the forms of heritage – tangible and intangible, cultural and natural (Robischon 2015). Cultural heritage not only refers to the so-called tangible heritage, but it also includes those which cannot be touched, and can only be experienced, existing transiently in the thoughts, words and actions of human beings. This intangible heritage of a community encompasses the stories people tell and the things they do, transmitting them across the generation by oral or gestural means, and also continuously recreating them in response to their history and environment, therefore, helping people to define who they are, and where they belong to. This living heritage is manifested by, but not limited to, the following overlapping domains: oral traditions, performing arts, beliefs and customs, traditional ecological knowledge and craftsmanship (Stefano et al. 2012). Since the carriers of this heritage are mortal, it dies with each person and is reborn with each new member of a community, resulting in its amazing diversity, vitality, but also in its inherent fragility (Singer 2006).

The growing danger of disappearance of intangible cultural heritage across the globe is a result of numerous factors that include mass migration, urbanization and environmental change. Our awareness of the significance of intangible cultural heritage has grown only recently, mostly due to the efforts of UNESCO and its *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003). The importance is not so much of the cultural manifestation itself, but rather of the wealth of knowledge and skills associated with it. Central to the effectiveness of policies and programmes for environmental conservation is an understanding of the inextricable link between cultural and biological diversity (Maffi 2005). Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is a key factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of increasing globalization and cultural homogenization. It can also contribute to each of the three interdependent dimensions – economic, social and environmental – of sustainable development (Hawkes 2001).

North-east India, with distinctive geographical, historical, social, cultural and political attributes, is home to a multitude of ethnic groups. This includes145 small and large tribal communities of both the hills and the plains, constituting 12.5 percent of the tribal population of India and 25 percent of the population of North-East India (Irshad Ali and Das 2003).The Apatanis are a small but unique hill tribe inhabiting the Ziro valley (22° 34' N, 88° 24' E), Lower Subansiri, Arunachal Pradesh, located in the lower ranges of the Eastern Himalayas. They share similarities with other tribes of central Arunachal Pradesh who are collectively referred to as the Tani group. However, the language, beliefs and practices of the Apatanis are distinct from all the other Tani tribes. The Apatanis are *stout,* well-built, *short* to medium height, belonging to the Mongoloid stock (Goswami and Das 1990). Their language belongs to the Tani sub-group of the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, harbouring a number of features which are rare or absent in the other Tani languages (Post and Kanno 2013). The Apatanis, in sharp contrast to the other hill tribes of the North-East, practice sedentary agriculture that has been nurtured and perfected over the centuries by their traditional ecological knowledge (Rai 2005). Topographically secluded from the rest of the region, their distinctive eco-cultural landscape presents the paradigm of the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. The Ziro valley (1,524-2,738 m), aptly called the 'rice bowl' of the Eastern Himalayas, consists of extensive terraced fields surrounded by thickly forested hills. The river Kiile, flowing from north to south, supports this rich agro-ecosystem. The Apatanis dwell in villages wedged between the rice fields and forest tracts. Their seven large original villages(*lemba*) are Hong, Hari, Biila (Reru, Tajang and Kalung), Dutta,Hija, Mudang-Tage and Michi-Bamin (Kani 2012). Recently, due to the rising population estimated at more than 60,000 (Census of India 2011), five satellite villages have also appeared, viz., Siiro, Lempya, Biirii, Nenchachagya and Siibe (Kani 2012). Many families have also settled in the towns of Hapoli (or Haopolyang) and Old Ziro located at the two ends of the valley (Fig. 1a-b).The endogamous Apatanis are segmented into 78 exogamous clans (*halu*). Larger clans are divided into sub-clans or *tulu* (Blackburn 2010).The Apatanis follow the animistic and shamanic Tani religion of Donyi-Polo (Sun-Moon) as the absolute female-male divinities (Blackburn 2010). The Apatani society is patriarchal, patrilocal and

patrilineal (Hazarika 2011); primogeniture is the fundamental rule of inheritance for the ancestral property. Monogamy is a rule and polygamy is rare (Kani 2012). They govern themselves effectively by means of their tribal council (*buliang*) constituted by the elder male members of the clan (Elwin 1988). Like most of the other tribes of India's North-east, the Apatani culture is now poised at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. This paper briefly explores this traditional micro-culture of North-east India with the focus on some of the key aspects of its intangible cultural heritage that functions as a linking factor for their environmental prudence and sustainable livelihood.

## Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the intangible cultural heritage of the Apatanis by tracing their history and delineating their oral traditions, beliefs and customs and traditional ecological knowledge. Two field trips in the Ziro Valley (in May and October 2014) and a review of the secondary sources gave us the material for the basis of this paper. Specific primary methods included personal interviews, community discussions and general observations during the field works in the Ziro Valley (Hong, Hari, Hapoli and Old Ziro). The interviews were conducted with the members of the tribe, both young and old, to collect the perspectives of the cultural landscape. The interviews were documented with hand written notes that were later processed with analysis. During the interviews the local guide performed the role of the interpreter. The field trip also included a visit to the district museum and craft centre. A major challenge faced during this research work was that the Apatani people have no permanent religious structures, imagery, written literature or historical records. So the dependence on secondary source material was vital to this study.

## Origin and History

North-east India is an amazing assortment of ethnic groups due to migrations throughout the long span of history. The indigenous Australoids were partially or fully absorbed by the waves of Mongoloids from the north and the east (Das 1970). The Apatani lore narrates their descent from Abotani ('father of humankind'), the legendary ancestor of all the Tani tribes (Blackburn 2012). The forbearers of the Tani group may have migrated across the Himalayas from Central Asia at the end of the Neolithic period (Kani 1993). The history of the human colonization of the secluded Ziro valley could date back to the arrival of the Apatanis. In the absence of any written record, the exact period and events are uncertain. The oral history of the Apatani people speaks of their origin in terms of cosmogony and genealogy, rather than geography (Blackburn 2012). It can trace back at least 20 generations after their legendary exodus. Their ritual chants describe their odyssey involving several generations from Wi (spirit) Supung (habitation), through Iipyo (ancient) Supung, Nyime (Tibet) Supung, Hiising Supung, Shango Supung and Mudo Supung (along the Tsangpo valley), to Siilo (Ziro) Supung (Blackburn 2004). Tibetan and Ahom sources indicate that the tribes of central Arunachal Pradesh inhabited the area from as early as the fifteenth century (Blackburn and Tarr 2008). The earliest reference to these tribes is in a geographical text probably dating back to twelfth-century. Thirteenth-century references are also mentioned in the later historical

works (Blackburn 2004). According to their oral tradition, the Apatanis settled down for sometime in Talley Valley before shifting their base to the Ziro valley. This area was a swampy wasteland inhabited by a mythical beast called *buru*, the last of which was killed before the swamp was drained (*Izzard 1951*). The subsequent transformation of the valley testifies to the hard work and human struggle against the natural odds.

British rule was established in North-East India in 1825. During the colonial period, the hill tribes of this region were drawn into armed conflicts throughout the nineteenth century. The first colonial contact with the isolated Apatanis was established in 1897 when British officials reached the Ziro valley, followed by six more similar brief visits during the 1920s (Blackburn 2003). Earlier, in 1914, the tribal-dominated hill areas of the North-East frontiers of British India were administratively separated from the Assam Province to form the North-East Frontier Tracts. The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract (with the Ziro valley) was expanded into the Balipara Frontier Tract in 1919. The Apatanis, who consider themselves (*tanii*) in opposition to their tribal neighbours (*misan*) — the Nyishis and Hill Miris — were hostile to the outsiders (*halyang*). In 1944 a temporary government outpost was setup in the valley with an anthropologist-administrator. A second permanent outpost was constructed in 1946 at Kure, a nearby hilltop, with the Assam Rifles garrisoned to protect it. This generated fear and resentment. In 1948 the Apatanis attacked Kure, which was followed by a swift and brutal retaliation; an incident officially unrecorded but remembered as the *Kure chambyo* ('the Raid on Kure') in the Apatani oral history (Blackburn 2003). This first and only incident of armed resistance to external authority signalled the end of the tribal autonomy with the mounting presence of the government apparatus. The Subansiri area (named after a tributary of the Brahmaputra) was carved out in 1946. The bazaar called Ziro (now Old Ziro), at the base of a hill, became its headquarters in 1952. The region was renamed Subansiri frontier division in 1954 and Subansiri district in 1965. The headquarters shifted to Hapoli in 1960 and the government renamed Hapoli as (New) Ziro.

