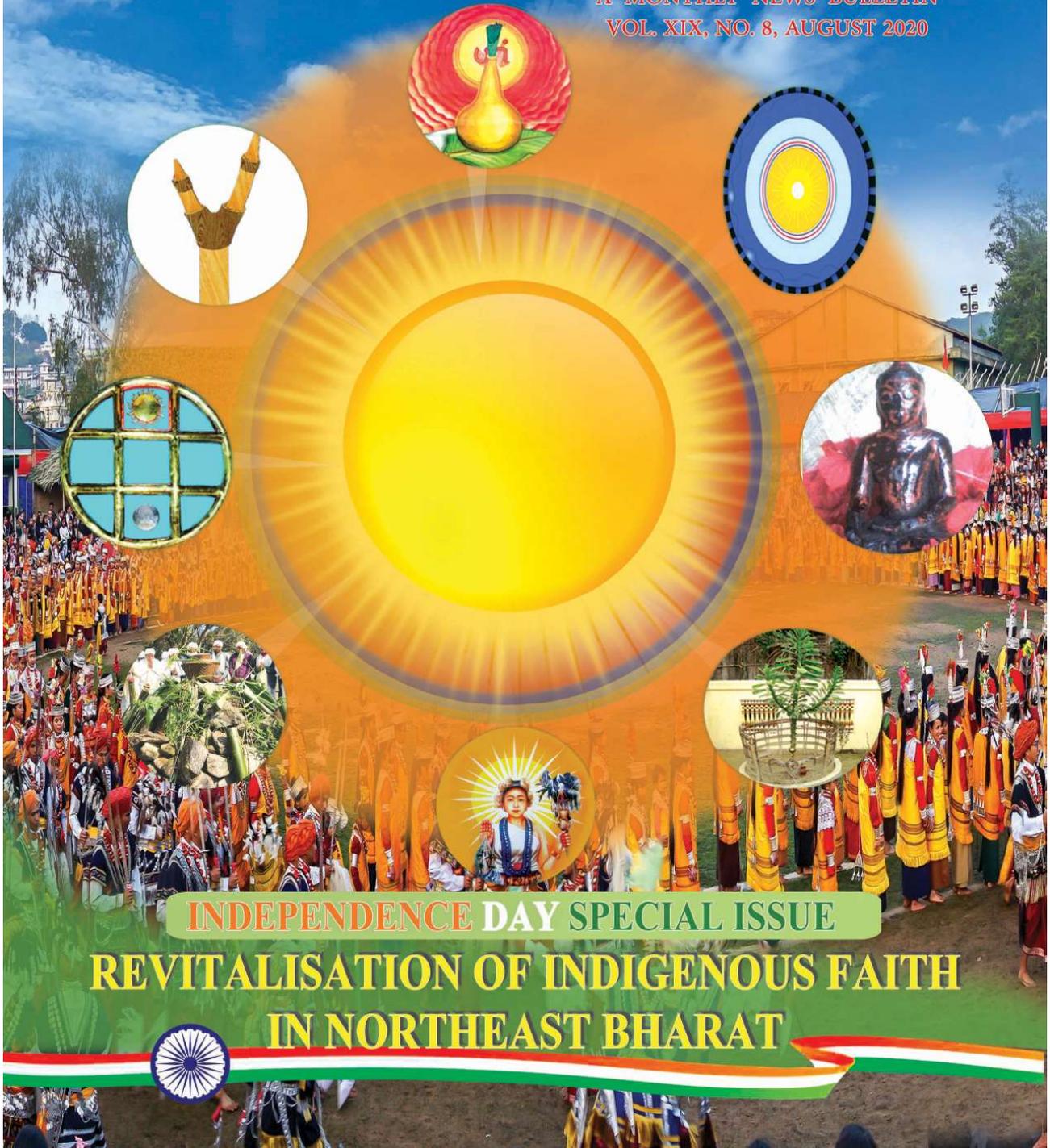


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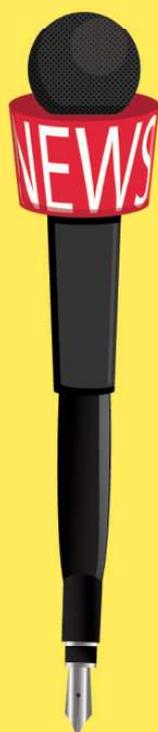


INDEPENDENCE DAY SPECIAL ISSUE

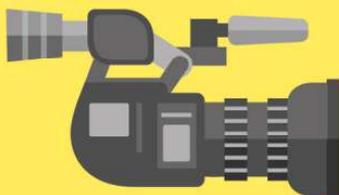
REVITALISATION OF INDIGENOUS FAITH
IN NORTHEAST BHARAT



SCHEMES OF Information and Public Relations Department for the welfare of Journalists of the State of Assam



- **Media Fellowship** for the up gradation of professional skills and knowledge in journalism. Fellowship is awarded to Media Persons @ ₹50,000 each.
- **“Republic Day Journalism Award”** is conferred to one eminent journalist of the State annually for his/ her outstanding contribution in the field of Journalism. Award money ₹1 lakh.
- **Assam Pension Scheme for Journalist** is provided @ ₹8000 per month to the journalists working more than 20 years in Assam on their retirement.
- Under the scheme, **“Press Tour on Goodwill Mission for the Rural Media Persons of Assam”**, a team of rural media persons are sent to other state every year for 12 days.
- Under the **“Journalists’ Medical Welfare Scheme”** one-time financial assistance is provided to Accredited and Recognized Journalists and their dependent family members.
- Under the scheme **One Time Ex-gratia to the next of the kin (NoK) of the deceased journalists** one time Ex-gratia @ ₹5 lakh each is given to the next of kin of journalists who lost their lives or are missing in various incidents of violence in the state.
- **Journalist Family Benefit Fund (JBBF)** is to provide financial assistance to the family of deceased journalist met with untimely death while being on duty.



