



Reception at Boro Hallong on 17.03.2014



"Ranimra Gaidinliu Rath" at Tening Town in Peren District of Nagaland on 20.03.2014



Zeliangrong Heraka Leaders on dias at a function held at Tening Town on 20.03.2014



"Ranimra Gaidinliu Rath" is followed by devotees with chanting of devotional mantras at Hangrum in Dima Hasau District



Members of the Mass tour programme at Zaome Village of Manipur. Most of them completed 10 days trip of Rath yatra



Ranimra Gaidinliu Rath" visited a remote village Heranghna in Peren district on 21.03.2013



Little children of B. Jaiakie receiving "Ranimra Gaidinliu Rath" on 23.03.2014



Heraka followers visited the "Holy Stone" at Mbaipungwa village. This stone was revealed to Ranimra in her dream and she instructed the villagers to fetch it from the nearby river bank in 1978.

HERITAGE Explorer

LET KNOWLEDGE COME FROM ALL THE SIDES

A Monthly News Bulletin

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Heritage Explorer

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Contents

Culture and Religion	P-5	Mass Tour Programme in connection with Freedom Fighter Rani Ma Gaidinliu Birth Centenary Celebration Year 2014-15	P-14
Vaishnavite Tourism in Assam	P-7	The Alarming Cases of Human Trafficking in Assam	P-15
Handloom Scheme for NE Weavers Fails to Take Off	P-8	Buddhist Student Wins Big! School Must Stop Endorsing Christianity	P-16
Cultural Extravaganza at Karbi Youth Fest	P-8	Pope Got Offended by His Own Myth and Mystique	P-16
First NE Tribal Museum Founded in Assam	P-9	Benedict Option	P-17
Maniram Dewan, Piyali Barua's Sacrifices Recalled	P-10	5 Intriguing Facts About the Rome	P-18
Rs. 3600 Crores are Spent as Scholarship to Minority Students in the Country	P-10	Description of Mann Communitarian of Garo Hills, Meghalaya	P-19
Deepening Mystery of Malaysia Airline's Boeing 777-200ER	P-11	Rising Above Regional Differences	P-21
A Seminar Talk on Role of Namghars in Cultural of Assam	P-11	DRU -WAN BOLA	P-22
Identity of Somarasa	P-12	Meghalaya Sacred Groves in Peril	P-25
Centuries of Women's Struggle	P-13		

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Editorial

This Chaitra Shuklaa Pratipadaa (31 March 2014 in English calendar) is the first day of Indian (Hindu) New Year named in different way from historical point of time and view. For example 5116 Yugabda (from the year of Sri Krishna abandoned his human form), it is also known as Kalyabda (the Kaliyuga, the beginning of the last one of the four Yugas with a Span of 4,32,00,00 solar years each), 2071 Vikramabda or Vikram Sambat (after the enthronement of legendary emperor, Vikramaditya) etc. Our Assamese year 1421 Chon or Bhaskarabda begins from Vaishakh (Bo'hag) month, instead.

How to identify the day? Shukla Pratipadaa is clear, the first day of New Moon. Then what is Chaitra? The sky is divided by our learned ancestors into 27 Nakshatras ($360^\circ/27=13^\circ20'$) and each Nakshatra is given a name the first one being Chitraa. Each Nakshatra is divided into four quadrants (totaling 108), 9 parts of which is called a Rashi. The Sun enters a Nakshatra and remains for a month in the corresponding Rashi. The day (how it is known is a tough but interesting astronomical question) on which the Sun enters the Nakshatra (& Rashi) is the FIRST DAY of Chaitra month. But the first day of Hindu year is reckoned from the day of Chaitra which is the first day (Pratipadaa) after the new moon (Amavashya) i.e. Chaitra, Shuklaa, Pratipadaa. Choosing of this day as the auspicious first day of the year is again a matter of pedagogical interest and astronomical importance.

In our Northeast, emphasis was given on the Natural change from dry-hot days to days with rain, flower, greeneries, time of cultivation that warrant merriment. Hence Bo'hag is taken as the first month of the year.

The so-called English calendar is in fact the Julian calendar (after the name of Julius Caesar), later known as Gregorian calendar (as corrected by Pope Gregory). It once began with March (our Chaitra). But two months July (after Julius Caesar) & August (after King Augustus) were introduced in between. Hence we got the present form of the calendar. Though it was named after Jesus Christ, it was in vogue more than 50 years of his birth (and Christ birth year is 4 B.C).

All these are now of academic interest only. What is more important for us now is, to see a new era of political development in the country before long, which may lead us, in letter and spirit to the cherished goal by 2020 as dreamt by Dr. A.P.J. Kalam, our former president of India.

Wish you all a Happy New Year. We extend our greetings to our well-wishers, contributors, the agencies and publications from where we often reprint valuable articles worth preserving of "Heritage nature" and, invariably to our esteemed readers, whose patronization is our strength and stamina to grow with.

Editor

Culture and Religion

-Dr. Jyotsna Bhattacharjee

The dictionary meaning of culture is that it is an intellectual and artistic achievement or expression. Actually it is a way of life of a group of people residing in a particular place and at a certain time. Culture is reflected in the customs and practices, which regulate the individual and collective lives. There are various aspects of culture—notably aesthetic, moral, social and spiritual. All the cultural practices are guided by a belief, which represents a particular way of looking at the world and provides meaning and significance to peoples' activities and relations. Some people aim at wealth and power and some aim at truth and virtue. All social customs are actively derived from the peoples' particular view of the world. These aims of the people are regulated by a particular culture and it offers means to the people to pursue the goal. Beliefs belong to the realm of thought and it forms the foundation of a culture.

Religion is closely connected with the meaning and significance of human existence and therefore it is connected with culture. It has been said that "Religion shapes a culture's system of beliefs and practice, and culture influences how a religion is interpreted. Diverse sects have diverse culture. Human civilization has not yet developed a culture which is wholly secular."

It has been said that Indian culture originated in the indigenous civilization of Indus valley, which was multi-lingual and multi-ethnic. Some of the elements of this period through its synthesis with Vedic culture continue till today. Radhakrishnan observed, "The cults of Shiva and Shakti may have come down from the Indus people. Worship of trees, animals and rivers, and other cults associated with fertility ritual, may have had the same origin". At that phase there was a temporary setback to the Vedic religion for a time. But it soon reinstated itself through the doctrines of Vedanta which stated

that pure consciousness and bliss are all-pervading and one ultimate reality. The Upanishads, by asserting the oneness of this ultimate reality with nature and man, discussed the existential problems of human beings. Upanishadic thought can be termed as the basis of Indian culture.

Possibly the concept of 'Varna' was introduced to regulate division of labour. But later on it degraded to a rigid social system of caste, which has caused havoc in Indian society. Every aspect of one's life had to be determined by the Varna customs. But Buddhism and Jainism were against these customs. They questioned the Vedic authority and put forward a different concept of ethics, independent of Varna system.

Emperor Ashoka was greatly influenced by the teachings of Gautama Buddha and in his Rock Edict XII; the Mauryan Emperor exhorts the members of all sects to be tolerant towards their beliefs and practices.

The great Indian epics, particularly the Ramayana and Mahabharata provided the continuity of this kind of socio-ethical tradition of Indian culture. These epics have clearly stated one's responsibility to all living beings. The Dharmasashtras of Hindu religion also stressed the need for harmonious integration of one's rights with his responsibilities to others. It is an ethical doctrine that rights and duties go together. One cannot insist on his rights, if he does not realize that he has also obligations to others. This ethical theory was stated by the Hindu dharma shashtras long back. According to Dr. P. R. Kame, the word 'dharma' does not mean a religion, but a mode of life or course of conduct. Thus the Rigveda may be regarded as a divine revelation, but Hindu religion with a large number of religious festivals centred round an equal number of deities, is more significant in the realm of culture than in religion. The "Dharma shashtras", by introducing the "common code of

conduct", propagated ethical practice, which are binding on all sections of the society. But these practices have nothing to do with religion. They aim at individual perfection by reconciling the conflicting claims of one's personality to achieve harmony in his life in society.

The classical thoughts of ancient India gave birth to the philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

Emperor Akbar rejuvenated the tradition of secularism and tolerance, ingrained in Indian mind since the days of emperor Ashoka. The idea of oneness of nature and man with god has long been propagated by the ancient Indian philosophy.

This kind of idea is contained in the Bhagavad Gita, in which Lord Sri Krishna, in his dialogues with Arjuna, explains, "He, who sees me in everything and everything within me, neither loses the sight of me nor is lost beyond my sight, since he and I are one".

Rabindra Nath Tagore, who was greatly influenced by the Upanishads, said in one of his verses, "Oh Lord, unveil the covers and let me recognize my real self within thy innate radiance"

It is ridiculous to think that one religion is superior to another. Superficially, in the surface, every religion has some elements, which are conditioned by constraints and prejudices of the time and space of its origin and influence the culture of that period. But deep beneath the surface of every religion lies its essence, that is, the "oneness of being". In the context of the diversity of individual preference, the Bhagavad Gita clearly states that each of the apparently different paths of knowledge, love of God and disinterested action leads to the same goal. These paths to reach the goal are almost the same in all the religions of the world.

Indian reformation movement was initiated by Rammohan Roy and

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The European Renaissance did influence Indian reformation to a certain extent. The spirit of Indian Renaissance, rational inquiry, human rights, joy of living, was nothing new to Indian mind. These ideas were already incorporated in the Upanishads.

The Upanishads have forbidden accepting anything that is not amenable to reason. The very first verse of Isha-Upanishad states; "Enjoy yourself by 'Tyaga', do not get tempted by others' wealth" The Taittiriya Upanishad celebrates the joy of being, as it proclaims: "Everything is derived from joy, is nourished in joy, and finally returns to joy".

However, the activities of the Christian missionaries helped spread education and medical care. This made a profound impact on the enlightened Indians. They did not fail to take note of the wide gap between the awareness of one's responsibility to others and its ineffective realization in social practice. This is obvious in the continuation of such evil social customs as caste distinction and treatment of the so-called untouchability. In Mahabharata itself we can notice the evil practice in the case of guru Dronacharya's refusal to accept "Low-born" Ekalavya as his disciple. Then Karna was often humiliated by the Pandavas, especially Arjuna, under the misconception that he was the son of a "low-born" charioteer.

Swami Vivekananda pointed this reality, when he said, "No religion on earth preached the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism".

Mahatma Gandhi explored the Upanishadic doctrines of 'oneness' and 'truth' through 'Satyagraha' which asserts the supremacy of truth over brute physical strength. Maintaining a link with the past heritage, the revival of Indian culture in the modern period reaffirmed the concept of 'oneness' by extending the claim that all religions point to the same goal. If we observe deeply we get the evidence

that a uniform plan links every form in the manifold universe.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates was supposed to have said, "Know thyself". In the Chandogya-Upanishad, the self has been explored in a number of ways. It is the knowledge of the self that holds the secret of how to transcend death. The "Katha-upanishad" observes, "A rare discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes inwards and sees the self"

From time immemorial man has been perplexed by diverse events of the world. He faces conflicting conceptions of various duties at every step of his life and he becomes uncertain about the right path he has to undertake. His quest for truth leads him to ask questions, questions concerning the human condition, about one's relationship with one's self and with the world one lives in. In his search for the right path, he wanders through various conceptions, until the conflicting conceptions of his personality dissolve into the fullness of the impersonal, transcending the mortal barriers of existence. Then he is transformed into the rare discriminating man of the Katha-Upanishad. Such a way of looking at the world and searching human relations accordingly is the distinctive feature of the cultural tradition of India.

Ancient Greece, which is the source of western philosophy, shared the same awareness of individual perfection as contemplated in classical Indian thoughts of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. But unfortunately the intellectual development of enlightenment shifted its focus from attainment of perfection to individual comfort which led to adverse consequences.

In the name of modernism, the Machiavellian policy of removing ethics and morality from society is complete. A culture of rights devoid of any sense of commitment to society and awareness of responsibilities to others has pervaded all forms of human religion and such has been the end of our so-

called development and progress. In this competitive and mechanical world, human image is lost in a maze of shallow senseless entity that lacks the intention to face reality in its entirety. In this intellectual vacuum, the notion of fragmentation and incoherence rules the roost and is presented as the dominant culture of this age.