## Oral Tradition

North-east India is acknowledged for its tribal communities possessing rich oral genres (Verrier 1958, 1970). The predominant oral tradition of the Apatanis is called the *miji-migung*, a paired noun (Blackburn 2008).They also make no distinction between factual and fictive stories. The *miji* and *migung* differ only in texture, context and teller, but not always in content. Stories told in ordinary speech are *migung*, but when the same story (as an episode of an elaborate ritual text) is chanted in a special ritual speech (*nyibu agung*) they are *miji*. *Miji* are chanted during rituals for communicating with the world of spirits for prosperity and health, but *migung* are spoken outside these occasions without any intention to invoke spirits. *Migung* can be narrated by any male elder, but *miji* are chanted almost exclusively by the male shaman priest (*nyibu*). *Miji* is at the core of the Apatani oral tradition. Formal chanting of ritual texts (as *miji*) uses special vocabulary, allusions and metaphors to build a dense cluster of meanings and associations. There are three types of ritual texts: *wi barnii* invoke benevolent spirits (*tiigo*) during ceremonies and festivals for prosperity and

health; *wi benii* summon specific benevolent spirits to guard against illness or malevolent spirits (*cicing*) to placate it (and the Abotani legends are the basis for all of these healing chants); and *ayu* call upon benevolent spirits during festivals, other than the occasions of animal sacrifice. The funeral chant is the only ritual text performed by a woman. This oral tradition also includes tales, myths and histories which are informally narrated (as *migung*) by means of conversational prose. These stories are not told in sessions, but often as a part of everyday conversation and by mothers to children. Some of these tales resemble folktales. They are fabulous accounts of animal-husbands, man-eating monsters, magic trees and mistreated heroines with the focus always on the family drama (Blackburn 2008). The other stories resemble myths and histories explaining origins and describing happenings. These are heterogeneous but roughly arranged in a chronological order starting with the beginnings of the world, ancestral migration and settlement, followed by origin myths about crops, livestock and human society; then goes onto colonial contacts and trading adventures and ending with the Sun-Moon myth (Blackburn 2008).Origins are perhaps the most common subject of oral literature. Beginnings of the world, migration from homelands and descent from ancestors are among the Apatani origin stories. The Abotani myths describe the establishment of the religious beliefs and social practices of the Apatanis. The origin of material possessions is a less grand but equally popular topic and the Apatanis locate the source of most valuable things within the Abo Tani cycle of stories. *Oryza sativa*, the (Asian) rice (*pyapin*), their staple food, also used to make the rice-beer (*apong*) which is used in rituals, was given to the Apatanis by him in the migration story. The Apatanis, when they migrated and settled in the Ziro valley, must have brought with them the rice, a pan-Asian crop that was probably first domesticated in China (Higham and Lu, 1998). Interestingly, one valuable possession not linked to Abo Tani is *Bos frontalis*, the semi-domesticated bovine (*mithun*) that is indispensable in sacrificial rituals and confers social status. Therefore, the domestication of the *mithun*, a livestock unique to the Eastern Himalayas, was probably a much later local innovation after reaching this region. Field songs (*biisi*), ballads (*daminda*) and lullabies (*iingya myadu*) sung by young women, and riddles (*kansii nii*) and proverbs (*niting horming*) popular among elderly men, are not recognised as *miji-migung* (Blackburn 2008). Most indigenous people have oral tradition as well as customs and rituals as means of transmitting specific human elements of traditional knowledge. Oral tradition involves the transmission of cultural material through vocal utterance. The Apatani language is still alive on account of these diverse oral traditions and expressions.The chants, songs, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends, nursery rhymes not only play a key role in perpetuating this vibrant cultural heritage, but are also used to pass on their collective memory, socio-cultural values and traditional understanding of their environment.The linkage between their oral genres and their traditional values, practices and ecological wisdom is obvious. The *miji*, chanted by the priests during the major agrarian festivals as well as other rituals, and the *migung* and other genres, narrated by men and women in more informal settings, are cultural means of passing on their traditional beliefs, customs and knowledge, and therefore, these people who know these stories are the custodians of their rich cultural legacy.