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or log on to : <https://dipr.assam.gov.in/>

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श्रद्धा सुमन



HERITAGE FOUNDATION

DEDICATES

THE 15th AUGUST, 2020 SPECIAL ISSUE OF
HERITAGE EXPLORER
TO THE HALLOWED MEMORY OF

JAGDEORAM URAON

PRESIDENT

AKHIL BHARATIYA VANAVASI KALYAN ASHRAM
WHO LEFT FOR HIS HEAVENLY ABODE ON 15-07-2020

PIONEERS OF NORTH EAST BHARAT



Name : Golgi Bote Sri Talom Rukbo
DOB : 1937 DOD : 2001
State : Arunachal Pradesh



Name : Prof. Gangumai Kamei
DOB : 21-10-1939 DOD : 05-01-2017
State : Manipur



Name : Sri Bineshwar Brahma
DOB : 28-02-1948 DOD : 19-08-2000
State : Assam



Name : Babu Jeebon Roy
DOB : 1838 DOD : 16-05-1903
State : Meghalaya

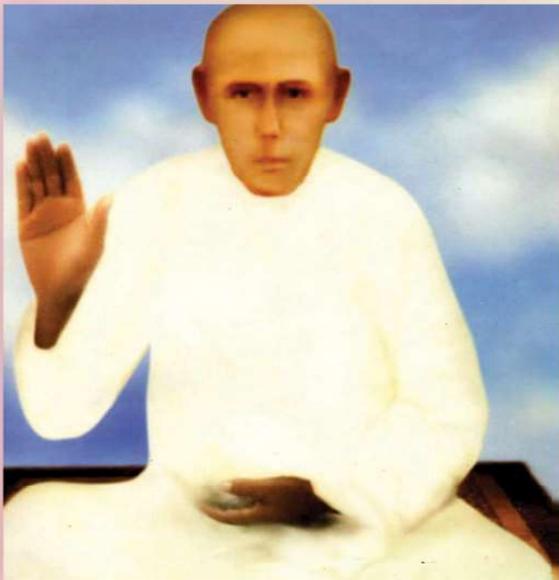
PIONEERS OF NORTH EAST BHARAT



Name : H. Onderson Mawrie
DOB : 12-04-1920 DOD : 26-05-1991
State : Meghalaya



Name : Sri Hipshon Roy
DOB : 15-06-1915 DOD : 02-05-2003
State : Meghalaya



Name : Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma
DOB : 18-04-1860 DOD : 08-05-1938
State : Assam