We are facing a strange paradox today. While the diverse sciences in their various fields have started appreciating the idea of oneness of truth, the metaphysical thought is drifting apart to assert the relativity of truth.

To realize the oneness of being, we have to note that the path of eternal life is not external, but internal. Yudhisthira in the Mahabharata age took his decisive journey to eternal life. Yet more than 2000 years after that final journey of Yudhisthira, civilization driven by the primitive instincts of selfish greed has circled back to the vulgar competition for material gain in which a few are enriched at the expense of others. Thus we are steadily in our battle against poverty and ignorance, not due to the dearth of material resources, but by making ourselves culturally bankrupt.

It is high time that we remembered our cultural priority. The individual must be aware of his/her responsibility towards others, responsibility arising not from an idea of duty or obedience to some law, but from a feeling of togetherness in a human situation. Morality alone is capable of balancing the tilt in today's culture of selfish 'rights'. Theism that effectively accounts for the inescapability of these ethical values can provide a moral compass until a wholly secular culture is evolved.

In the context of communal state or group loyalties, it is necessary to realize the importance of 'oneness' underlying the various beliefs in the superstructure of Indian culture. Non-violence and tolerance are essential ingredients that form the basis of broader ethics capable of exploring ways to reduce social conflicts in India.

(The Sentinel – 09.03.2014)

Vaishnavite Tourism in Assam

- Satyajit Das

Recently, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of Assam, has given emphasis on the prospect of Vaishnavite tourism as a new trend of tourism in the State. It is really a welcome step for Assam and its people, because this kind of tourism may give a new look to our State. Actually, Vaishnavite tourism means tourism in various institutions of Vaishnavite religion like the Satras, *Namghars* (or *Kirtan Ghars*) and the *Thaans*.

About 500 years ago, the great saints of Assam, Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva had initiated a religious, social and cultural institution called Satra for propagation of their religion known as 'Ek Saran Naam Dharma' among the various groups of people of greater Assam. Primarily, a religio-social institution called *Namghar* (alternately called *Kirtan Char*) had been introduced in the central location of a village. It has been playing a major role in establishing socio-cultural and religious harmony among the different groups of people in the society. The *Namghars* also carry out cultural activities like dance, music, festivals and other rituals. Besides, they act as village courts as well as revenue offices. All sections of the people of the society participate in various activities of the *Namghar*.

The Satra institutions are larger than the *Namghar* or *Kirtan Ghar* but similar in regard to the purpose and activities. The Satras have a great role to play in keeping socio-cultural, socio-religious harmony and unity among-different sections of the Assamese people for the last many years.

From the-tourism point of view, it is observed that tourists both domestic and foreign visit various Satra institutions located in different parts of the State. The main tourist

attraction is its genesis, various performing arts, sculptures, architecture, paintings, traditional settings, decorations, daily rites, various festivals, rituals, etc.

So, this form of tourism may be planned and developed in a very systematic and proper way. The authenticity of the Satra institutions and its main associated aspects must be maintained for tourists. The presentation and performance of various art forms and cultural items pertaining to the Satra institutions are unique in style and distinct in features. In this connection, it is necessary to mention here that all the Satras are not uniform in respect of their various religious, cultural and other associated activities. After the death of Sankardeva, there developed a system called *Samhati* (which mean an association) According to the system, there are four categories such as *Nika Samhati*, *Kaal Samhati*, *Brahma Samhati* and *Purusha Samhati* with some ideological differences among them, including the propitiation of Lord Krishna, some other rules and regulations, architectural pattern and other art forms. Difference could be noticed only in the case of minor practices and in degrees of emphasis laid on any of the four fundamental principles, viz, *Nama*, *Deva*, *Guru* and *Bhakat*.

For tourism, this kind of variety of Satras may definitely create attraction and inquisitiveness not only among the pilgrims but also the tourists. For the convenience of the organizers of Vaishnavite tourism and the tourists, the sites or places where the Satra institution are located may be geographically divided into some broad zones and sub-zones on the basis of the location of major towns and cities where the foreign as well as domestic tourists may stay.

In the case of lower Assam, the

Barpeta district may be considered as a major Sattra zone. There are several Satras under the four *Samhatis* located in different areas surrounding the Barpeta Satra or at distance not far away from it. *Patbaushi* established by *Damodardeva*, *Vyaskuchi* by *Bhattadeva* and *Bahari* by *Harideva* - these three *Brahma Samhati* Satras are located not very far away from Barpeta. *Gopala Ata* first established Satra at *Puran* (old) *Bhawanipur* and then established a permanent Satra at *Kalajhar*, situated at a few km away from-*Bhawanipur*. The *Patbaushi* Satra established at the *Patbaushi Sankardeva Thaan* and the *Jania* Satra belong to *Purusha Samhati*. It is seen that there are two satras at *Pitbaushi*-one belonging to *Brahma Samhati* and the other to *Purusha Samhati*. The most influential Satra affiliated to *Nika Samhati* is the *Barpeta Satra* established by *Madhavdeva*. The other important Satras of *Nika Samhati* in this zone are *Sundaridiya*, *Ganakkuchi* and *Baradi*.

Secondly, in upper Assam, *Majuli* is the most attractive zone of Vaishnavite tourism. It is the main centre of Neo-Vaishnavism. The different Satras under the four *Samhatis* are located in different parts of *Majuli*. The most prominent Satras belonging to *Brahma Samhati* are *Auniati*, *Dakhinpat* and *Garmurh*.

The *Bengena Ati* and *Samaguri* Satras belong to *Purusha Samhati*. *Uttar Kamalabari*, *Natun Kamalabari* and *Bhogpur* are the three prominent Satras of *Nika Samhati*. Besides these, there are several famous Vaishnavite Satras located in middle Assam zone centring around either *Nagaon* or *Tezpur*. They are the *Bardowa* or *Batadrawa* Satra, *Alipukhuri* *Patekibari Thaan*, the

(Contd. to Page 12)

Handloom Scheme for NE Weavers Fails to Take Off

The North-East accounts for about 66.75 per cent of the total looms (13.96 lakh out of 20.91 lakh units) and more than 50 per cent of the weavers (21.75 lakh out of 43.31 lakh weavers in the country).

And despite the fact that most of the weavers in the North-East continue to work on traditional loom units on individual basis bereft of institutional support for raw materials, finance, marketing, training and landholding, an ambitious project aimed at upgrading domestic handloom units into commercially viable ones has failed to materialize even after it was recommended by various State governments of the North-East, Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of DoNER, and other experts and committees within and outside the Planning Commission.

The project, MES Handloom Scheme, envisaged awareness building and motivation, human resource development/ entrepreneurship development, skill and capacity development, design and product development, market linkage, and creation of infrastructure facilities like common facility centers besides setting up of minimum economic size (MES) commercial units with at least ten fly shuttle loom of 1,000 sq ft and ten jacquard machine for design weaving and other accessories at a cost of Rs 11.42 lakh with 90 per cent grant from Government of India and 10 per cent contribution including land from the weaver entrepreneurs in the cooperative sector.

Implementation of the scheme warranted no additional budget since the required fund was available within the 10 per cent budget allocation for the North-East from the Ministry of Textiles.

“After several rounds of discussions, the office of the Development Commissioner

(Handloom), the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India finalised the scheme and submitted a Standing Finance Committee Memo to the Planning Commission for its in-principle approval,” official sources told The Assam Tribune.

Although the Planning Commission is required to convey either the in-principle approval or reject the same within a specific timeframe, it made undue delay and only in April 2011, a joint team of officials from the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Textiles visited Guwahati to make on-the-spot assessment of the ground level situation and had discussions with different stakeholders.

Since then, due to reasons best known to the officials concerned, the relevant file was kept moving to different unconcerned tables for three to four months and only on December 14, 2011, the then Member Secretary, Planning Commission held discussions on the scheme, wherein senior officials of the Government of India viz Secretary, (Textiles), Development Commissioner (Handlooms) Economic Adviser & Deputy Economic Adviser and other officials of the Ministry of Textiles strongly advocated for grant of in-principle approval for the scheme without any further delay.

Unfortunately, while the scheme was for upgrading of the domestic handloom units owned by the local weavers, an unrealistic view that upgrading of the domestic handloom units would invite outsiders to the region and turn the local weavers into manual workers was taken, putting a spanner in the process.

The issue of according in-principle approval to the scheme was kept pending for unknown reasons and ultimately in the meeting held on May 2, 2012 between the then Secretary Textiles and the Secretary, Planning Commission, it was decided to

formulate an umbrella scheme for the North-east within which the MES Handloom Scheme could be taken up.

“The Planning Commission thus neither rejected the proposal for introduction of the MES Handloom Scheme nor undermined its socio-economic implications in the region but refrained from according its approval to the proposal of the Ministry of Textiles for without any rhyme or reason, thereby sending the preferred MES scheme into the dustbin,” sources said.

(The Assam Tribune – 3.3.2014)

Cultural Extravaganza at Karbi Youth Fest

The Amri Karbi Students' Union (AKSU) is organized a youth festival from February 25 to February 27 at the Amri Karbi cultural complex at Samata in Sonapur. The youth festival primarily showcased the rich cultural and traditional heritage of the Karbi people. Various cultural programs and sporting events were also organized during the youth festival.

General Secretary of AKSU, Bisnu Nandan Teron said, “We are glad to host the event as it would bring our hidden heritage and unique cultural colours before the entire world. Various events like folk songs, art competitions, dance competitions, marathon race, and traditional food courts will also be organized during the three days of cultural extravaganza.”

“Another important thing is that, every competition would bear prize money from the range of Rs 500 to Rs 12000 as a part of recognition to the competitors from our end. This would also provide a moral boost for the youngsters to perform excellently.” He added.

It may be mentioned that, the cultural programs and events held on February 26 was dedicated in the memory of renowned writer Monuram Karkun Phangso.

(The Sentinel- 15.2.14)

First NE Tribal Museum Founded in Assam

The last Thursday of February 2014 gave North East Region its first ever Tribal Museum when Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi inaugurated the first tribal museum of the northeastern region at Nazirakhat in Sonapur. This museum has been set up by the State Cultural Affairs Department with the support of State PWD and WPT & BC Department.

"This is a dream project of the State government. We have implemented the first phase of the project. This tribal museum is going to showcase the colourful traditions and lifestyles of the tribal communities in the northeastern region on a single platform," the Chief Minister said after inaugurating the museum on Thursday last.

According to Gogoi, total cost of the project is Rs 50 crore and it is being built on 227 bighas, 1 katha and 17 lessa of land.

The museum has one administrative cum reception building, an amphitheatre, 11 numbers of huts belonging to different tribal communities, eight different food courts representing the eight different NE States, and several other centres for basic amenities.

The aims and objectives behind the setting up of this museum is to preserve, perpetuate and revitalizing the culture, architecture, tradition, lifestyles of indigenous tribal people of North East India and provide a common platform. It also aims to promote traditional, vernacular architecture of different ethnic tribal communities of North East Region and to promote their culture.

"By setting up the museum it is also aimed to encourage exchange of ideas and techniques of performing arts and architecture and crafts different ethnic groups of the NE states with the people of world," said Bhuban Gum, proprietor of Gum

Construction Private Limited, adding, "By setting this museum it is also aimed to conduct studies on various tribal communities, transmit native culture from one generation to the next, try to initiate light and sound show, to organize evening cultural programmes of different tribal communities for encouraging tourism by providing a platform to various tribal artists, weekend cultural show for the students of different age groups to make an awareness on the tribes of NE India by organizing folk and traditional music, dance, etc."

By setting the museum, it is also aimed to organize competition on painting, debating, recitation on tribal art and culture, literature, livelihood and prizes would be given to the best competitor

"Necessary steps will be taken to develop the project at par of IGRMS (Bhopal), Chokhi Dhani (Rajasthan), and other project of national and international repute," Gum further added.

To run this museum effectively, without any hassle, several activities will also be formulated.

"The in and around area of each campus of a particular tribe will be arranged properly. Agricultural tools, hunting gear and war weapons in the courtyard and patio of the dwellings, just as they are kept in the actual tribal dwellings in their nature land, will be displayed in the huts," Gum said, adding, "At the moment of entering a dwelling, a tradition attired educated couple of a particular tribe to which that particular dwelling belongs will take it upon them regarding the hospitality of the guests. Indigenous food will be cooked and served in the traditional way and the visitors will be shown how they weave at their own inimitable loom and how each tribe go about their day

to day chores in their own unique and incredible style."