## Beliefs and Customs

North-east India is recognized for its myriad tribal communities as the sentinels of timeless beliefs and customs (Roy 1991). The traditional dress of the Apatanis is elaborate and colourful, yet simple in style. The women have tattoos from their forehead to tip of the nose. They also tattoo their chin with five vertical lines and a horizontal bar joins the five lines at the top, near the lower lip. Their most striking facial decoration is a pair of massive nose plugs (*yaping hullo*) on either side of the nose (Fig. 1e). They perforate their ears to wear hollow bamboo earrings. Above the ear holes, two to three smaller perforations (*rutting*) are made for wearing *rutting yarangs* made of flat brass rings (Kani 2012). The men decorate their face with a tattoo at the middle of their chin (Fig. 1f). They tie their hair in a knot just above the forehead (*piiding*) using a knitting needle-like brass rod (*dingko*) made of pieces of cane. They also perforate their ear lobes and wear big pieces of hollowed bamboo ear plug (*yaru hukho*). To an Apatani the world is full of *wi,* a generic term for spirit beings. There are *gyunyang wi* who causes harm to humans without warning, *yalu wuhi* who brings war and hostility and *tiigo wi* who bring life and prosperity (Kani 2012). They also venerate Abotani as the primal ancestral spirit. It is a belief that the chants, rituals and sacrifices propitiate the spirits, thus granting them boons throughout the year (Blackburn 2010). Taboos known as *anyodu* follow each of the festivals or rituals, with restrictions in the form of not consuming certain foods or not entering certain places. The animistic rites are conducted by male shaman priests (*nyibu*) (Fig. 1d) who communicate with the spirits through the ritual chants as *miji* (Blackburn 2008). According to the oral tradition, Kolyung Bumya Nyikang was the original priest (Kani 2012). The chief shaman is called *ura nyibu* or *lapang nyibu,* who is assisted by *ago nyibu* or *liipa*; all wear the traditional *jilan.* These priests are vital links between the material and spiritual worlds and occupy the core of social life as the highest religious authority of the village (Kani 2012). All the rituals are performed in sacred structures present only in the *lemba* villages, which are closely-knit and congested and each has three ritual structures as the focal point of social life, viz., the *babo* (an elaborately structured wooden pole), *lapang* (a wooden platform) and *nago* (a bamboo hut) (Fig. 1b). These are closely located and are reconstructed every fourth year during the Myoko festival. Festivities are also sacred to every Apatani and are crucial to their social life. In March-April, the tribe celebrates Myoko, the feast of kinship and thanksgiving, cyclically hosted by one of three groups of villages. In July, at Hapoli, the tribe celebrates its main agricultural festival known as Dree. For five days after the festival no one is allowed to work in the fields or enter the plantations and forests. Another major festival, Murung, celebrated in January, is a private, voluntary fertility rite whose centrepiece is the chanting of the most elaborate ritual text called Subu Heniin on the *lapang* (Blackburn 2010). Offerings of food, wine, and sacrifice of birds and animals, including large ones such as pigs, *mithuns*, take place during the festivals. *Mithuns* are killed at major festivals, and their meat is distributed according to local practices of exchange, after which their skulls are displayed as trophies. Besides these major festivals, several rituals are also performed by the individuals. In case of a natural death, *tazer hulii* is performed wherein a chicken is sacrificed. In case of an