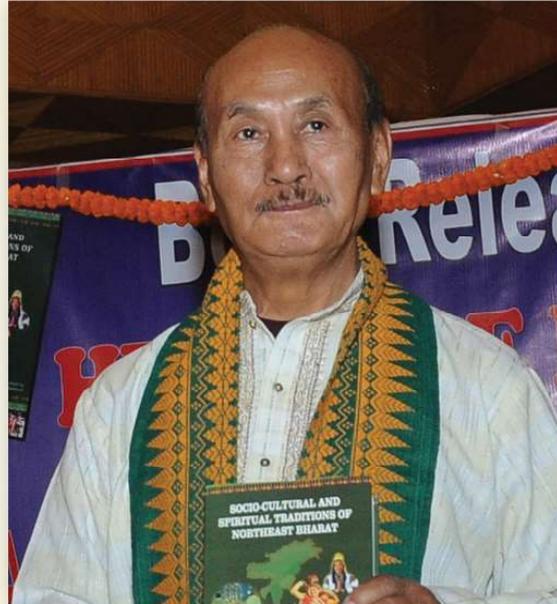


Name : Santikali Maharaj
DOB : 15-06-1955 DOD : 27-08-2000
State : Tripura

TORCH BEARERS OF INDIGENOUS FAITH MOVEMENT OF NE BHARAT



Name : Bikram Bahadur Jamatiya
DOB : 01-10-1939
State : Tripura



Name : Jaleshwer Brahma
DOB : 15-11-1942
State : Assam



Name : Ram Kuiwangbe Jeme
DOB : 25-05-1947
State : Assam



Name : Sri Nabam Atum
DOB : 15-03-1948
State : Arunachal Pradesh

TORCH BEARERS OF INDIGENOUS FAITH MOVEMENT OF NE BHARAT



Name : Er. Latsam Khimhun
DOB : 31-03-1962
State : Arunachal Pradesh



Name : Sri Kumar Yonzon
DOB : 15-01-1951
State : Sikkim



Name : Pu. Rorelliana
DOB : 02-02-1947
State : Mizoram



Name : Smt. Kiepu Tshering Lepcha
DOB : 02-02-1942
State : Sikkim

TEMPLES



Temple : Nyingmapa Monastery
Tribe : Lepcha, Bhutiya
State : Sikkim



Temple : Nyedat Namlo
Tribe : Nyishi
State : Arunachal Pradesh

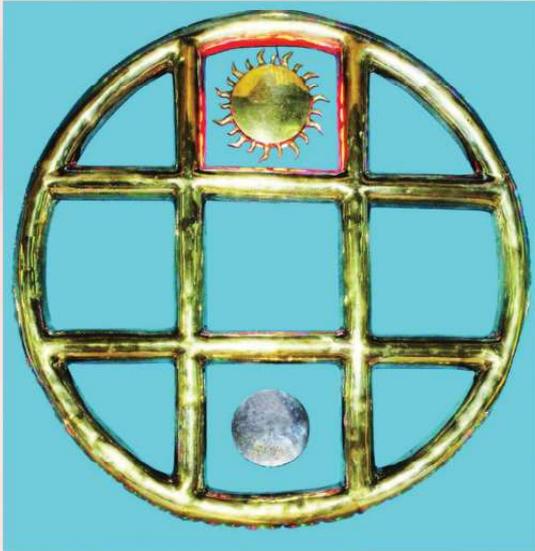


Temple : Brahma Temple
Tribe : Bodo
State : Assam

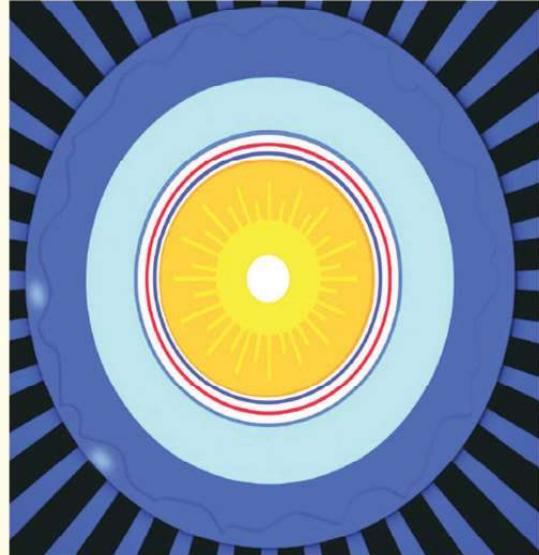


Temple : Kargu Gamgi
Tribe : Galo
State : Arunachal Pradesh

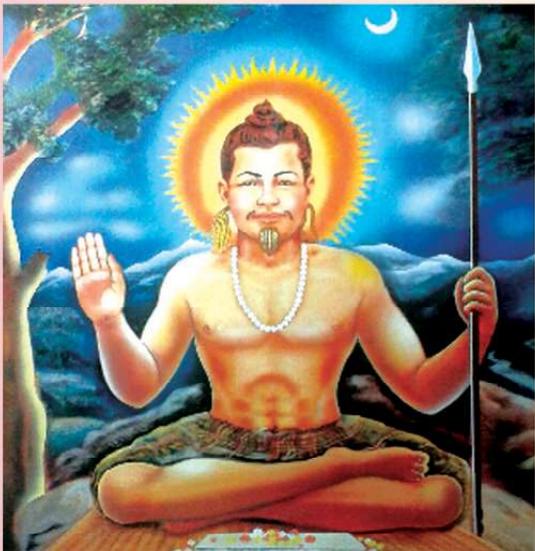
GODS - GODESSES



God : Tingkao Ragwang
Tribe : Rongmei
State : Manipur



God : Danyi Piilo
Tribe : Apatani
State : Arunachal Pradesh



God : Rangfraa
Tribe : Tangsa and Tutsa
State : Arunachal Pradesh



God : Seluphan (The Holy symbol)
Tribe : Mizo
State : Mizoram

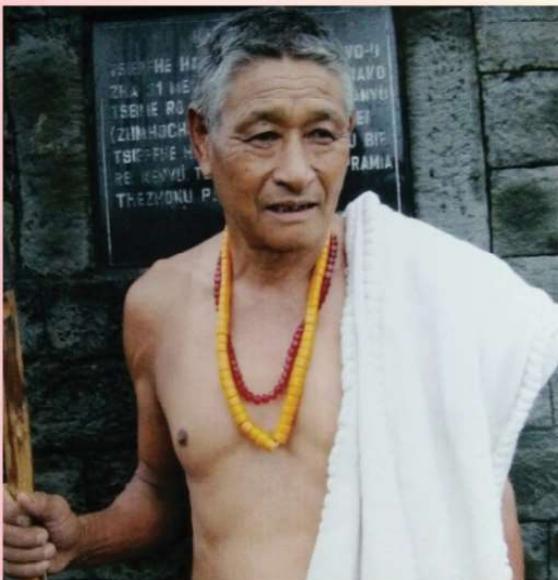
PRIESTS



Name : Hediahingbe Newme
Tribe : Jeme Naga
Place : Lodhi, Haflong, Assam



Name : Shri Obang Tarun
Tribe : Adi
Place : Pasighat



Name : Vilezo Toso
Tribe : Angami
Place : Viswema Kemevo, Nagaland



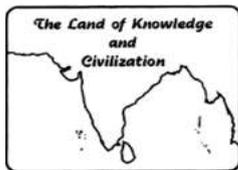
Tribe : Khasi
Place : Shillong Peak, Meghalaya

Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith in Northeast Bharat

Independence Day Special Issue 2020

HERITAGE EXPLORER

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Vol. XIX. No.7, AUGUST 2020



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Revitalization of Indigenous Faith in North East Bharat: A Foreword

The emergence of culture in human history was the outcome of man's struggle for existence and his evolution to become the supreme form of life. His cultural capability was first reflected in tools made of stones of various shapes and size. These stone artefacts were used basically for hunting and gathering purposes and the introduction of cultivation in human society also witnessed the use of stone tools for agriculture and allied activities. Prehistoric art either in the form of engravings or paintings using natural colours on the ceilings and walls of caves or on rock surface was another remarkable feature of human history. The stone artefacts mentioned earlier together with potteries made from clay which were moulded during the Neolithic phase of prehistory bear testimony to the manual dexterity and aesthetic capability of early man. Anthropologists consider all these features in totality from the earliest phase of human history to the present in understanding culture. This material facet of culture is very much supplemented by the non material aspect in the form of beliefs, ideas and practices etc. which add dynamism to the total process. This dynamism in the culture which is millennium old cumulative tangible outcome associated with intangibility is termed as heritage. Heritage is comparatively a recent concept in anthropology and allied discipline with minimum or no references in classical literature. The term has been made popular by western scholars and international agencies like UNESCO who requires the definitional praxis for identifying, documenting, conserving and promoting different tangible and intangible aspects of culture. This together with the evolving concept of indigenous knowledge system is putting a renewed effort in understanding and projecting human history from a modern point of view. Other dynamic factors of culture like enculturation, diffusion, acculturation, revivalism, revitalization etc. are also significant for understanding from a modern perspective. However, the distinction between revitalization and revivalism needs to be understood in the truest sense of the terms. While revivalism refers to recreate bygone behaviour and practices for fulfilment of set objectives, many a times for narrow gains, revitalization is putting renewed emphasis on certain aspects of culture which although exist but are losing momentum due to forces of culture change. The present special issue of Heritage Explorer with the theme of Revitalization of Indigenous faith of North East Bharat tries to cover different aspects of traditional beliefs and practices which need enough stimuli for their conservation and meaningful continuation. The volume, with all the valuable articles authored by different scholars working in this particular field, will be another milestone in the academic domain. I would like to congratulate the editorial team for their tireless and meticulous efforts in bringing out the present volume.