"The couple will also show the visitors as how the tribal people welcome them by offering their respective rice soup in honour in each particular tribal community. Any visitor, who formally enters the project and wishes to spend a night in a particular tribal hut, the host will feel privileged to give a feeling of sleep on a raised bamboo floor or on a mud floor in the tranquillity of the Nazirakhat Hills facilitate at par of Chokhi Dhoni, Rajasthan and IGRMS, Bhopal," Gum further added.

Gum also informed that the colourful folk dance and the pulsating music of the NE's tribal communities will be regularly performed in the amphitheatre by native artists, each bringing out the best of its traditional musical instrument.

"North East Tribal Festival will also be organized annually to propagate the colourful ethnic art and culture of the various tribal communities of NE. It will be at par like the Hornbill Festival, Khajurahoo Festival, Taj Festival etc. The food court will dish out an array of the ethnic food of all the tribes, all under one roof," Gum added.

It was also learnt from Gum that the museum is also expected to facilitate research on tribal communities of the North East, exchange of tribal culture with rest of the country will be organized through festivals and camps.

"Valuable clothes like *Miri Jim* of the Mishing tribe, *Thym* of Tripuri, *Bokaku* of *Deori*, *Boiragi* of each tribal community will also be provided to night stay visitors. Necessary tools and facilities will also be provided for entertaining the children," Gum further said.

(The Sentinel – 7.3.2014)

Maniram Dewan, Piyali Barua's Sacrifices Recalled

A commemoration meeting held by the Maniram Dewan Memorial Trust 27 Feb demanded publication of a postage stamp in memory of Maniram Dewan, the martyr of the First Indian War of Independence, on April 23 next on the occasion of his 209th birth anniversary. The meeting was held on the occasion of the 156th death anniversary of Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua at the Rupnagar Mukti Jujaru Bhawan here.

The meeting also urged the State government to organise official functions in memory of Maniram Dewan and his fellow freedom fighters.

Both Dewan and Barua were hanged by the British colonial rulers on February 26, 1858, for their involvement in the First Indian Freedom Struggle in 1857, the British called it as the Sepoy Mutiny.

On the occasion, two functions were held in the city today, the Rupnagar function being one of them. The other function was held at the Guwahati Press Club by the Assam branch of the All India Patriotic Forum. The Assam Freedom Fighters'

Association assisted the Maniram Dewan Memorial Trust in organising the Rupnagar function.

Delivering the memorial lecture at the Rupnagar function, writer Bimal Kumar Hazarika described Maniram Dewan as the most outstanding personality in the country's First Freedom Struggle.

Despite a section of the intellectuals' bid to malign the image of Maniram as a minion of the feudal lords, he remained the harbinger of new industrial awakening in the country, Hazarika claimed.

Hazarika also mentioned the scholarship of Dewan and his contemporary Piyali Barua and spoke on the valour demonstrated by Dewan's other contemporaries, like Bahadur Gaonburha, Farmud Ali, Madhu Mullick, among others, who were deported to Andaman.

The vice president of the Trust, Bhupendra Kumar Das, spoke on the contributions made by Dewan as the first Indian tea planter.

In his presidential address, DN

Chakravorty said that besides being the pioneer in the field of tea industry, Dewan was the first journalist of Assam, too. He was a regular representative of the Samachar Darpan published from Calcutta.

Dewan also had command over several languages, including English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian and Bengali. He had authored the voluminous history book *Buranji Bibek Ratna*. His other works include *Barabhuyar Charitra* and *Bhakti Pradip*.

Keshab Kanta Barua, working president of the Assam Freedom Fighters' Association, also spoke on the occasion. Earlier, the function was inaugurated by Arun Kumar Barua, the great grandson of Dewan.

At the Guwahati Press Club function, rich tributes were paid to Dewan and Piyali Barua and their contributions were remembered. The function was addressed by the State president of the Forum Rupam Barua, Colonel Monoranjan Goswami, Ajay Dutta, Major General Purnananda Das and Jaharlal Saha, among others.

(The Assam Tribune – 27.2.2014)

Rs. 3600 Crores are Spent as Scholarship to Minority Students in the Country

More than half the budget of the minority affairs ministry is spent on scholarships, Minority Affairs Minister K. Rahman Khan said Tuesday.

"More than half of the annual budget of the ministry is spent on scholarship and fellowship programmes," he said.

"During 2012-13 and 2013-14 so far, the ministry has spent more than Rs.3,600 crore to award scholarships to more than 1.58 crore minority students," he added.

The minister was speaking after launching the Maulana Azad Sehat

Scheme, a health scheme for minority institutions.

Under it, a health card would be issued to every student of minority institutions financially aided by the Maulana Azad Education Foundation.

Preventive health check-up camps would be organised twice a year through government or private hospitals or nursing homes.

Health care centres will also be set up in the educational institutions to provide daily medical facilities to the students.

The minister also launched a

project for orientation and development of faculties of minority institutions.

The Nalanda Project will be run by Aligarh Muslim University for orientation and development of faculty.

"The need for faculty development programmes in higher education is immense for several reasons, like increases in the complexity of higher education, demands from internal and external constituencies and the necessity to balance teaching, scholarship, service and personal responsibilities," the minister said.

(The Sentinel – 5.3.2014)

Deepening Mystery of Malaysia Airline's Boeing 777-200ER

Though far more people die all over the world in road accidents, the aura surrounding a plane-crash appears more tragic, perhaps because of the sense of inevitable death air-tragedies carry. The pathos evoked by the crash of the Beijing-bound Malaysia Airline's Boeing 777-200ER aircraft carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew members has been tinged too with an air of mystery. Four days after the disappearance of the plane from monitoring radars, despite the deployment of 34 planes and 40 ships belonging to over a dozen nations, no trace of the missing aircraft has been found. Expectedly, a majority of the passengers were, Chinese, 154 of them, which explains the presence of Chinese search and rescue vessels in the Gulf of Thailand between Malaysia and Vietnam in the endeavour to locate the wreckage of the downed plane. While such a large deployment of Chinese vessels across the disputed stretch of South China Sea would have ordinarily

raised a hue and cry ironically on this occasion these were welcomed as they responded to Malaysian requests and joined in the search mission. Even the US, their ubiquitous FBI included, has joined in the search effort, but has not been able to contribute much to the unraveling of what is turning out to be a deepening mystery.

Indeed, it is astonishing that in these days of technological advancement, especially that of surveillance technology including the use of precise satellite imaging, an international effort so far has not been able to locate the wreckage. Adding to the conundrum as to where exactly the plane crashed has been the growing suspicion that the downing was an act of sabotage by terrorists. Quite a few pointers indicate that there is more than meets the eye to this tragedy, not the least being the fact that two of the passengers had been travelling on stolen passports and had purchased their tickets to-

gether. The search mission also has not been able to spot any oil slick or widely scattered debris, which would have been the case had the plane hit the waters intact. At the same time, there was no distress signal from the pilots or any may day calls, though reportedly possibilities have been detected that the aircraft was trying to reverse course before communication was cut off and it vanished from the radar screen. All circumstantial evidence points to the possibility that the Boeing may have exploded in the air, thereby hinting at an act of terrorism. Things might attain greater clarity once the missing aircraft, or at least the spot where it crashed, is located enabling the gathering of more forensic evidence if not actually the recovery of the black-box. On the other hand, given that so much time and effort has not yielded the slightest progress, this plane-crash might remain an unexplained mystery.

(Ed. The Assam Tribune-11.3.2014)

A Seminar Talk on Role of Namghars in Cultural Life of Assam



Noted journalist Pulin Kalita focused on the 'Emergence of Namghar in Assamese Society: A Historical Overview' at a recent interactive session on the namghar which was organised by the Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture, (VKIC) Guwahati.

At the meeting, well-attended by

various members of namghars of Guwahati, Pulin Kalita brought to light how the namghar evolved and how it became the centre head of Assamese religious and spiritual place. He also brought into focus how Srimanta Sankardeva built up the institution in different places even amidst adversities. He had to shift to different places even after creating namghars.

Pulin Kalita pointed out that there are namghars in Christian-dominated States, like Meghalaya, where worshippers continue to worship, although in different forms.

"The social and cultural roles of namghars cannot be denied in rural areas, where they are held in high esteem. It also has an educational impact in many areas," he added.

Moderator Dr Sanjib Borkakoti mentioned that although Vaishnavism is not restricted to Sankardeva only, Ek Saran Nam Dharma is exclusive to his belief.

Dr Borkakoti also mentioned about the Kalialia Badya, which is found in Nagaon district and is still considered as part and parcel of namghar.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Prof DC Baroowa, Director, Research Advisory Council, VKIC mentioned about the significance of namghars in Assamese cultural life and hoped that the ongoing series on namghar, which is a VKIC initiative, will throw further light on the important subject.

(The Assam Tribune – 7.3.2014)

Identity of Somarasa

-Sri Gautam Borthakur

What is Soma Rasa?

Some ancient texts translated by western scholars of Sanskrit talk about Soma rasa prepared from a plant is a juice of intoxication. Some say it is elixir of life or *Amrita*. There has been widespread debate and discussion about this. But the tradition of Yoga and Tantras have defined well the meaning of Somrasa.

From Rig Veda to see if it is really pointing at an intoxicant. "O Soma you alone create the medicines that heal us. You alone create the water that quenches our thirst. You alone create all moving objects, sense organs and living beings and also us the life" Rig Veda 1.91.22.

Soma is not only pure in itself but also purifies everything else. Some is extremely sweet and

promotes noble qualities. It destroys sinful tendencies. "O Soma purify us, from everywhere. Enter us which excitement and strengthen our speech. Inculcate a sharp intellect within us." Rig Veda – 9.108.3

Hatha Yoga Pradeepika explains "Soma Rasa as the gift of the Moon centre of the body, originating from deep behind the eyebrows. The juice is saline, similar in constitution to ghee with texture and consistency of honey. You lead us towards immortality."

Botanical Identity: From the late 1960s onwards, several studies attempted to establish Soma rasa as a psychotropic substance. A number of proposals were made including. Robert Gordon Wasson an amateur mycologist, who (on Vedic evidence) asserted that Soma was an inebriant and suggested fly

agarics mushroom *Amanita, muscaria*. As this was contradicted in 1974. Iranian scientist Illya Greshvitch who determined that in small doses, fly agaric was indeed a stimulant peganum Harmala known in Iranian languages as esfand or seband or other similar terms related to Avestan word "*Spenta*" means sacred or holy.

Soma description species

Pegnum Harmala

Family: Nitrariaceae .

Conclusion : Vedas were not written by common man. So common man find it difficult to understand and he often misunderstands and misinterests it. This is what has happened when western Sanskrit scholars started translating ancient Sanskrit texts.

(Contd. from Page 7)

Vaishnavite Tourism....

original birthplace Srimanta Sankardeva, Khatara Satra in the Darrang district and Nikamul at Tezpur in the Sonitpur district. The fourth sub-zone of Vaishnavite tourism is Cooch Behar located in North Bengal. Here, the Madhupur Satra bears the memories of the Koch King Naranarayana, the great patron of Sankardeva. Moreover various Vaishnava Namghars and Thaans are located in different areas in Assam which also comprise the Vaishnavite tourism resources.

In spite of the rich potential resources available for this new trend of tourism, the lack of infrastructural facilities and proper management are the main constraints for promotion and development of Vaishnavite tourism in Assam. The

systematic presentation and performance of various performing arts relating to the Satriya and Vaishnavite culture in the Satra premises or different cultural centres of the State and various forms of other visual arts like paintings on the walls of the Satras and Namghars, different statues, Guru aashana, wood craft, architecture of the Kirtan Ghars and Namghars, Manikut, Karapat (Batchora), etc., are necessary for introducing and promoting Vaishnavite tourism in the State. The transportation and accommodation facilities must be good and well equipped in this regards. The respective state government departments like the Directorate of Tourism and the Assam Tourism Development

Corporation under the Ministry of Tourism should be provided financial assistance by the government for infrastructural development and maintenance of the Satriya cultural items and resources as well as conservation of the Satras and other Vaishnavite institutions.

There should be special schemes for providing financial assistance to the artists in order to keep and practice the art form traditionally alive.