unnatural death, *talii gontii* is performed during which the priests and family members use *Cyclosorus glandulosus*, a common fern (*millo tarih),* as a protective talisman. It is also used in rituals associated with ceremonial hunting of the tiger (*pattii roppi*) or the leopard (*hogya roppi*). *Angiopteris evecta,* a tree fern (*Chanyu*), is used for performing rituals during extreme conditions such as outbreak of epidemics. Each house, with thatched roof, bamboo floor and walls and raised hardwood pillars, has a protective altar (*tamu)* at the entrance to prevent the entry of the powerful spirits called *uhis* (Kani 2004). The interior of the traditional Apatani house is divided into front and rear, each with a hearth and each with gender and ritual associations. The front hearth (*ago*) is where women cook and aggregate. The rear hearth (*ura*) (Fig. 1c) is where men sit, talk and where most household rituals are performed (Blackburn 2010). Many rites are related to their agriculture by invoking the spirits with chants and sacrificial offerings. *Danyi* is performed mainly for the wellbeing of human beings, crops and livestock. *Myokung* is performed for the fertility of soil in the month of March after seeds are sown in the nursery. *Tamu* is performed when crops are transplanted from nurseries to field in the month of April-May to prevent disease. *Yapung* is done in September to ensure sufficient rain to enhance good growth of the paddy. Several local plants are also used during the major festivals as well as other rituals to make the sacrificial altar(*agyang*) where ritual chanting is performed (Bamin and Gajurel, 2015). The most widely used plant for the rituals is *Phyllostachys bambusoides*, the runner bamboo (*bije*) grown as monocultures in groves, also called *bije*, located adjacent to the villages. Other species of bamboos like *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii,* the tufted *bamboo* (*yayii*) and canes such as *Calamus acanthospathus,* the *rattan palm*(*tisser*) are also used. A local bamboo, *Pleioblastus simonii (tapyu),* is used to make a flute that is played at funeral of a well-known person or priest or elder. *Saccharum arundinaceum*, the hardy sugarcane (*peji-pelo*), is an important plant that is used for all the agriculture related festivals and rituals to ward off harmful pests from the crops. For the Apatani people, rituals, taboos, social practices and festive events involve an incredible variety of forms and are closely linked to the community's perception of its own history and memory as well as their oral tradition as well as traditional knowledge. As a community, the Apatanis use and conserve selected plant species which are closely associated with their religious beliefs and social practices. They have customary laws (Singh 1993) administered by the *buliang* to enforce their social practices whose underlying belief system is based on respect, reciprocity and interconnectedness with the natural environment. Taboos, self-enforced through the idea that the violator's action carries its own penalty (Colding and Folk 2001), also play a key role in their local resource management and biological conservation.

## Traditional Ecological Knowledge

North-east India harbours indigenous communities who are still engaged in either hunting-gathering or subsistence agriculture whose farming practices range from shifting to sedentary cultivation (Majumder et al.2011). Unlike most of the other tribes in North-East India who practice the notorious shifting or slash-and-burn (*jhum*) cultivation (Ninan 1992), the

Apatanis are settled agriculturists(Fig. 2a-f). The need for natural resource conservation is an integral part of the socio-cultural belief systems in indigenous societies. Based on their traditional ecological knowledge, evolved from centuries of collective experience, they have built up sustainable methods of natural resource use and management. The Apatanis are renowned for their ingenious utilization of their limited territorial space, with the functional integration of the areas allocated for human settlement, farming, burial grounds, plantations and forests. Their highly-evolved eco-cultural landscape consists of productive community-managed forests and complex yet productive agro-ecosystems (Rai 2007).The forests of the surrounding hills are rich in flora and fauna. Entrenched spiritual values and strong customary laws (including social taboos) of the Apatanis have fortified their traditional practices for sustainable harvesting, optimal management and effective conservation of their local forest resources. Natural woodlands are supplemented by private groves of pine and bamboo (*bije*) (Fig. 2d) which function as local resource base and also prevent soil erosion (Rechlin and Varuni 2006). The Apatani men practice fishing and hunting. The Apatani women collect firewood, vegetables and fruits from the forest. However, the most distinguished traditional practice of the Apatanis is their environmentally-sustainable sedentary agriculture in the form of the unique paddy-cum-fish cultivation (which is also linked with animal husbandry and forestry), an example of a highly evolved indigenous farming system (Rai 2005, Nimachow et al. 2010). According to their oral tradition, the practice of wet rice cultivation in the terraces began with Abo Tani (Blackburn 2010). In spite of limited water resources, the entire expanse of the terraced farming areas in the valley is well watered by a network of meticulously engineered irrigation channels (Fig. 2a-c). Their community-based *jebi-aji* agriculture is an amalgamation of the cultivation of local rice cultivars (*amo, mypia* and *pyapee*) and the introduced *Cyprinus carpio*, the common carp (*aji ngiyi*) in the plots, together with *Eleusine coracana*, the finger millet (*sarse*), on the bunds separating them. In this system a small pit is dug in each terrace where paddy is grown. Fingerlings are put in the water in these pits. In the monsoons, when the paddy field is submerged, the fishes come out of the pits and move in the flooded field. Again, when there is a scarcity of water, the fishes go back to the pits. In this way the fishes get better nutrition from the manure in the paddy fields. Thus both rice and fish are produced together by proper management of the rain water. Fertility of the soil is also maintained by organic means. The paddy fields receive the nutrient wash from the surrounding hill slopes. The house and granary sites are located on higher grounds so that decayed and decomposed matter can be drained out to the field. The Apatanis recycle their crop residues and organic wastes of the villages. Throughout winter and spring, from the end of harvest until the time for transplanting men and women carry baskets of rice chaff, pig and chicken droppings, and kitchen wastes to spread them in the fields (Rai 2005). The agricultural operation is carried out by human labour using traditional tools and implements, without any animal traction (Fig. 2e-f).Their collective labour involves men and women as members of voluntary farming groups with specific responsibilities that have also evolved over the years, and these activities are coordinated by the *buliang*. With highly developed wet rice cultivation,