Dwipen Bsezbaruah
Professor and Head,
Department of Anthropology,
Gauhati University



Editorial

Revitalization of Indigenous Faith

Today most of us are well acquainted with organised religions that rule the hearts and minds of millions of people spread over the globe. It is also a well known fact that the Religion as we understand today is an organized collection of beliefs and faiths, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence. Of all these, beliefs and faiths are the mother of modern religious concepts.

Before we proceed further it will perhaps be in order to peep into the concept of belief which is the first seed of human imagination that propelled them to believe in a supernatural source of unassailable power. To be precise, belief is the product of mind and to hold to it in the worst of times, it requires us to silence our minds or at least quiet it because our mind interferes in the process of belief more than it contributes to it. So our beliefs are things that we are only mentally convinced of. Usually, but not always, beliefs are ideas, concepts that we gather through acquiring information and experience. Because of that, our beliefs can change over time as we gain more knowledge and experience more things throughout our lives. The beliefs can buoy our spirits, which can also be brought down by them when they prove inadequate, as they most certainly will at some point in the journey of our lives. Even the beliefs humans have held most closely have come and gone over the course of a lifetime or a millennium. It is also to be remembered that beliefs are mostly narrow and rooted in culture and upbringing. Sometimes our most closely held beliefs are in direct conflict with everything else we know to be true.

Natural development of the brains of human beings helped them to graduate to a higher level of consciousness called faith. Faith apparently includes our beliefs, but in actuality it is bigger than that. It can be termed as a kind of attitude of trust or assent of the believer. In simple terms, it can be understood to involve an act of will or a commitment on the part of the believer. Faiths need not necessarily be based on evidence or be scientifically proven. It is more dependent on the act of the will of the religious believer alone. However, it must be honestly admitted that no one can have spoken the last word about the basis of religious beliefs or religious faiths. There are numerous explanations for the evolution of religious faiths but none of them by itself can be considered as satisfactory. Some proposals are psychological: Our ancestors understood that other individuals have different mental states, motivation, and agency, so they attributed those same qualities to supernatural agents to explain everything from lightning to illness. Innumerable theories and opinions abound and it is not easy to navigate through them to find a universally acceptable conclusion. This is more so with the indigenous communities of north eastern region, where hundreds of them have their homes and hearths and practice their widely different faiths in their very own way.

Before we advance further we must have an idea about the indigenous faith and what does it imply. The term “indigenous faith” is usually applied to the localised belief systems of small-scale societies. These belief systems do not typically engage in proselytization, thus distinguishing them from religions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism that all seek converts and which are typically classified as “world religions”. Indigenous faith is also often characterised as being distinct from

the “world religions” because they are mostly orally transmitted, intertwined with traditional lifestyles, and pluralist. Within the study of religion there has been much debate as to what the scope of the category should be, largely arising from debates over what the term “indigenous” should best encompass, but the results are inconclusive. However, in spite of their inherent diversities, diversities in definition, it is an admitted fact that all the indigenous faiths of North East are bound by one unifying thread of nature and nature worship.

The present effort of the Heritage Explorer in the shape of publication of a special issue on revitalisation of traditional faiths, is aimed at exploring and understanding the philosophies and motivations behind the religious practices followed by the indigenous communities of North East and the need for their revitalisation. It is necessary to emphasise here that although a large chunk of our indigenous populace have been snatched away from the mainstream, but their traditional faiths could not be wiped out in entirety. Number of followers may have dwindled, but there are still some followers who have staunchly stuck to the faiths of their ancestors with the fond hope of reviving them once again to its past glory, because they know that if they fail to put renewed emphasis on the important aspects of their faith which although exist but are losing momentum mainly due to forces of culture change and cultural aggression of alien faiths, there will be no hope for their survival. They very well understand that only revival of the faiths of their forefathers will not do, it requires its revitalisation too. The alien missionaries and the Islamic fundamentalists could not have weaned away the indigenous faith followers by allurements alone. They successfully sowed the seeds of doubt in their minds about the inferiority of their own religious practices and ritualistic traditions. In addition to that the anglicised education the missionaries have provided to our younger generation immensely affected their world view, which in turn motivated them to give up their own culture and traditions related to their indigenous faiths and life styles. The glamour of modernity and the psychological need for the so called equality with the advanced communities worldwide, have caused great upheavals in their minds to motivate them to give up their own time tested religious faiths. The cause and effects of the happenings mentioned above need careful scrutiny to find out ways and means for an effective solution in the greater interest preservation of the identities of the indigenous faith followers and the integrity of our nation.

In the present thematic issue of Heritage Explorer, several social thinkers, community leaders and learned academics have contributed well researched articles on the need for revitalisation of the indigenous faiths. The articles are highly enlightening and are capable of expanding our knowledge horizon about the indigenous faiths of our tribal brethren. Several individuals such as Prof. Gangmumei Kamei, Talom Rukbo, Dularai Boro of Harimu Afat have extended invaluable service towards the cause of the revitalisation of indigenous faiths. At the same time organisations like Kalyan Ashram Assam, Heraka (Ranima Gaidinliu) foundation, My Home India, Jamatia Huda and Rangkhoh Sonong Reformation Council (RSRC) and many others are committedly working to achieve the same goal.

Before concluding, I must offer our special thanks to Dr. Dwipen Bezbaruah, Professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University for his kindly agreeing to pen down the Foreword for this special issue in spite of his being sick and hospitalised. We also feel privileged to place on record our sincere appreciation to the authors and contributors for placing their labour of love at our disposal for publication in our August, 15, 2020 Special Issue.

Romen Chakraborty

Romen Chakraborty
Chief Editor

The Pioneers of Indigenous Faith and Culture Movement in North-East Bharat

Late Sri Joybhadra Hagjer, Assam : Born on 2nd April 1914 at Vill- Nanadisa, Haflong Dist Dima Hasao, Died on 18th July 1973 at Shillong, Meghalaya. Shri Joybhadra Hagjer belongs to Dimasa community. He was Founder President of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. He was Member of Parliament in 1967. He was first MLA elected from Haflong, Dima Hasao. During the period of his demise he was cabinet minister of Veterinary, Jail and Minority Affairs Ministry of undivided Assam.