Last but-not the least, tourist guides who are well trained and well versed in Vaishnava literature and Satriya culture should be appointed for enhancing tourism in various Vaishnavite institutions of Assam which can help attract the tourists.

(The Assam Tribune-01.03.2014)

Centuries of Women's Struggle

- Dr Dinesh Baishya

Women of the world have struggled for their rights for centuries as per records in history. The progress in the struggle for Women's Rights is not a straight-line. There are many developments in the society throughout history, but this development is not equal to the struggle of women for their rights. In many societies where women are repressed today were the most enlightened in the past. History of the struggle of the women proves that rights can be won and also can be taken away. Landmarks on the road that the women have been struggling along for centuries have established this tragedy of women in the world.

As early as in 900 BC, the women of ancient Sumer, present Iraq, Egypt and Japan, could own property, play active roles in the market place and even in ecclesiastic. In precolonial Latin America, some native cultures practiced "gender parallelism". This practise valued equally the distinct and overlapping tasks performed by men and women. In 1400s, trade brought new status to women in some countries. In Nigeria Yoruba women elected their own female representative to protect their trading interest. During the French Revolution, (1776), working women marched on Versailles to demand bread. In 1791 French playwright Olympe de Gouges issued the Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen.

In 1792, in Britain, Mary Wollstonecraft rejected conventional family authority, believed in female education, and bore a child out of wedlock. She wrote 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', which became a catalyst for subsequent feminist thinking. In 1850s in Brazil women like O Journal das Senhoras (Journal of Women) complained that marriage is an 'unbearable tyranny' and women deserve 'a just enjoyment of their

Rights'. In the eighties of nineteenth century Khisida Toshiko founded the Japanese women's movement. She had started the movement with the demand that the women's horizon to be 'as large and free as the world itself'. The Japanese Government put her in jail. Japanese Government eventually banned women's political participation. In 1893, New Zealand became the first country to give women the right to vote. In 1896, in the US the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) founded by Margaret Murray Washington, united Black women's organizations, with Merry Church Terrell its first president. The NACW became a major vehicle for reform during the next forty years. In 1923, Huda Sharawawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union. Women were at the forefront of the battle for independence from the British. During this time, Islam was used to justify the education of women. In 1911, socialists observed 8 March as a day to honour the women who organized strikes for better working conditions. In Mexico, Jovita and Soledad Pena organized La Liga femenil Mexacanista (League of Mexican Feminists).

Year 1926 is remarkable for women not only of Turkey but also for the entire world. As a part of modernization process of Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, (Father of Turks), one of the great figures of the 20th century abolished polygamy, made schools and universities co educational, gave women political rights and recognized the equal rights of women in divorce, custody and inheritance. In Nigeria in 1929, the British rulers imposed a new tax on women's property. The Nigerian Igbo women's trading network started a revolution against this decision of British rulers. A big crowd of women came out to the street and declared a "women's war" against the British rulers. The British put down

the revolution by firing into the crowd, killing fifty women and injuring many. This is one of the biggest women's revolutions in Nigeria demanding their rights.

In 1941, a large number of women were recruited in various jobs in US. During the war almost seven million women joined various jobs. Two million women joined in industries and four million women who joined military. This is the highest number of women in various jobs in a year during that time. In India in the year of independence in 1947, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation expressed strong opposition to male domination of women and India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, called for equal opportunities in education and jobs for women and men. The nationalist leaders of India during the time of independence struggle had adopted the historic slogan- "India cannot be free until its women are free and women cannot be free until India is free". The constitution of India guarantees equality between sexes.

In 1948 in Egypt, Doria Shafik formed a women organization in the name 'the daughters of Nile union'. Doria Shafik was one of the women leaders who led the women's liberation movement in Egypt in the early 1950s. Because of her activities,

Egyptian women now have the right to elect and nominate in the Egyptian constitution. She founded literature patrols, and served as a freedom fighter against the British occupation in Egypt. She was among the first female students sent by the Egyptian Ministry of Education to study at Sorbonne University in Paris at the government's expense. She also studied for a PhD in philosophy at the Sorbonne; her thesis subject was 'Woman in Islam' in which she argued that Islam allows equality for women.

(Contd. to Page 15)

Mass Tour Programme in Connection with Freedom Fighter Rani Ma Gaidinliu Birth Centenary Celebration Year 2014-15

The Birth Centenary Celebration of Rani Ma Gaidinliu (26th January 1915 – 26th January 2014) is being observed during the year 2015 starting from 26th January onwards and as a fore-runner programme – a mass tour programme started on 17th March 2014 from Lodi Village near Halflong in Dima Hasao district of Assam.

Rani Gaidinliu was born on 26th January 1915 to her father Lothonang and mother Keluatlinliu in Lungkao village of Tamenglong district of Manipur. At the tender age of 13, she joined the Heraka Movement and freedom struggle started by Haipou Jadonang and she led the freedom struggle when Jadonang was hanged on 29th August 1931 at Imphal (Manipur) by the British. She was captured on 18th October 1932 at Pulomi (Poilwa) village in present Nagaland (then Naga Hills). She was put in jail for life long and was released only in 1947 when Bharatvarsh got independence.

With a view to commemorate her memory and educate the Naga people in particular and the nation in general about her contribution in achieving the freedom of the country, the Mass Tour cum preaching was initiated programme on 17th March 2014 at Lodi village.

A befitting send-off programme was organised in village council hall of Lodi village in which 300 people (men & women both) from Lodi, Bagetar and Halflong town attended the function. While speaking on the occasion as President of Zeliangrong Heraka Association (Assam, Manipur & Nagaland) Shri Ramkuiwangbe Newmei threw light on the divine birth of Rani and went at length on her freedom struggle, life imprisonment, release from isolation in 1947, her struggle against alien forces to protect Heraka Religion, Heraka Culture and Heraka people in free Bharatvarsh during the period 1960-1966. Shri Ramkuiji narrated that from 1966, she stayed at Kohima and

devoted her whole life for the activities aimed at preservation, protection and promotion of Heraka Religion, Heraka Culture and Zeliangrong people.

Britishers declared Rani Ma as “Terror of North-East” and they decided to punish whole Zeliangrong community. For weakening the society, the British Government distributed Zeliangrong community in three States – Manipur, Assam & Nagaland (then Naga Hills). Purposefully, no development programme was undertaken and all the steps were taken to convert Zeliangrong peoples in alien religion” – said Shri Ramkuiji and added – “Rani Ma did her best for the integration of Zeliangrong area into one administrative unit”.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Jagdamba Mall, Organising Secretary, Janjati Dharma Sanskriti Suraksha Manch, said that Rani Ma was divine healer, a successful organiser, a brave commander, an epoch maker, a poet, a good singer and a folk dancer. Rani Ma composed over 300 songs including devotional hymns, patriotic songs and poems to be sung while observing different rites and rituals of birth and death, marriage and festivals etc. The songs were revealed by Lord Tingwang on different visits to Bhavan Cave.

Jagdamba Mall said that though she could not get any formal education, she was so bold and strong enough with commitment that she discussed her people’s problems with Prime Minister Smt Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. He added that Rani Gaidinliu was a strong bridge at gulf between Nagas and non-Nagas over which both the communities walked to meet other and exchange their goodwill for one-other. “This programme and many other such programmes will clear the clouds of myths about Naga society” – Jagdamba Mall added.

A vehicle was decorated as “Rath” (chariot) with Rani Ma’s Photo, puja

was performed in front of the photo by Shri Ramkuiji, Shri Tanjanji and the Paipeu of the village. The “Rath” is fitted with sound system for announcement. A convoy of ten 4-wheelers occupied and 10 motor cycles, by almost 60 Heraka leaders / workers over 100 laminated photos of Rani Ma and 100 laminated photos of Heraka’s divine symbol are carried to be given to each Heraka Kelumki (Mandir).

Before launching the 10-days tour cum preaching programme, the Rani Ma’s Rath along with the convoy of accompanying vehicles visited Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) campus to pay respect to VHP which has been serving the society since four decades from 1975 onwards. The longest serving worker, Shri Ramanand Sharma from Balia (U.P.) welcomed the Rath along with the team of VHP workers. The Rath halted at the statue of Rani Gaidinliu on road side in Bada Halflong and Shri Ramkuiji and Shri Tanjanji offered floral tribute to Rani Ma.

The dais of send-off programme was also shared by Ramesh Babu (Akhil Bharatiya Shradhaa Jagaran Pramukh, Kalyan Ashram), Shri Ramanand Sharma (Uttar Poorva Sewa Pramukh of VHP), Shri Ram Singh (Dharma Jagaran Pramukh of Dakshin Assam Prant), Shri Dinesh Tiwari (Vibhag Pracharak), Shri Somendra Longmaile (Vibhag Karyavah of Halflong Vibhag and Chief Trustee of Keshav Smarak Nyas Halflong), Shri Yogendra Singh, Project Pramukh Vidya Bharati Halflong, Jagdamba Mall, Thunbui Zeliang, General Secretary, Heraka Association Nagaland, Surya Prakash Rao, Purna Chandra Mandol.

Earlier, the key and documents of new vehicle was handed over to Ramkuiji by Somendra Longmaile on behalf of Keshav Smarak Nyas Halflong. On the same day, the Rath was welcomed at Mahur by 300

(Contd. to Page 15)

The Alarming Cases of Human Trafficking in Assam

On 3rd March 2014, Guwahati, the UNICEF presented a report on the trafficking of women and children. According to the report, during the last 31 months, out of a total of 207 cases of rescue, 56 per cent were girls and 20 per cent boys. These have been collected from CID records.

During the period from January 2011 to March 2013, the total number of missing cases of women and children is 2,454. In 2011, the numbers of missing girls, boys and women are 511, 235 and 664 respectively. In 2012, these figures are 262, 97 and 399 respectively. And

in 2013, such figures are 95, 36 and 155 respectively.

On the other hand, according to a report by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), a total of 3,697 people have gone missing during the last 31 months. The report states that a minimum of 3,000 girls, boys and women have been rescued from trafficking. The period in question is from January 2011 to July 2013.

According to the CWC, trafficking of girls is more for engagement as child labourers (domestic labour force) in Assam. Girls are also getting trafficked outside Assam for sexual exploitation, the rate of which

is higher than that of those being trafficked for use as domestic labour force. Boys are mostly trafficked for use as child labour force. The main hub of such trafficking is Guwahati, said the report.

Why is the Assam government not able to control such trafficking of innocent people? A million-dollar question.

The UNICEF report was released by Assam Social Welfare Department Minister Akon Bora and Gauhati High Court judge Justice Indira Shah in Guwahati on Tuesday.

(The Sentinel – 5.3.14)

(Contd. from Page 13)

Centuries of ...

On her return from France accompanied by her husband, the dean of the faculty of arts in Cairo University rejected hiring her in the university because “she is a woman”. Princess Shuvekar (the first wife of King Fuad I of Egypt), offered her the position of chief manager of the new women’s magazine. It was the first magazine, written in Arabic and directed to teach and educate the Egyptian woman. In 1951, she organized the invasion of Egyptian parliament by women. In February 1951, she led a demonstration, accompanied by 1500 Egyptian women, during which she broke into the Egyptian Chamber and spoke to the council to consider the issues and

demands of Egyptian women. After a week, the Council granted Egyptian women the right to vote and stand for parliament. In 1953, she started a women’s political party in Egypt, which was suppressed by the Government.

In 1959 in Eastern Nigeria, 2000 women protested against their declining status by occupying and setting fire to a market. They negotiated a resolution that eliminated all foreign courts and schools and expelled all foreigners in the area. In 1977, Argentinean women formed the ‘Mother of Plaza de Mayo’ to defy the murderous military Junta that seized power from President Isabel Peron of Argentina.

In the last three decades of twentieth century and in the first decade of twenty first century there have been large numbers of feminist movements all over the world. The first international women’s conference in Mexico launched the United Nations decade for the women and formation of women’s groups all over the world, including feminist newspapers, student organizations, professional women and lesbian feminist groups. Followed by International women’s conferences in Copenhagen, Nairobi, Beijing and other cities. Women’s right have become enriched in law in many countries.

(The Assam Tribune – 09.03.2014)

(Contd. to Page 14)

Mass Tour Programme in Connection with Freedom...

Heraka followers where Ramkui ji and Ramesh Babu spoke on the occasion.