as much as 40 percent of the rice and 80 percent of the fish produced is traded with the neighbouring Nishis and the Hill Miris(Nimachow et al., 2010). Thus the Apatani agro ecosystem is a good example of economic self-sufficiency of a traditional agricultural society that practices ecologically and economically sound agriculture. Many ecologically valued species are culturally protected (Bamin and Gajurel, 2015). The wetlands, plantations and forests next to the paddy fields of the Apatanis are the habitats of sacred species with immense keystone value in the ecosystem function, including a bamboo (*Phyllostachys bambusoides),* the banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), pines (*Pinus* spp.), chinkapins (*Castanopsis* spp.) and a fish (*Schizothoraxmolesworthii*). These are all examples of species taboos (Colding and Folk 2001). Small patches of virgin pine forests (*ranthii*) situated near the villages are protected as sacred groves and only used for ritual purpose. This is an example of a habitat taboo (Colding and Folk 2001). It was noticed that the two plant families, Poaceae (including the bamboos) and Arecaceae (including the canes), have shaped the material culture of the Apatani people. They are also used for construction, fencing, making irrigation pipes, indigenous farm implements, traditional hunting gears, baskets, mats and household products. Another remarkable feature of the Apatani indigenous knowledge is their indigenous system of medicine based on local medicinal herbs which are collected from the local forests (Kala 2005). Traditional knowledge system, which is entrenched in the customary way of life of the less technologically advanced, often rural or indigenous, communities who directly depend on their local natural resources, is profoundly reflected in their language, culture, society and religion.The traditional knowledge of the Apatanis, shaped by their natural environment, has a strong influence on their culture, practices and skills, as well as the lore and beliefs that underlie them.

## Conclusion

No insight into the environment can be complete without understanding the cultural values of indigenous communities who are inseparable from their natural surroundings (Gadgil et al. 1993). Their traditional respect and reverence for the local eco systems is founded on their time-honoured belief that respecting the inherent resilience of the environment is crucial for ensuring its sustainability. The Apatani are a self-reliant community of the Eastern Himalayas whose prolonged intimacy with nature has resulted in the development of indigenous understanding of their environment that is reflected in their cultural heritage. This unique agrarian community practice integrated agriculture-pisciculture, one of the most sophisticated in the world, supplemented with animal husbandry and social forestry. They depend on local natural resources but at the same time venerate the natural world. This respect and reciprocity is copiously manifested in their folk lore, traditional values and social practices. Their indigenous worldview, myths, legends, rituals and festivals are inseparable and are a celebration of nature. Such a holistic system is designed for nature and culture to mutually support each other. Their oral literature, spiritual values, social customs and traditional wisdom are crucial for maintaining the amazingly sustainable system that exists today. Their established system of approaching all social activities through voluntary groups administered by the tribal council ensures the participation of each member

of the community, fostering a strong sense of shared ownership. At a time when the policy-makers across the globe are struggling to develop effective means of mobilising local communities in environmental conservation and sustainable development, the inclusive social organization of the Apatanis and their rich cultural heritage has immense significance for the rest of humanity. Their unique eco-cultural landscape functions as a linking factor for protecting the fragile mountain environment and its rich biodiversity alongside providing a means for a sustainable livelihood.

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Fig.1:




Fig.2:

**Figure Legends:**

**Fig.1 :** The Apatanis of Ziro valley, Arunachal Pradesh. **(*a*)** The northern end of the Ziro valley, near Old Ziro. **(*b*)** Apatani houses and ceremonial structures (*babo* and *lapang*) in Hong village. **(*c*)** The rear hearth (*ura*) of an Apatani dwelling. **(*d*)** An Apatani shaman (*nyibu*) preparing for a ritual. **(*e*)** An Apatani woman displaying facial tattoos and nose plugs (*yaping hullo*). **(*f*)** An Apatani man with facial tattoos.