Late Golgi Bote Sri Talom Rukbo, Arunachal Pradesh : Born 1937 at Kelek, Dist East Siang Died 2001. Shri Talom Rukbo was born at Kelek village of Balel Group of East Siang He later on settled at Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh. He was from Adi community of the major tribe of Tani group of tribes. He served as area organizer of special cultural officer. He is also regarded as preceptor Donyi-polo movement started in 1986 in the name of Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang. He was known as Golgi Bote, Revered Guru. He lead crusade against fraudulent means adopted by various missionaries in religious conversions.

Late Sri Bineshwar Brahma, Assam : Born on 28th February 1948 at Bhatarmari dist. Kokrajhar, died on 19th August 2000 at Guwahati. Shri Bineshwar Brahma was social worker from his early college days. He was a teacher. Later on he was Joint Manager of Guwahati Zonal office FCI. He was assassinated by insurgent outfit NDFB ex General Secretary and then President of 'Bodo Sahitya Sabha'. He opposed use of roman script for writing bodo language. He also worked on peace talks between various bodo groups and India, Assam Government.

Babu Jeebon Roy, Meghalaya : Born 1838 at Saitsohpn, Sohra, Died on 16th May 1903 at Shillong, Meghalaya. Shri Jeebon Roy didn't get formal education but he learnt Bengali, Sanskrit and English at home. He joined in the service as interpreter with commissioner in 1858 and retired in 1894 as an extra assistant commissioner. He started high school in 1878. Initially the inspector of school was not willing for it but the success of school started by Babu Jeebon Roy compelled him to do so. which was amalgamated with mission school in 1879. Ultimately in a clever tactic in 1879 he amalgamated his school with missionary school. He was to establish first press for khasi literature which is still functional. He was first enter in the lime stone mines and challenge other British mine owners with His authored book "Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi" (The Religion of the Khasis), it is a great contribution in preservation of tradition of Khasi community.

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, Assam : Born on 18th April 1860 at Kajigami, Dhubari Assam, Died in his village on 8th May 1938. Shri Kalicharan Brahma belongs to Mech community. He is mainly known as socio religious reformer of Bodo Community. He initiated new way of worship known as Brahma Dharma. According to this ideology Fire is Brahma, It gives life to entire living

creature. He replaced Idol worship by fire worship and animal sacrifice as offering by fruits. He was one of member of delegation that visited Simon Commission at Shillong on 4th January 1929.

Late Shantikali Maharaj, Tripura : Born on 15th June 1955 at Fulsori, Sub-divn-Tuikumbha, Dist. Tripura (South) and Died on 27th August 2000, at Jiraniya, Dist. Tripura (west). Previously name of Shantikali Maharaj was Shri Shanti Tripura of Tripuri community. He worshiped as female devotee of 'Ma Kali'. He renamed himself as 'Shantikali Maharaj'. He preached religion during the pick of insurgency and terrorism. He didn't leave his activity though he was prohibited and got threatening from terrorist outfit several times. Ultimately he was assassinated by insurgents in his ashram.

Sri H. Onderson Mawrie : Born on 12th April 1920 at Vill Letumhkrah, Shillong, Meghalaya Died on 26th May 1991 at Shillong. Late Sri. H. Ondersen Mawrie joined army after completion of intermediate examination from Kolkata University. He participated in World War-II. After few years service he left the job and restarted his study of graduation from Guwahati University. He joined High school as teacher. He left the job in 1966 and went Srirampur for the study of Theology and Philosophy. During his study he was surprised to know that the khasi religion is great religion and has unique status in world religions. He is honoured with Swami Vivekanand Award by Shree Burrabazar Kumarpara Pustakalay Kolkata, and other many awards. He joined Seng Khasi movement at Nongthlang on 6th March 1978. He was president of Seng-Khah-Lang. He was writer of different books on Khasi religion and Culture his book. His book Ka Pakhat U Khasi is well admired. Later on it was translated into English by name 'The Khasi Milieu'.

Late Sri Hipshon Roy, Meghalaya : Born on 15th June 1915, Vill. Mawphlang, Meghalaya. Died on 2nd May 2003, at Shillong, Meghalaya. He was contemporary social worker of Seng Khasi with Sri H. Ondersen Maowari. He joined army and participated in World War-II. In collage days he was active in social service. From 1946 to 1975 work as an efficient government officer in different capacity. He worked mostly in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

After his retirement he worked for the retention of Indigenous faith and Culture of Khasi Community. He is one of the prominent leaders to start Seng Khasi movement. He was writer of different books on Khasi religion and Culture.

Late Prof Gangumai Kamei, Manipur : Born on 21st October 1939, Died on 5th January 2017 at Imphal, Manipur. Shri Gangumai Kamei was a Professor of History in Manipur University. He was awarded by 'Manipuri Sahitya Parishad' for his contribution in the field of history and tribal study in 2010. Represented as MLA twice and in both session he was cabinet minister of state. He was pioneer in giving philosophical foundation to TRC movement. He was member of NEC till his last breath.

The Torch bearer of Indigenous Faith and Culture Movement in North-East Bharat

Sri. Bikram Bahadur Jamatiya Tripura : Born on 1st October 1939 at Vill Khamarbari, Dist Khowai, Tripura. Sri Bikram Bahadur Jamatiya was community chief (Hoda Akra) of his Jamatiya community. During his tenure as Akra, insurgency and terrorism was at its pick in Tripura. In spite of several threats from these underground organizations he didn't leave his work of supporting tradition, faith and culture. Under his President ship Janajati Faith and Culture Protection Forum right from its foundation 2001 to 2015. He is honored by different awards in last decades.

Sri Nabam Atum: Born on 15th March 1948 at Vill. Aampoli, Dist. Papumpare Arunachal Pradesh. Shri Nabam Atum is from Arunachal Pradesh He was competent government officer and Chairman of Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission. He was president of Indigenous Faith and Cultural society of Arunachal Pradesh and Arunachal Vikash Parishad. Presently he is patron of Janajati Faith and Culture Protection Forum, Indigenous Faith protection Society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Sri Jaleshwar Brahma Assam : Sri Jaleshwar Brahma He is President of Janajati Faith and Culture Protection Forum. Earlier he was foundering General Secretary of this organization. He was founding General Secretary of Kalyan Ashram Assam. Later on he became All India Vice President of Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram.