Rath Yatra commenced on 16th March from Lodingram, Haflong completed its first phase on 26th March after covering 650 k.m. touching Zeliangrong tribe inhabited villages in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. It received warm reception at 23 places with public meetings, processions, cultural programmes etc. Shri Ramkuiwangbe Newmei, Shri Thumbui Zeliang, Shri Diralung Zeme, Shri Kilungbe Zeme, Shri Pautanzan, Shri Iwangnungbe Newmei, Shri Hurui Zeliang, Shri Sabuing, Shri Kingthiliu Zeliang and Heraka Pracharaks addressed the public at different places. People gathered over in large number with great enthusiasm. They paid tribute to the portrait of Ranima Gaidinliu. 45 members in five vehicles covered the areas from beginning to end as mentioned in the chart below. Later, Another 4 vehicles with 20 volunteers from Nagaland also joined in the Yatra. Team visited the ‘Samadhi’ of late N.C. Zeliang at Jalukie and Ranima’s divine stone at Mbapungwa village.

Buddhist Student Wins Big! School Must Stop Endorsing Christianity

- JEAN ANN ESSELINK

The parents of a Louisiana sixth-grader, who say he was harassed by his Uber-Christian teacher for being Buddhist, have reached a settlement with the school. Negreet High School has agreed to no longer endorse prayer at school events, and to neither promote nor denigrate any religion.

The boy, identified in court documents only as "C.C." was a student at Negreet High School in Sabine Parish, Louisiana, which serves students from graded 1-12. C.C., who is of Thai decent, claimed the staff, and especially his science teacher Rita Roark, who was named in the lawsuit, regularly harassed and humiliated him because of his Buddhist faith, and would try to convert him to Christianity.

Ms. Roark's behavior as reported appears particularly egregious. According to the ACLU, which represented C.C.'s parents Scott and Sharon Lane, the "science" teacher taught students that the Earth was created by God 6,000 years ago, that evolution is "impossible," and that the Bible is "100 percent true."

The complaint also said Ms. Roark regularly included on her tests religious propaganda like "ISN'T IT

AMAZING WHAT THE HAS MADE!!! And that she belittled C.C. in front of the class when he didn't answer "LORD." C.C. also said while studying other religions, Ms. Roark told the class that Buddhism is "stupid."

"Public schools should be welcoming places for students of all backgrounds," said Marjorie Esman, executive director of the ACLU of Louisiana. "No child should be harassed and made to feel like an outsider in his own classroom, and students should not have to endure school officials constantly imposing their religious beliefs on them while they are trying to learn."

The Lanes say Negreet High School regularly put Christianity front and center, with Christian prayer in class and at school events. Christian themed religious displays can be found throughout the school, including a large portrait of Jesus Christ, and an electronic sign in front of the school that scrolls Bible verses as students enter the building. Under the settlement, these will have to be removed.

The Lanes say when they raised concerns, Sabine Parish

Superintendent Sara Ebarb told them: "This is the Bible belt." Ms. Ebarb then suggested that C.C. should change his faith and advised the Lanes to transfer him to another district school 25 miles away where, "there are more Asians."

The Lanes did remove all three of their children from Negreet High School, but were determined to press their lawsuit to stop the discrimination. Under the consent decree, the school agrees that if adjudicated, their policies would be found to be violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The school board also admitted its policies "endorse and promote religion and coerce religious exercise."

The consent decree permanently enjoins school prayer at any event, prohibits teachers from discussing their own personal beliefs, and from either endorsing or denigrating any religion. Teachers and school staff will be required to attend a training session with an attorney to assure compliance.

(<http://thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/buddhist-student-wins-big-school-must-stop-endorsing-christianity/discrimination/2014/03/19/84554>)

Pope Got Offended by His Own Myth and Mystique

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis finds the hype that is increasingly surrounding him "offensive," according to an interview published Wednesday, even as the Vatican is marking the anniversary of his election with commemorative stamps and coins and a DVD with never-before-seen footage of the pope.

Francis told Italian daily Corriere della Sera he doesn't appreciate the myth-making that has seen him depicted as a "Superpope" (as an

Italian street artist recently painted him) who sneaks out at night to feed the poor (as Italian newspapers have suggested).

On Wednesday, he had to contend with a new bout of celebrity as "My Pope" hit Italian newsstands, a weekly gossip magazine devoted entirely to Francis. It is published by Mondadori, which is owned by ex-Premier Silvio Berlusconi's media empire. In addition, at his general audience, someone tried to give him

a replica of an Oscar statue that said "Oscar Pope" on it.

"I don't like ideological interpretations, this type of mythology of Pope Francis," the pope told Corriere. "If I'm not mistaken, Sigmund Freud said that in every idealization there's an aggression. Depicting the pope as a sort of Superman, a star, is offensive to me.

"The pope is a man who laughs, cries, sleeps calmly and has friends

(Contd. to Page 26)

Benedict Option

- ROD DREHER

March 19, 2014: Bad news for the future of Catholicism in America, according to the Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith, and his colleagues. In their new book *Young Catholic America*, they build on social science data showing the following about young Catholic adults:

They don't understand their faith well enough to pass it on to any children they may have. They believe that their own subjective beliefs and experiences are a more important arbiter of truth than the Church. They pick and choose what they want to believe, discarding the parts that they dislike (e.g., in particular, teaching on sexuality).

They are less involved with the Church as an institution (e.g., don't go to mass as often), and feel more loosely tied to it than previous Catholic generations. They tend to believe that the Catholic Church is just one church among others, with no special claim to the truth.

They affirm a Catholic identity, but reserve the right to define that as they want to; plus, they see their Catholicism not as being at the center of their identity, but one facet among others. They are unable to articulate a coherent case for what it means to be Catholic. I don't have a copy of the book in hand, but reading the excerpt available on Amazon, the authors say that the collapse of Catholic identity in the US had a lot to do with the collapse of catechesis after the Second Vatican Council; with a determination among leaders of Catholic universities, which had been important custodians of

Catholic identity, to assimilate into the mainstream; and the widespread rejection of *Humanae Vitae*, the encyclical in which Paul VI reaffirmed the Church's historic teaching outlawing contraception. The authors are careful not to blame HV for this, but simply to say that once American Catholics decided that they didn't have to obey the Church on this teaching, a cultural and psychological Rubicon was crossed.

The authors say that the hinge of modern American Catholic history was the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s - the first one to be raised in postconciliar Catholicism. Generally speaking, they were poorly taught, and poorly formed in the habits of Catholicism. They have proven to be terrible at passing on Catholicism to their children. According to Smith et al., social science studies have repeatedly shown that the most important factor in passing on religious faith to the next generation is the practices of parents. This is even more important than one's pastor. If parents don't know and live out the faith, it is unlikely that their children will. It takes only a generation to greatly increase the likelihood that the faith will be lost to all subsequent generations. In the past, when there were cultural constructs that were recognizably Christian, parents could at least theoretically afford to be less vigilant, trusting that their kids would be more or less catechized by the ambient Christianity in the culture. Those days are long gone, though.

Smith and his co-authors say this is a rule of thumb for all parents with regard to religious

education of their kids: "We will get what we are." That is, the faith of our children will not be determined by what we profess to believe, or what idealize, but by what we live out every day in our families and communities.

Here's the important, not-to-be-missed point from Smith's work: everything that has gone wrong with American Catholicism and its young adults is pretty much equally true of other Christian churches, with the exception of Mormons.

True, there are particular reasons for why this has happened in Catholicism, and why it happened the way it did. But what Catholicism has in common with Protestantism in this sense is far more important than how it differs. As I've said here before, some intellectually-minded Protestants - often Anglicans - who despair over the freefall of their own churches on questions of faith and morals look to the rock of Rome as an ecclesial and epistemological shelter from postmodernity, which has hit the churches like a firehose gushing acid. What they usually find, at least in this country, is a church whose ideals are quite far from what is lived out. Generally speaking, American Catholicism at the popular level - that is, outside of relatively small groups of orthodox Catholic intellectuals and the journals to which they contribute - pretty much as Protestant as any other church.

(http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/christianity-collapse-catholicism-benedictoption/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=christianity-collapse-catholicism-benedict-option)

5 Intriguing Facts About the Roma

- Marc Lallanilla

Their names are as mysterious as their origins: Often called the Roma or the Romani people, they're also known as gitanos in Spain, Kale in Finland and Portugal, Manush or gitan in France and Travelers in Scandinavia.

And almost everywhere they go, they're referred to - somewhat pejoratively - as gypsies, a people who have migrated throughout the world over the course of several centuries.

The Roma have one of the most dramatic stories in human history, but few people know their ancient tale of travel, persecution and survival. Here are five intriguing facts about the Romani people:

1. The Roma originated in India

There's a wealth of evidence - from genetics as well as linguistics - that the Roma are originally a Hindi people from northern India. Many of the words and grammatical rules of the Romani language are virtually identical to those of the Hindi language. [Top 10 Mysteries of the First Humans]

A 2012 study, published in the journal *Cell Biology*, analyzed genomic data from 13 Romani communities across Europe. The researchers concluded that the Roma people left northern India about 1,500 years ago; those Roma now in Europe migrated through the Balkans starting about 900 years ago. These data confirm written reports of Roma groups arriving in medieval Europe in the 1100s.

2. There are about 12 million Roma worldwide

After leaving northern India, most Romani went to Europe: In some Eastern European countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, they form up to 12 percent of the total population. The Roma are also numerous in Turkey, which has about 2.75 million Romani, according to *The New York Times*: Other European countries with large Roma populations include

Russia, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Spain and France.

Though concentrated in Europe, there are also Romani populations on every occupied continent - about 1 million live in the United States, and roughly 800,000 in Brazil. But no matter where they go, the Roma seem to be unwelcomed.

3. The Romani faced horrific persecution

Shortly after arriving in Europe, the Romani were enslaved in many regions, a cultural heritage that continued into the 19th century in countries like Romania. In England, Switzerland and Denmark, the Romani were put to death throughout the medieval era. Many countries, such as Germany, Italy and Portugal, ordered the expulsion of all Romani.

There are countless reports of Roma children being abducted from their parents, women who had their ears cut off, and Romani who were branded with hot irons. In an effort to force assimilation, the use of their native language was forbidden in some countries; other places forbade the Roma to marry among themselves.

Perhaps the most devastating persecution of the Romani occurred during World War II, when they were among the first targets of Nazi atrocities, according to the BBC. An estimated 2 million Romani died in concentration camps and through other means of extermination. [7 Absolutely Evil Medical Experiments]

In the post-war era, the Romani remained an oppressed group, especially in the Soviet Union. As recently as the 1980s, Roma women in Czechoslovakia were forced to undergo sterilization to limit the Romani population.

4. Roma culture is a rich and fascinating collage.

The Romani are often celebrated for their musical heritage, which has influenced jazz, bolero, flamenco

music, as well as classical composers including Franz Liszt.

While it's believed that the Roma were originally Hindu, over the centuries, most Romani have adopted the religions of their host countries. The majority of Roma communities now practice a form of Islam or Christianity that retains some Romani influences.

Traditional Roma society still arranges marriages between minors as young as 12, according to the BBC. Teenage brides are sometimes bartered and traded between Roma communities, an activity that has alarmed European officials concerned with human trafficking.

A 2006 report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also found that some Roma communities practice child trafficking; children have reportedly been engaged for labor, petty crime and sexual exploitation.

5. The Romani remain an oppressed group

Many Romani avoid assimilation with the larger societies of their host countries - this may be a legacy of centuries of persecution. Because of their isolation, many Roma children do not attend school; Romani typically lack access to stable jobs, affordable housing, health care and other social services. As a result, poverty, disease, substance abuse and crime plague many Roma communities.

For these and other reasons, the Romani remain a persecuted minority, including those living in affluent European countries with enviable social services. Authorities in Italy have denied housing to Roma families - even those born in Italy - on the grounds that people living in cheap, makeshift metal containers in isolated Roma camps already have permanent housing, according to the Guardian.