**Fig. 2 :** The agro-ecosystem of the Apatani people.(***a***) Terraced paddy fields for rice, fish and millet cultivation.(***b***) Submerged paddy field in the transplantation season during the monsoon. (***c***) Ripe paddy field in the harvesting season after the monsoon. (***d***) A bamboo grove near Hong village. (***e***) A young Apatani woman planting rice seedlings. (***f***) An elderly Apatani woman reaping the rice crop.

**NB :** All images are original photographs taken by KNC during May and October, 2014.

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**Book Review**

**Ghose (Roy), Archita (2015): *India's "Look East" Policy: The China Tangle.* Kolkata: Minerva.**

**Reviewed by: Samir Kumar Das, University of Calcutta**

The book is an interesting narrative history of India's Look East policy and how it has been and continues to be designed and influenced by what the author calls 'the China tangle'. While there is no denying that China is indeed a 'tangle' in this context, it may be a gross oversimplification to argue that the policy is influenced solely by this 'tangle'. Nor does the book make such a claim. There are other 'tangles' which are also very significant and have been tangentially referred in the book. Does not Look East policy reflect India's attempt at changing the theatre of foreign policy from the West to the East? The narrative history is written in a crisp and intelligible manner without making any overt theoretical pretension. The book tells us how the policy evolved under the premierships of Narasimha Rao, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh – the last completing two terms as the prime minister of India. Although not fore-grounded, the book seems to be informed by the paradigm of what in International Relations Theory is characterized as Strategic and Security Studies. It develops mainly along two trajectories of military and economic strategies.

All other ties like historical and cultural ones – although figure in the work like a constant refrain – are certainly considered as subordinate to larger strategic considerations. Thus to cite an instance, the policy is, according to the author, designed and crafted to 'exploit complementarities in each others' economic and social structures'. Such examples of instrumentalization of economy and society, history and culture are not rare in strategic and security circles. That such complementarities have a dynamic of their own and often refuse to be subordinated to the so-called 'national interest' is borne by a variety of anthropological and archeological studies. The 'intrinsic traits' that the Hindu sailors and traders carried with them some centuries back may have generated these complementarities over time; but in our age of globalization they are, as the author argues, meant for being 'utilized' in the national interest. At one level, one may argue that the book is very old fashioned, for, theories in International Relations have clearly moved beyond the paradigm of Strategic and Security Studies. But at another level, the virtue of such flat narrative can hardly be underestimated at a time when theoretical frills and pretensions overwhelm most of the social science writings. In that sense, the book is likely to be appreciated by students and research scholars.

As the policy passes through the three premierships, its thrust and emphasis obviously do not remain the same. But the exact connection between their personality and leadership on one hand and the nature of policy changes on the other is never unearthed. Although chapters are subtitled after the three prime ministers, the book does not make it clear how

Look East policy during their tenure bear the distinct signature of their personality and leadership. The author should have been more cautious about her generous use of superlatives. At times, she gets so much carried away by these superlatives that her writing loses balance and bears the bruises and scars of inconsistencies and contradictions. Thus, to cite an instance, in page 87, she observes that "Dr. Singh's contribution towards enhancement of India's role as an important player in the strategic and *economic* arena turned out to be much more impressive" (italics mine). A few pages later (p.93), she writes that "the bilateral trade and investment during this tenure did not grow much according to their potential." Social Science writing calls for a distinct writing style that needs to account for the tentativeness and contingency of social and political reality. The book - true to the genre of Strategic and Security Studies – constantly refers to the States as individual actors – single and indivisible, while growing evidence suggests that the States are neither single nor indivisible while encountering the world outside. Thus, there is a strong argument – mostly coming from the scholars of India's Northeast – that Look East policy may have benefited India, but not or even at the cost of the Northeast. Never before in Indian foreign policy, federal dynamics have played such a significant role as they do now. Finally, something must be said about the way the book is planned and chapterised. The last two chapters are in many ways repetition of the first three chapters.

I think, the book is a product of hard work and will be of immense help to students and scholars of Indian foreign policy.

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