Sri Kumar Yonzon, Sikkim : Born on 15th January 1951 at Vill - Pakyong, Sikkim. Sri Kumar Yonzon retired as Divisional Forest Officer. He was active in social activity while was serving as government servant. He was vice-president of All India Tamang Buddhist Association. He was editor-in Chief of periodical 'Tsar Gyam' which deals with tradition and culture of Tamang Buddhist tribe. He participated in different programs of Janjati Faith and Culture Protection Forum.

Er. Sri. Latsam Khimhun Arunachal Pradesh : Born on 31st March 1962 at Vill- Shohe Laktong, Dist Changlang. Sri Latsam Khimhun belongs to Tangsa community of Arunachal Pradesh. He is engineer and government employee working in electrical department. He believes in Rangfraism. He gave philosophical and spiritual base to this movement. He is thinker, philosopher and writer.

Smt. Kiepu Tshering Lepcha Sikkim : Smt. Kiepu Tshering Lepcha is from Lepcha Community she is 'Padmashree' awardees in the field of education for her community. She is also associated with work of Kalyan Ashram Sikkim. She was honoured by Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in its second Mahila Sammelan at Ranchi.

Sri Ramkui Newme Assam : Born on 25th May 1947 at Vill. Henam, Dist Dima Hasao. Shri Ramkui Newme is from Lodi village of Dima Hassao District of Assam. He belongs to Jemi Naga community of Assam. He was also personal secretary to Rani Ma Guidinliue. He is Vice-President of 'Janajati Faith and culture Protection Forum'.

Pu. Rorelliana Mizoram : Born 1 October 1947 at Baite village of Mizoram. Pu Rorelliana is one of the religious head of indigenous faith followers by name 'Nunna Lal Hnum' (own family of living god). He establishes a village for the follower of indigenous faith by name 'Chanchuana Khopui'. He lives in Aizwal, Mizoram. He is awarded by different awards. He is one of the leaders in establishing first school with facility to study Mizo tradition and culture.

Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith of Northeast Bharat

Chandra Krishna Malsom

Introduction to Indigenous Faiths:-

The word 'indigenous' refers to the notion of a place-based ethnic culture that has not migrated from its original place, and is not a settler or colonial type. Indigenous is different from being a the Western or Euro-American. Faith is the assurance that the things revealed and promised in the word are true, even though unseen, and gives the believer a conviction that what he expects in faith, will come to pass. It becomes so tangible that you now possess it. It becomes a reality in the spiritual realm. Therefore, Indigenous faith is a category used in the study of religion to demarcate the religious belief systems of communities described as being "indigenous".

The term "indigenous faith" is usually applied to the localised belief systems of small-scale societies. These belief systems do not typically engage in proselytization, thus distinguishing them from movements like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism that all seek converts and which are typically classified as "world religions". Indigenous faith is also often characterised as being distinct from the "world religions" because they are orally transmitted, intertwined with traditional lifestyles, and pluralist. Within the study of religion there has been much debate as to what the scope of the category should be, largely arising from debates over what the term "indigenous" should best encompass.

Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith Movements in the Northeast Bharat:-

□ **Heraka Movement:-** In respect of Nagaland, the Heraka is a socio-religious movement of the Zeliangrong Nagas. The movement was started

by Haipou Jadonang, for the preservation of the Zeliangrong indigenous religion and culture. Heraka literally means 'pure' in Zeme, and it is a reformed religion. It believes in the supreme God Tingkao Ragwang (God of Heaven), the creator of everything, and does not believe in the worship of spirits or smaller deities.

This reformed religion aims at the abolition of the obscurantist customs and superstitious practices. Besides, the reform movement also has political aspects. In the words of Gangmumei Kamei, 'the religious reform of Jadonang in the traditional Zeliangrong society was a synthesis of Christian monotheism and Hindu idolatry and temple culture, rationalized and simplified form of religious worship, the social solidarity and unity among the Zeliangrong groups reviving their common origin, past and a political ideology of a kingdom which inspired political integration of the Zeliangrong people under a polity system, perhaps monarchy, thus making the Zeliangrong revolt for independence, anti colonial struggle, identifying with the greater national struggle for India's independence.'

□ Donyi-Polo Movement:-

In Arunachal Pradesh, according to Talom Rukbo's theology, all celestial bodies including Earth, all things, originate from one source, *Keyum* (nothingness or the vacuum). Donyi-Polo is the polar force that generates all stars; the physical Sun and Moon, Bomong and Boo) near the Earth and humanity, are bodily manifestations of the universal unseen power Donyi-Polo, with Bomong carrying out the centralising power of Donyi, and

Boo the Polo power is life-giving. It is the analogy through which the Divinity (Sedi) can be described, representing the way in which the divine principle manifests itself, that is: eternally veiling, unveiling and then revealing himself in nature; providing harmony and balance to the universe, for example in the alternation of light and darkness, heat and cold, or unity (analogically, the Sun of the daily sky) and multiplicity (analogically, the stars of the night sky).

The practical expression of the faith in Donyi-Polo can be found in the daily life and actions of people: they call themselves “Donyi O, Polo Ome”, meaning “children of the sun and the moon”. When a believer is distressed he invokes “Donyi-Polo”. If a man is falsely accused of lying he invokes “Donyi-e!”, “oh Sun!”. All these are expressions of faith in Donyi-Polo upholding providently the world, rewarding the righteous and punishing wrong-doers. The divine pair is revered as the highest holy figure governing fate “Donyi-Polo” is also used in the sense of “truth” in sacral speech. “Donyi-Polo” is an epitome for wisdom, enlightenment, right conscience, truthfulness, and selflessness. Aware people are called “Donyi-Polo Ome”, which means “children of truth”. Elders are regarded as “Donyi-Polo Abu”, “representatives of the truth”.

□ Seng Khasi Movement:-

In the state of Meghalaya, the Indigenous Khasi people proclaim the dignity and solemnity of the indigenous Khasi faith and culture, celebrate “Seng Kut Snem festival” / Khasi Movement Day annually.