This month, protests erupted in France after authorities detained a

(Contd. to Page 26)

Description of Mann Communitarian of Garo Hills, Meghalaya

- Shri. Dibakar Mann
& Jyotirmoy Mann

When we look at the history of Assam, it is seen that there was a family feud resulting in a clash between Purnananda Bura Gohain and Bodon Chandra Borphukan. This clash brought Bodon seek the help of the King of Burma Boduyappa in 1817 and fight his uncle. Boduyappa extended his help and the Mann soldiers attacked Assam three times. When the Mann soldiers attacked Assam for the third time, they conquered places like Goalpara, Sylhet and Chittagong which were then ruled by the British; and onwards they marched to Kachar. The British tried to stop the Mann invasion (1817-24) and at Bikrampur in Kachar a battle between the Mann and the British took place. The Mann army was defeated by the British and they were scattered. After that battle, the Mann soldiers faced another battle in the banks of the river Borak, where they again faced defeat and fled to Manipur. During that time, the British made a strong plan of action to send the Mann army back to Burma (Myanmar). For a variety of reasons, the number of the Mann army started decreasing and the remaining troops panicked and they moved towards the Upper Mohura. In January 1825, the main encampment of the Mann army in Mohura situated in Upper Assam came under the control of the British. Cham Phukan and Bogoli Phukan were two leaders of the Mann army, in which the chief of the army was Moha Bandulla. They knew that it was impossible to defeat the British, so they sent a Buddhist monk, Dharmadhar Brahmachari, with the proposal of a truce. Colonel Richard accepted the truce and a treaty signed between the Mann King Byagiduwa, Mann Army Chief Bandulla and the British on 24th February, 1826. The British also conquered Rongpur and the Mann army was forced to leave

Assam. Though the majority of the Mann army left Assam, some of the Mann soldiers remained and became faithful soldiers for the British and with their help the British (1869-1903) were able to conquer the Lushai, Naga and Garo Hills. The British were impressed with the bravery of the Mann soldiers in the battlefield and as a reward handed over places like Mashokpara, Shyamnagar, Bangalkhata, Ronkhola, etc, bordering Goalpara (Assam) for the permanent settlement of Mann people.

Besides, in the year 1895, Sir C. G. M. Kennedy provided 41 rifles to the Mann soldiers for their self protection and the responsibility was given to Aipan Hawaldar. According to information some places were given where the Mann people were exempted from paying taxes, but due miscommunication, these orders were not executed. The Mann soldiers helped in the work of Government till India got its independence. The rifles, which were given for protection, were submitted at the time of the Second World War.

The Mann people living in the districts of Garo Hills, are the branches of following lineages:

1. Shri Patu Hawaldar- Shri Tulanengra Mann (son) - Shri. Loghon Mann (son)

2. Shri Aipan Hawaldar - Shri Shingbor Mann (son) - Shri. Bhakta and Shri. Atul Mann (sons)

3. Shri Meo Shobidar - Shri Kandura Mann (son) - Smt. Roheswari Mann and Smt. Dhoneswari Mann (daughters)

4. Shri Lesham Mann (Soldier) - Shri Gial Mann (son) - Shri, Ladu Mann (son)

- Shri Debendralal Man (son)

5. Shri Shombaru Mann (Soldier) - Shri Aasaru Mann (son) - Shri Bheloram Mann (son)

The forefathers of Mann people

have long expired. The remaining Mann people have forgotten all their languages, culture, behaviour, and so on. Since the Manns came to these regions only as soldiers, they did not bring their wives or girls along with them. That's why, they married the girls from different community and started living in Garo Pahar (Garo Hills) of Assam as their own motherland. A majority of the forefathers might have married to local indigenous tribal women. The Mann people have also forgotten their religion, i.e., Buddhism when they began to live in the Garo Hills. But, in the meantime, the Burmese came to know about the existence of Mann in Garo Hills and they sent a Buddhist monk yen. Urimala to teach Buddhism to the Mann people. Two more monks came afterwards, ven. Unandra and ven. Uchandra, to teach and spread Buddhism. They established Buddha statues in each and every village where there were Manns. Since then, the Mann people began to follow Buddhism.

Now, some of the Buddhist monks from Upper Assam visit Garo Hills to teach about the Buddhist religion. At present there are many Buddhist monks who went from Garo Hills and learnt to become monks. The names are yen. Mahastovir Ungyanashara, ven. Gyanowada, etc. They used to visit the villages and do good works for the betterment of the Mann community. Now there are Buddhist temples (Vihara) in each village. Among them, the Haldibari Vihara is the biggest.

There is an exchange of views and information between the Buddhist of Garo Hills and Upper Assam. There is a representative from the Garo Hills in the North-Eastern Buddhist Cultural Association.

At present, the 'Mann' people are living in six villages (Haldibari,

Shankarpara, Rajanggola, Bangalkata, Deldella and Shyamnagar) of Garo Hills district of Meghalaya mixing with Rabha, Boro, Hajong, Garo, etc. The villages Haldibari, Shankarpara and Rajanggola fall under Garobadha police station. Some people of these three villages migrate to live in Mashokpara and Banthalapara (Bahoni) near Singimari bordering Assam. Now, they live in these villages. The rest three villages namely Bangalkata, Deldella and Shyamnagar falls under Phulbari police station. At present the population of Mann community have increased to nearly 2500 or more. Some of the Mann people have left for Lido and Ghonashuti of Uttar Lakhimpur and Arunachal Pradesh. And also to *Inthem* of Tinsukia district of Assam. Some of the people also left for Balipathar of Sibsagar district of Assam.

Lifestyle of Mann Community in brief Inhabitation:

They inhabit the six villages of West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya under Dadenggiri Civil Sub-Division. The villages are Bangalkata, Deldella, Shyamnagar, Holdibari, Shankarpara and Rajanggola. After the separation of Meghalaya from the state of Assam, some of the Mann families began to migrate gradually towards Upper Assam and this process of migration from the Garo Hills continued for some years. A large section of the community have already moved to Tinsukia district of Assam. There, also live many Mann families basically in the village like *Inthem*, Bordumsai, Duarmara, etc which fall under Tinsukia district bordering Arunachal Pradesh. Manns are listed as a Scheduled Tribe in Meghalaya.

Climate of Habitat:

The climate of their habitat is warm and they have rainfall, which results in high humidity. The vegetation of this area is of a tropical monsoon type with sal and teak trees and plantains. The cow, buffalo, jackal and wild fowl are commonly found fauna in the vicinity of this area

Language:

As a result of close biological and cultural inter-mixture, they have completely forgotten their original language. The Mann speak a mixture of Kamrup and Goalpara dialects of Assamese. They also use the Mymensingh dialects of Bengali in speaking with other community, particularly Bengali Hindus and Muslims. They have been completely Assamised and assimilated into the greater Assam culture. They have completely forgotten their original Mann script (Burmese script) and have began to use the Assamese script. The loss of Burmese language and their script was due to the fact that, when the Mann soldiers invaded Assam, at that time they did not brought any woman with them. After they settled here in the state of Garo Hills, Meghalaya, they began to marry the women of different castes of the locality especially Hajong, Rava, Koch, Garo, Kachari, etc. It is known by all that 'Mother tongue' develops only from the mother, not from the father In due course of time the Mann people have completely forgotten their original language.

Dress:

The dress of the men consists of dhoti (unstitched lower garment) and longi (stitched lower garment), Assamese gamocha (towel), pyjama and bariyan (undershirt). Now a day, they wear modern dresses like shirts and trousers. The women wear mekhala (stitched lower garment), riha (like lower which they put around hips) and a top (stitched upper garment). They also put saree, salwarkameej, skirt and tops, etc. when they go out. They wear silver and gold ornaments of different designs. The old women used to wear black mekhela and white blouse. The men, both young and old use gamochas of different colours when they are at home.

Food Habit:-

They are not strictly vegetarian. But some people think that the 'Mann' peoples are vegetarian. They eat the meat of fowl, pig, goat, duck, chicken and varieties of fish. But they strictly

abstain from taking beef and buffalo meat. Since they are Buddhist, they are not allowed to kill, or sacrifice any animal for consumption, but are permitted to eat the meat of animal, when it is dead. Rice is their staple food and cooked rice is eaten with items like potato, pulses, orum, green vegetables, fish or meat of certain animals.

Some of the special curry of Mann are like Paniukha (boiled vegetables), Leba (prepared with rice flour), sukatiptat kharoni (dried jute leaf soda) and uksiguti bhorta (sour nuts). They do not consume liquor or wine in any form. If anybody is found taking wine, he will be punished and ask him to pay fine to the village fund. Some of them smoke cigarettes and tobacco rolled in the form of Burmese cigar. Some people use dhopat (tobacco) and newspaper to prepare selai (cigarette) and smoke it pleasantly. Old women used to take tobacco and also used to do smoking. They eat betel-nut in a typical Assamese fashion.

Marriage:

As a rule, the Mann are an endogamous tribe without any special division or grouping but marriage with the neighbouring Koch, Hajong, Garo, Boro and Rabha have also taken place. Marriage with the neighbouring Bengali or Assamese Muslim does not occur. They do not have any exogamous clan like organisation but they tend to avoid marriages between close relatives connected up to three generations. The age of marriage for boys is twenty years or above and between eighteen or above for girls.

The Mann are strictly monogamous. Polygamy in any form (either polygamy or polyandry) is not allowed in their society. A man is allowed to marry only once in his lifetime, though levirate form of marriage is permitted in the society. If a woman's husband dies, she is permitted to marry anyone of her deceased husband's younger brothers. If a man's wife dies, he is permitted to marry any one of his deceased wife's younger sisters.

Negotiated or arranged marriage is the main mode of acquiring mates.

Love marriage (marriage by mutual consent) also takes place among them. Galloping also takes place among the boys and girls. If both the families agree than of the boys and girls, the boy's family call the villagers regarding their marriage. In this case they take permission from the village people and take time to give a small party called Mengala. Neither bride price nor dowry exists in their society, and it is not encouraged among them.

Divorce is not encouraged in the Mann society but it is not completely absent. Anyone who divorces his/her spouse has to pay a fine to the family of the other partner in front of the village people. When a divorce takes place, they tear a betel-leaf into two parts in front of the villagers containing both the parties.

Family:

The Manns are a patrilineal society having patrilocal residence. In such patrilocal families, the prime or the foremost duty of all members including the daughter-in-law is to obey the parents (or parents-in-law) and other elders.

The extended type of family is frequently noticed among the Mann.

The nuclear type of family is also not rare and it is gradually on the increase. Due to the alienation from the agricultural for economic or some other reasons, extended families are gradually breaking down, giving rise to nuclear family.

In the family, the parents are generally respected, feared and obeyed by their sons and daughters. The parents-in-law are also respected, feared and obeyed by their daughters-in-law. It has been found that in the extended family, avoidance of one kind or another is observed in the relations between the wife and her husband's elder brother. But there exists a free relationship between the wife and her husband's younger brothers and sisters. After the death of the father, the eldest son takes responsibility for the family.

The Manns are patrimonial and property is inherited through that male line. They observe neither the primogeniture nor the ultimogeniture modes of inheritance. Property is inherited by the sons only and each of the sons gets an equal share. If they do not have any sons, all the properties are shared among the

daughters getting an equal share.

There exists a strong bond between separate families of the same community which indicates the intra-community solidarity. These linkages are reflected through interaction and participation in certain ritual activities and construction of houses. During marriage rituals and death ceremonies, different families come together and participate to make these ceremonies a success. The male members of neighbouring families help each other in the construction of houses for each other.

The women have a constructive role in the formation of family. Generally the women remain at home and look after the children and maintain the family. It is seen that males used to go out for earning something which they, at home, hand over to their wives whatever they get. In the winter season, woman used to go to hills for collecting fire-woods. And in the monsoon season they used to go on hire for planting paddy in the paddy fields. They also extend their service for the exchange of rice.

(International Mongoloid Meet- March 2014 held at Ballonggre Tura, Meghalaya)

Rising Above Regional Differences

I squatted with a banana leaf laid out in front of me-this was to be my first of the many *Sankranti* festivals was to be a part of in Bangalore. I felt pinned by a hundred eyes on me-hushed tones calling out 'Chinese' reached my ears. But I chose to ignore them all, for the food was glorious. The first mouthful was greeted with a muffled roar from the crowd: 'He eats, he eats *rasam* and rice!' Every time Ravi MN's father and mother stopped to refill my leaf plate most lovingly, I just felt at home.

I met Kiran, a hefty Kannadiga man who could have easily bagged a role in any 'South Indian' film, by sheer chance. It was my first day of college when Kiran and a few others called me out for a ragging session. 'Hey Chinese, come here!' With pride oozing for our military history from the hills and a bruised ego in tow, my

frenzied mind decided on a potentially destructive retort this time. Picking a brick in my hand, I yelled back at them, 'You Chinese! Your family Chinese! Come if you want to see how Indian I am!' My racial profile aside, I could easily have been beaten up by the seniors for that defiance on the first day itself. But, they said sorry and demanded just a song in compliance with my 'fatcha' status. I obliged, and Kiran became my big brother, my friend.

Ravi MN and Kiran were my first friends in alien Bangalore; they introduced me to their culture and made me comfortable. They were my answer to the ignorant others who would call me 'Chinese' or 'chinky', judging me by my 'Mongoloid' features only. I would have never made such great friends if I chose to stay in areas dominated by people from the

Northeastern region.

India, by virtue of its diversity, is also a deeply regional, and, hence, racist country. Almost every state is battling a conflict between the insider and the outsider. There are conflicts at all levels, and many are still based on caste and class. but much of our racism and attacks of counter-racism are based on convenience. Like people from Sikkim and Darjeeling bond when they are in Bengal, all people from the Northeast living in metros come together by virtue of their geographical affinity. They then forget their own internal differences, many of which are otherwise based on race, region, ethnicity, cast and class. Surprisingly, we become just 'Indians' when abroad, or even brothers and sisters to Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nepalese

(Contd. to Page 26)

DRU -WAN BOLA

(Intellectual Property of Nuruu-Mande Heritage Society, Tura)

The complete name of the God Almighty (Yahweh, Allah, God, Brahma, Bhagwan, Ishwar) in A'chik invocation is Dakgipa-Rugipa, Rurubi-Kimmasi, Mareru-Marebak, KosapakKosapin, A'atdi-Biatdi, Dingepa-Ba'bra equally distributing it among all the twelve sub-tribes. The same, in its truncated form, is Dakgipa Rugipa, Pattigipa Ra'rongipa, Dingepa Ba'bra. According to the A'chik belief, the Master the One who Blesses created the Earth and the Oceans before anything else or A'gsak Chigilbo [it is important know the etymologies/portmanteau words i.e. A'gilsak's etymology consists of a'a (soil/earth) + bigil (skin/surface) + kosak (above/atop) or in a blended form top of the earth's surface and that of chigilbo which is a blending of chi (water) + bigil (skin/surface) + bo (bulge/swelling/carry) or in a blended form swollen water surface] When you say A'gilsak Chigilbo it means land and water body, these are inclusive in A'ima D itdema (Guardian Angel of the depths of land and ocean) (also the other name for ocean/sea). After the creation of land and seas, creepers, vines, trees were planted. Thirdly, fishes, animals, insects and birds were moulded. After completing all creations, human being was lastly made. Between human beings, man was made first and woman was created the last of them all.

Because human being was made the last of all creations, he knew nothing understood none, that is, they did not know to wear and drape; to eat and drink; to co-habit and procreate; to build a house and a family; to make merry and dance; to beat or throb; to blow and strum; to cut and slash; to sow and weed; to buy land and homestead; to demarcate boundary and limits; to light fire and strike flint; to shape anvil, burn embers and make machete, hoe, axe, twin-bladed mil'lam sword, rang (a treasured ceremonial gong), lance, knew nothing at all.

All knowledge, skill and expertise he learnt from the settlers of water, crawlers on land and fliers in the sky. Just like how man still did not know to build a house. It was only after gaining Raka as groom and Gam'ba as son-in-law, the lake started bulging, the pool begun swelling which means after obtaining Turtle/Tortoise as son-in-law and observing how he built walls and laid parapet burrowing deep in the middle of the pool. He realised O! That is how walls are made and dividers are interlaced. Secondly, he learnt the trade from A'ni Knasi-Chini Knajong (Termites) by seeing how they made their nest. Lastly, noticing Miba Me'a Jonja Pante (Baya Weaver Bird) establishing a homestead and sourcing up water on the tree-top branch, raising a family, siring children, he replicated what he studied, that is, after seeing a baya weaver weave a nest, make a hearth, plant the rear flank of fire-fly to illuminate the abode, lay eggs and up-bring its fledglings, he imitated everything.

If one were to explain how man learnt the skills by imitating from the crawlers and fliers it would be too voluminous, The A'chiks acknowledge the importance of symbiotic existence between aquatic creatures, wild life, plants and man. They discourage killing and cruelty to wild animals, wild birds, reptiles because they strongly believe that they are the providers of knowledge to man. Likewise, meaningless destruction or trade in plants is not engendered. Gods' blessed land, water, everything is not allowed to be abused and the acquired A'king-gorerang (sub clan branch land and property) are not permitted to be sold to others, it is Asi Namja or sinful (A'kings' etymology/portmanteau word comprise of a'a+ biking or land + shell/carapace, therefore, a'king roughly means shielded/protected or blessed land).

Now let me explain a little bit about Dru-Wanbola. Every individual seems to know superficially about Wangala.

If DRU-WANBOLA's root words are to be explained wholly or in writing, it is an abridgement of A'NINGCHA DRUA (DURUA) CHININGCHA WANBOLA (DURU RECITATION UNDERGROUND, ORGANISING OF THANKSGIVING CEREMONY UNDERWATER) to Dru-Wanbola / Wangala /Wanna. There are two words in Dru-Wanbola. First, it is Durua, second it is WANBOLA/WANGALA. Let me tell you about the former. The etymology of DURUA is derived from the wife of an A'chik forefather Atchu Moron Rakgipa, called DURU AMA, who retained and memorised every word of revelation made to Nuruu Mandes Dema Resus by the Arch-Angel, Garuma-Getchima, in seven years and seventeen months i.e. eight years and five months. Because it was Ambi Duru Ama who began recitation of the oral tradition about the creation of earth and oceans, sprouting of plants, making of mountains, origination of land and aquatic animals, and fabrication of man, the art of preservation of the earth's history, in a ballad form, is still known as Durua till this date.

It is from this Duru Ama and Moron Rakgipa couple's twelve daughters, the twelve A'chik sub-tribes were born. The root of the second word WANBOLA is derived from the croaking of field frogs, bellowing of bull frogs, shrieking of water beetles, swimming of stream fishes, back and forth movement of water strider driftwood drifting down when river is swollen, chirping of crickets on land, lapwing's cry, plantain leaf's palm wave, bamboo hole playing flute, fog billowing, hail dropping, all actions included is called Wanbola. As mentioned earlier all the dwellers of water are called progenies of water and all the crawlers on land are regarded offspring of land. Their contented cries were first called underground Drua/Durua (recitation/singing glories of past history) and

underwater Wanbola (Thanksgiving observation). The duplication by human beings above ground on land is abridged and called Dru-Wanbola. As mentioned earlier the act of Dru-Wanbola underwater by progenies of water and offspring of and is done in expression of gratitude to the Almighty for His respective bountiful blessings, that is, when season arrives some start shrieking, crying, crowing, chanting, chirping, fog billow, hail drop, bamboo hole play flute, shrimp beats midget drum, plantation wave palm. In the beginning, the Nuruu Mandes Dema Resus could only imagine imitation of all of these actions. They were yet to do it practically.

When rice and millet were born in the A'chik country's Misi Kokdok Gara Petchok Dengga Dare Silkongkante Chibok Boksang Wa'nanng Kokang, the A'chiks switched to a life of cultivation and agriculture. According to oral tradition/history, till the harvest season of 1922, the dawn of rice-millet was 90,000 moons old (7500 years). After the birth of rice-millet, cotton, ginger, brinjal, yam-taro, pepper-onion, Nuruu Mande begun observing Wanbola (Thanksgiving Ceremony) by burning incense and offering wine libations at the King Post of the house in the style of the subterranean submarine Dru-Wanbola performed by the offspring of land and the progenies of water in expression of gratitude to the One who Blesses, Grower, Planter, Cultivator.

The observance of Dru-Wanbola of ancient A'chik fore-fathers is captured by Duru Ama in this way:

When at God Almighty's Thanksgiving Ceremony

At seven league plateau, seven sphere underwater

Unclothed gods they are, bare angels they are (Allusive reference to animals, reptiles, insects and birds etc.)

The plateau is alive with melody;

The slopes are rife with rhapsody

What is happening?

What is transpiring?

Ground below is sonorous

Water underneath is clamorous

Hearing the distant murmur
Seeing the ugly spectre
Electric Eel Singsipa's Merman
Radupa's

Their errand boy bearer
Their runner messenger

Asintak Malbin Chirongge Rongre
(guardian angel of fishes)

Sent to ground under
Dispatched underwater
When unclothed gods and bare
angels

When the errand boy runner
Came to hum to fetch water
So met so encountered
Because the ground below was
sonorous

Water underneath was clamorous
Wondering what was happening
Asking what was transpiring
Sent to find out dispatched to know
To Asintak Malbin Chirongge
Rongre

Reported and recounted
The errand boy the messenger
All are errand boys all are messengers
All are cheerless all are dour
It is still raucous

It is still vociferous
They are celebrating they are
reciting (of oral tradition)

They will bite they will devour
I forbid do not go
I restrain do not flow
It is a cruel land offensive watering
place

If you wish to learn desire to know
I shall inform you in writing
Show you by scribbling
At a muddy place at a slushy
ground

Wrote on the flesh of a spotted sand
fish

On the back of a black stream fish
That is how the Protector is rejoicing
It is indicated, the Benefactor is
performing

The cheerless ones satumine creatures
Unclothed god bare angel
That is how Lord Merman King
Electric Eel

At his porch in his courtyard
Approved Thanksgiving
Assented to Recitation (of oral
tradition/history)

Been performing with lips

Reciting with fingers
By writing on the walls
Daubing the dividers
Like spliced bamboo fastener (wading)
Offering thanksgiving with lips
Rehearsing recitation (oral tradition/
history)

Observing what they did
Nuruu Mande Dema Resu
Imitating Thanksgiving replicating
Recitation

Adopted it on the surface of the
Earth
Placed t on the sea-face
Before that he was still creating
noise

Still making commotion
That Nuruu Mande that Dema Resu
Saying it is ugly it is unbecoming
Retained Thanksgiving
Sustained honouring
The Sharp Bidawe Kleppa Susme
(the divine counsellor)

To hollow out a timber
Remove the heartwood
To cover it with hide, fasten the ends
Instruction is given knowledge
provided

Started dancing waving the palms
Stirred the hips
Broad Damillanggo leaves preceded
the hide

For strings, Suedil vine did provide
When flexed it broke, tore when
covered

Because it did not fit and
mismatched

The Sharp Bida'we Kleppa Susme
Overhauled and reassembled
That is how the timber intensely
matured

Was hollowed out and heartwood
removed

When it was hided ends fastened
When beaten pleasing it sounded
Delightful when played
Satisfied after beating

Glad after surveying
Holes pierced and flute scaled
Shown by him asked by him
Adopted Thanksgiving grew resolute

Consulting the stars hiding was done
Seeking counsel from the roots
ends fastened

When it was sampled when it was
tested

The dance synchronized
 The mimicry matched
 To demonstrate palm waving it is blending,
 To don turban it is concurring
 To plant a sacrificial pole it is consenting
 To give offerings to Angel it is assenting
 When wine libation to Guardian is made it bubbled
 Without offering to Protector
 Without giving the Benefactor
 To sing it is forbidden
 Asi did not heed Malja did not listen
 Sung and waved hands
 That is how without heeding the Benefactor
 Without listening to the Protector
 Because of singing, waving of hands
 To gather plantain leaves when he reached
 To collect firewood when he flowed
 At a deserted place by a tiger Asi was killed
 At a forlorn stream when to catch crabs he ventured
 In a knee-deep pool by a merman Malja was kidnapped
 Since the time by a tiger Asi was killed
 Grey became Do'rekgo's (a kind of bird) head
 Since the day by a merman Malja was abducted
 Barking deer's (Muntjac) tail snapped
 Even if wine libation is made to the Benefactor
 If you do not give the Angel the first share
 'Tis said before paying tithes to the Protector
 But Asi did not heed Malja did not listen
 And sung and waved hands even
 And that is how for failing to respect the Benefactor
 For not obeying the Protector
 To gather plantain leaves when he arrived
 To collect firewood when he flowed
 At a deserted place by a tiger Asi was killed
 To catch crabs when he strayed
 To angle for fish when he flowed
 In a knee-deep pool by a merman

Malja was kidnapped
 That is how since the time by a tiger Asi was Killed
 Grey became Do'rekgo's (a kind of bird) head
 And since the day by a merman Malja was abducted
 Barking deer's (Muntjac) tail snapped.
 Before field paddy, millet, yam-taro, ginger, brinjal, pepper, onion, fruits and everything is consumed offerings should first be made to the one who blesses Arch Angel Misi Saljong and then only start eating which is the precept A'chiks have been keenly abiding by since ages till today and have been performing thanksgiving, burning incense, strewing cooked rice and paying tithes to God the Almighty. Just like how they do not consume ahead of the One who blesses and the Provider, they strictly abstain from uttering names or what they term Ku'cha sompia-Jakcha takkaria which roughly means Verbal riddle-Physical action which means mentioning of names like tiger, elephants, bears, boar, dog, monkey, tit, wind, rain, air, snake, monitor lizard, kite are refrained from. They are not named directly but alluded to using abstainer's name. Employing abstainers' name, the A'chiks have been exercising firm control over them with reverence. Once after all rituals of thanksgiving to the One who blesses Provider Arch Angel is executed, they can start eating everything without bar and use usual names of all creatures directly which is called "Demonstration of Verbal riddle-Physical action".
 To briefly describe DRU-WANROLA, it is our expression of gratitude to God Almighty for the bountiful blessings of our well being, happiness, provision of food, wealth, fine weather, country etc, that we offer our thanksgiving once a year after the harvest and that is how we have been conducting our lives. According to the oral tradition preserved by the priests, the practice of WANBOLA (Thanksgiving ceremony) after the birth of rice- millet is 69,000 moons or 5750 years old till the harvest period of

1922. One can deeply imagine for how long the A'chiks have been in firm belief of God, glorifying and praising, offering thanksgiving without fail.