In Meghalaya, every year, the “Seng Khasi Movement” day is observed which marks a movement (tribal uprising) that took place in 1899. However, this was not the first uprising in the region. The early part of the 19th century saw “Ri Hynniewtrep” (Khasi nation) under the local rulers. Over last two centuries, Seng Khasi has played the role of a custodian of the cultural and

spiritual heritage of the people in the region.

The faith had originated on the line of the Brahmo Samaj, but became a resurrected tribal faith that took shape in the 19th century. It is also a torchbearer of “Niamtre” religion of the tribal masses of Meghalaya.

Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith Movement in Tripura:-

In the perspective of Tripura, the Land of Chaturdasa-Devata (Fourteen Gods and Goddesses) various religions like Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma, Buddhism, Brahmanism and Indigenous Tribal Religions or faiths had been prevailing since time immemorial. Tripura became an important centre of Buddhism from the first decade of 6th Century AD, and tantric Buddhism flourished from 8th Century AD onwards, especially with the Tribal folks of Maghs and Chakmas.

The Immigration of plain land people marks the rise of Brahmanism. The religious history of Tripura prior to 12th Century AD is mixed up with the religious history of ancient Sylhet, Samatata, Noakhali, Chittagong and other neighbouring States of North-Eastern India. Various Schools of Hinduism like Saivism, Vaisnavism, Saktism, etc. flourished here with conspicuous regional imprint during the Medieval Period. Side by side, tribal religion, with its faiths and beliefs, rites and rituals were also prevalent as non-Brahmanical religious system. All these played a vital role in building the characteristic features of the religious and cultural aspect of this tiny Hilly Tract of North-Eastern India.

But afterwards, by the increasing impact of conversion into Christianity of local tribal people in the State; indigenous faiths and culture are at stake now which needs immediate protection and preservation failing which these will be definitely extinguished in near future. As such, some prominent communities like Jamatia, Molsom, Reangs, Tripuri and so on trying to maintain their

age-old indigenous faiths, culture and traditions at their own capacity which is not enough at all. Some of the traditional faiths protection organizations found like Baba Gorla Mission, Lampra Gorla Bodol, Awipa Sengrak Mission, Satya Sanatan Ram Mandali etc. by different tribal communities. Therefore, a common platform is required to stand unitedly for which the Janjati Faith & Cultural Protection Forum was formed under the leadership of Sri Bikram Bahadur Jamatia-ji, Formerly President of the Forum, North East States, India.

Conclusion:-

The Revitalisation of Indigenous Faiths Movements organized by different Janjati Communities, groups, sub-groups etc in the Northeast Bharat is in need of more comprehensive understanding amongst the tribes, communities, groups or sub-groups of all Northeast States irrespective of language, manner of worship, social system and the nomenclature of the Gods and Goddesses used for worshipping for the sake of our common goal for entity and existence. The interstate and inter-community relationship amongst the indigenous faiths and belief followers is not upto mark as per the need of the hour. Therefore, it is necessary that all indigenous faith followers' should work hand in hand as brothers and sisters to achieve our common goal of Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith, failing which our dream or vision will be shattered into pieces. We should pledge to succeed for the Revitalisation of Indigenous Faiths Movement with the help of each other.

Some additional information on the facts related to the indigenous communities of Tripura is appended below.

1) Name of the community and their original faith:- Actually Community is **Halam** and Sub-tribe is **Molsom**. Name of original faith is Sanatan Dharma (Hindu) or Sangsari.

2) Why the original faiths are being abandoned:- In the original faith system, some boli pratha (sacrificing of animals), use of wine in pujas and social functions like naming ceremony, birth rites ceremony, marriage, death rites, warding off evil spirits, malevolent spirits and pujas for recovery from illness by sacrificing animals etc are criticized by so-called educated class in the society and practice of puja-parvans are also leveled as superstitious and unscientific. These ideas could have been successfully instilled in the minds of common people by the Christian Missionaries and their agents especially in remote areas. Traditional social workers could not counter them successfully for want of adequate knowledge, training and financial resources at their disposal. But the Missionaries have all types of resources, highly skilled motivators and money power.

3) Is there any initiative on the part of some community or community faith organization leaders to revive the original indigenous faith?

Description of the success stories:- After 1980's riot between Bengali and Tribal people in Tripura; almost all kinds of Socio-Cultural programmes were stopped due to law and order situation, economic crisis, lack of initiatives for want of courage in such a critical situation in the state. Therefore, the social system started deteriorating faster and Christian Missionaries took advantage of this situation to convert people to Christianity in the name of education, true faith and scientific way of life etc. But the traditional leaders were trying their best to revive the social system but result is not satisfactory. In such a situation, in collaboration with Kalyan Asharam Tripura our age-old social apex body Molsom Dofa of Tripura partially reversed the trend in 2004 by organizing Community Festival and Puja called Sengrak Festival (Khawserpui & Cultural Festival) in Manithang Para, Udaipur, Gomati Tripura, which is continuing till date. Since then various social activities are have revived and we are trying our best to revive the indigenous faith, culture and tradition.

4) Did the conversion distort and disturb the peace, amity and brotherhood within the community of your area:- Nowadays, it is noticed that in Christian dominated villsges there are lots of problems like obstruction in worshipping of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, propitiation rites of Satan to get rid of natural calamities, puja performances, opposition in maintaining socio-cultural relations and above all pressurization for conversion etc.

5) Pressure on indigenous social institutions: Where there are maximum families

of converted Christians, they are trying to take control over the societal institutions by forming community chief of their own contrary to the traditional social system. It is a great challenge for us which we shall have to combat.