There is nothing wrong in performing DRU-WANBOLA and offering thanksgiving to God the almighty by modern A'chiks though they have been Christians, we need not forget our culture and our language even as Christians. The same Almighty God (Yahweh/Allah/ Nokgipa- Biambi/ Brahma/Bhagwan/ Ishwar) has blessed differently to different races/tribes. Special blessings have been given to the A'chiks before 40,000 years. Mia-Misi Ga'gong, Mandeskaan Saljong-Stem of Rice-Millet, Fellow Human Being is God- it is said (reflected in 'I said, you are gods' Psalms 82:6 and Jesus answered them "It is not written in your Law" I have said you are gods?)

Man is regarded as God Almighty, The One who blesses, Provider and we have been living harmoniously without making distinctions we ought not to disrespect the culture, custom, language and the country he has blessed us with and preserve all of them. There is a saying in English 'Culture is the mirror of our Society' It is by preserving our culture, custom, language and the country and by looking at their image reflection we will be able beautifully build a strong A'chik society. The races of different parts of the world, in spite of becoming Christians, do not profess Christianity to the point of forgetting or losing their culture, custom, language and the culture.

Likewise, we A'chiks also ought not to become Christians to the point of losing our culture, custom, language and country. In order to preserve A'chik (Mande) language, culture and our native habitat, we should stage DRUWANBOLA to express our deep gratitude to the Almighty by determining and deciding the right auspicious time, in every A'chik village which will ensure long life, adequate food, and sufficient resources, proper health, vigour, capacity and perseverance.

(International Mongoloid Meet – March 2014)

Meghalaya Sacred Groves in Peril

- Saidul Khan

India has the highest concentration of sacred groves in the world. Over a 100,000 sacred groves stretch out here, yet these are rapidly disappearing due to cultural change and pressure to use the natural resources that they contain. The size of the sacred groves varies greatly from small plots of less than a hectare to larger tracts of upto hundreds of hectares.

In some cases, these fragments represent the sole remaining natural forests outside of protected areas and may be key reservoirs of biodiversity. Sacred forests are known to conserve habitats that are not represented in the current protected area system and serve as a refuge for endemic species. Such groves also help in maintaining a healthy ecosystem by controlling erosion and maintaining water quality.

Sacred groves of Meghalaya

The ethnic communities of Meghalaya are rich in conservation knowledge. It is evident from their age-old traditions that support conservation by limiting activities within sacred groves. As such, hunting and logging is prohibited within these patches. Preservation of nature thus holds key in the ancient beliefs of the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos. For instance, Labasa is the name for the God of the Mawphlang sacred grove, described by many as taking the form of a tiger or leopard. There is a strong belief that this deity inhabits the sacred grove and offers protection to the community. Another popular belief is of a deity known as Basa or Ryngkew Basa, who is benevolent and provides for the well-being of the people in the village.

However, in recent times, the frequency of rituals conducted in association with Meghalaya's sacred groves is declining. Tribal religious beliefs have been largely replaced by Christianity. This conversion to Christianity has in turn led to a lessening of faith in traditional religion,

including beliefs in the gods of sacred groves. Most villages have abandoned the rituals, as ceremonies can't be held anymore. At Mawkyrwat in Khasi Hills, after the community's conversion to Christianity in the 1960s, the residents destroyed the surrounding forest and sold the wood. Researchers point out that the missionaries were not attentive to the need to adjust their preaching of Christianity to the local setting.

There is also economic pressure to extract resources from the sacred groves or to reduce the sacred grove's size. Experts suggest support for traditional ceremonies, existing local community resource management, and comprehensive education programmes associated with the sacred groves.

The introduction of the protected area category community reserves under the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002 has introduced legislation for providing government protection to community held land, which fits the sacred groves, as well.

Why are the Groves Unique?

Research scholars at NEHU have documented a total of 546 vascular plants, both flowering and non-flowering, from the five groves in the Jaintia Hills alone. Angiosperms with 515 species were the dominant variety followed by 28 species of pteridophytes and 3 species of gymnosperms. The distribution of these species' shows that out of the 88 species found in the Indian subcontinent, 45 species are exclusive to the Northeast and 26 species are exclusive to Meghalaya. Many plants are medicinal as well.

According to another researcher, Krishna Upadhyaya, there are more than 3,100 species of flowering plants in the five sacred groves of the Jaintia Hills (Tree Diversity in Sacred Groves of Jaintia hills in Meghalaya). He says that it constitutes 15 per cent of the total flora in the state and 32 per cent

of the total flora found in the Jaintia Hills. He also added that the 91 species recorded in the five sacred groves are either rare or endangered.

Seeking Financial Help

Exotic plant varieties which are seldom seen in other parts of the world are found in Meghalaya's sacred groves. Aroids, pipers, fern-allies and orchids are found in abundance in these groves.

So far 115 such 'sacred groves' have been documented in Meghalaya even as researchers engaged in the study believe that there are many more which are yet to be documented due to fund constraints. According to professor B K Tiwari of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), most of the sacred groves are found in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills apart for a few groves in the Garo hills.

'We are trying to acquire financial support from funding agencies for our new projects on sacred groves, but we have suggested to the State Forest Department to take initiative as well, as our work is more for academic purposes,' he explains. Tiwari acknowledged that the state government had extended financial help to the Mawphlang grove, located about 25 kms south of Shillong, but wanted other groves to be given equal attention.

Growing Threat

The sacred groves of Meghalaya are facing challenges owing to reasons as diverse as poverty, cultural change and migration. In Meghalaya, poverty has forced the community to sell exotic varieties of trees and other resources found in the forests'. The increasing growth of population and migration has also forced habitations in these areas. The Chairman of the Grand Council of Tribals, J. F. Kharshiing says with regret, 'There are hundreds of tribal clans whose forests have not been documented. Due to harsh economic circumstances and

unplanned human activity, such groves are diminishing in different parts of the State'.

He also adds, 'In view of the global concern on climate change, the government should take immediate steps to engage with the owners/ community of the rare forests in the State'. Kharshiing also believes that some sort of incentive and an award

system to preserve such groves could go a long way.

Whereas numerous ecological studies of sacred groves in India have been conducted, the cultural dimensions of sacred groves have not yet been studied in detail. Gauging how local residents and managers perceive sacred groves is essential to determining how these forest areas

may be protected and managed in the future. The religious and cultural course of Meghalaya has changed a lot over the years. Thus, it is imperative that new studies are conducted to map the changing scenario to better understand the best way forward for conservation.

(Courtesy: Eclectic NorthEast-March 2014)

(Contd. from Page 16)

like everyone else. A normal person."

Francis marks his anniversary as pope March 13. For the occasion, the Vatican has issued new coins and stamps. The DVD will feature behind-the-scenes footage of the pope leaving the Sistine Chapel just after he was elected and praying in the nearby Paoline Chapel before he went out onto the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to greet the world with his famous "Buonasera."

In the interview, Francis also said he and Pope Benedict XVI had agreed

Pop Offended by His...

that the emeritus pontiff wouldn't remain hidden away, as Benedict had said he would spend his retirement, but would participate more in the life of the church. That's in keeping with Francis' belief that the elderly have a wealth of wisdom to offer younger generations.

"The emeritus pope isn't a statue in a museum. He's an institution," Francis said. "We talked about it and we decided together that it would be better if he sees people, gets out and participates in the life of the church."

Benedict recently attended the

recent ceremony to formally install 19 new cardinals, the first time he and Francis had appeared together in St. Peter's. He is widely expected to attend the April 27 canonizations of Popes John Paul II and John XXIII.

"Some might have wanted him to retire away in a Benedictine abbey far from the Vatican," Francis said. "I thought about grandparents who with their wisdom and advice give strength to their families and don't deserve to end up in an old folks' home."

(The Assam Tribune – 6.3.2014)

(Contd. from Page 18)

5 Intriguing Facts...

Roma teenage girl at school; soon thereafter, she and her entire family were deported to Kosovo. In the past year, about 10,000 Roma were expelled from France after their camps were destroyed, according to the Baltimore Sun.

The European Union has threatened to take legal action against France for these recent expulsions, and the plight of the Roma community - who are frequently the targets of violence by neo-Nazi and other racist groups - has attracted the attention of human rights groups.

"This community crosses time and space with its traditions, and we in Europe have trouble to integrate them," Alain Behr, a lawyer who has defended the Roma, told The New York Times. "Yet they have preserved their tradition, which is one of survival."

(<http://www.livescience.com/40652-facts-about-roma-romani-gypsies.html>)

(Contd. from Page 21)

Rising Above...

and Sri Lankans,

While discrimination is faced by most in this country in spite of their region, people from the Northeast are also responsible for distancing themselves further from the mainstream by living in ghettos. Rather than integrating with others and easing out differences, we are calling for a separate police force and hostels based on racist foundations. There is perhaps a need for a law against racial discrimination, the boundaries of which should cover the entire country. A

regional police force in a city like Delhi will only complicate matters, widen the regional chasm and compound the racism. The other states, too, should then ask for a separate police force to protect people from their region. When the question is about a certain crime and punishment, the answer is to have a strong police force; a police force that protects its entire population equally well.

New Delhi is talking racism now and conveniently diverting all attention because it is hard to address the larger,

more pressing and practical issues at hand. From Sharmila's fight for removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in Manipur can wait. The ethnic clashes in Assam can make thousands leave their own land and not an eyebrow would raise at the Centre. New Delhi will only wake up to issues that are picked up after being 'profiled' by the media. The far Northeastern region, otherwise, has not been seen as befitting of any other mainstreaming.

(Courtesy: Eclectic NorthEast-March 2014)



**With Best Wishes
of Rangali Bihu**



Shri Ramkuiwangbe Newmai, President, Zeliangrong Heraka association and other leaders on Dias at Mahur on 17.03.2014



People waiting in cultural attire to receive "Ranima Gaidinli Rath" at Mahur Local Ground in Dima Hasau District of Assam on 17.03.2014



Women carrying children on their back in queue to pay floral tribute to their beloved Ranima Gaidinli at Boro Ninglo village in Dima Hasau District on 18.03.2014



Huge gathering at Laisong in Dima Hasau District waiting to see "Ranima Gaidinli Rath" on 17.03.2014



Women carrying children on their back in queue to pay floral tribute to their beloved Ranima Gaidinli at Boro Ninglo village in Dima Hasau District on 18.03.2014



Village elders of Hangrum in Dima Hasau district waiting to receive "Ranima Gaidinli Rath" on 18.03.2014



"Martyrs Column" at Hangrum village. Ranima Gaidinli fought against "British Assam Rifles" in 1932 in which 7 Zeliangrong Naga men laid down their life at Hangrum village