6) Your efforts for revival of the glorious traditions of the original faith:- We are trying our best to revive the glorious social traditions of our age-old faith by holding cultural activities, meetings, awareness campaigns, distribution of religious literatures, leaflets, pamphlets and handbills etc. □

* * * * *

Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith of the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh

Techi Gubin

The Nyishis constitute roughly one third of the population of Arunachal Pradesh inhabiting in 7 districts of the total of 24 districts. In the fifties they called themselves as Hindus and the entire population was indigenous faith believers. The Roman Catholic Mission had sown the gospel among few students at Ziro and started its mission in 1963. With the attainment of status from NEFA to Arunachal Pradesh (Union Territory) in 1972 and Statehood in 1987 many missionaries had entered Arunachal Pradesh and gradually started converting the Indigenous people into Christian faith in various denominations of the churches like Catholic, Baptist, Revival, Pentecostal, Presbyterian etc. As per 2011 census more than 63 percent population of the Nyishis were already counted as Christians. Now they claim that they have converted 90 percent population of the Nyishis, especially in Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare districts. However, we will get the correct figure after 2022 census.

Unlike other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh the Nyishis are Nature worshipers. In the olden days the worship of nature were performed by the Shamans (priests) only. The laymen did not do worshipping although they believed in Gods and Goddesses. Pujas etc were performed by the priests as and when required, i.e, whenever someone falls ill. Other rituals like birth, death and marriage rituals were also performed by the priests. So till 1986 there were no any organised religious groups of the Native People in the state of Arunachal Pradesh except Buddhism. Golgi Bote Talom Rukbo founded Donyipolo Yelam Kebang on 31st December, 1986 at Pasighat as a common forum

of the indigenous faith believers and evolved their own systems of prayers and worship in the Ganggings (Prayer centres). The image of the creator of the Universe (*Aane Donyi*) is kept in the Ganggings and worshiped every Sunday by the devotees.

Now 1st December every year is observed as Indigenous Faith Day and 31st December as Donyipolo Day among the Adis, Apatanis, Galos, Mishings and Nyishis. The names of religions of other Tribes are: Rang Fraah (among Tangsa, Tutsas), Rangkothak (among Noktes, Wanchoos), Inni Mashelo Jinu (among Idu Mishmis) and Amik Matai Ringya Jawmalu (among Digaru Mishmis, Mijo Mishmis). These prayer centres are known as Gangging (among Adis), Kargu Gamgii (among Galos), Nyedar Namlo (among Nyishis), Medar Nello (among Apatanis), Donyipolo Namlo (among Tagins), Khumu (among Idu Mishmis) and Tachow Khumya (among Digaru Mishmis and Miju mishmis). They have also formed their own forums like Donyipolo Yelam Kebang, Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society, Dani Piilo Society, Rang Fraah Faith Promotion Society, etc to protect, preserve and promote the age old cultural heritage. Of late, the think-tanks of the Nyishis wanted to do away with the traditional system of animal sacrifice to appease the malevolent deities to save themselves from illness and unforeseen catastrophes.

It was in the year 1999 when a group of voluntary social workers namely; Shri Tedi Tech, Shri Tech Gubin, Shri Nabam Atum, Late N.E Tana, Shri Rekhi Tana Tara and Dr. Tana Showren

along with other likeminded intellectual members of the Nyishi Society formed a platform called the Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society (NIFCS). Under the aegis of this organisation the social and indigenous cultural movement started to grow stronger in the society.

By the initiative of Shri Nabam Atum our dream turned into reality. On the basis of spiritual method and commandment authored by Dr. Nabam Tata and supported by his better half Smt. Naba Mekha the first edition of the spiritual learning book called *NYETAM* was published in 2001 and the historic and first ever Donyipolo prayer system of the Nyishis started on Saturday the 27th January 2001 at the residence of Shri Tana Tochu and Smt. Tana Kuka at Doimukh. Thus the desired ideology based platform called **Nyedar Namlo** came into being. The mass prayer system got an overwhelming response from all sections of the community among others. However, Saturday being working day for the employees of education department and works department they had expressed their inability to attend the mass prayer on that day. So the prayer day was shifted to Sunday and at present it is followed all over the state uniformly.

Over the years the Nyedar Namlo goers have increased and the areas expanded to all the Nyishi

inhabited districts of Arunachal Pradesh including some parts of Assam. With the combined efforts of Central Executive Council of Nyedar Namlo (CECNN), Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society (NIFCS), Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP) and Arunachal Vikas Parishad (AVP), the rate of conversion could be checked to a great extent. The present status of Nyedar Namlos as on 31.7.2020 is as under:-

(1) East Kameng	:	9
(2) Pakke Kessang	:	3
(3) Papum Pare	:	11
(4) Lower Subansiri	:	1
(5) Kurung Kumey	:	1
(6) Kra Daadi	:	2
(7) Kamle	:	14

There are reports of homecoming every Sunday from all over the state. Some of them are coming back after being in the church for 15-20 years. The following is the list of a few Homecomers:-

1. Shri Chukhu Tath with 2 members of his family from Taib village, Lower Subansiri.
2. Shri Likha Tatu, Taib village, Lower Subansiri.
3. Shri Chukhu Abo with 3 members of his family from Taib village, Lower Subansiri.
4. Shri Likha Magu with 7 members of his family from Taib village, Lower Subansiri.
5. Shri Tai Lukap, with 6 members of his family from Pachin Colony, Naharlagun.
6. Shri Bamang Tasu with 4 members of his village from Panch-ali, Itanagar,



Nyedar Namlo Itanagar

7. In 2019, 12 persons came back on one Sunday at Seppa Nyedar Namlo.

8. Shri Joram Ribia with family from AB-Sector, Itanagar.

9. Shri Joram Taj with family from Vivek Vihar, Itanagar.

The CECNN teaches to do away with the old system of offerings and animal sacrifice, except major festivals, and adopt the new method of prayer system as per NYETAM. In the new system anyone can become a priest on being trained. The trained priests are called Nyetam Nyub. As such, the Nyetam Nyubs can perform all the rituals namely; Birth Ritual, Death Ritual, Marriage Ritual and other Healing Rituals for ailments etc.

Another teaching of the CECNN is to do away with the social taboos cutting across all barriers. We consider all to be equal before the eyes of the supreme creator Aane Donyi who gives equal lights to all living things on earth through the Sun (Wjwne).

The month of November, every year, is kept for Door to Door or House to House services called Dapo Sonam. The motto of this program

is to keep contact with all the indigenous families and to encourage them to go to the Nyedar Namlo. During such visits lockets of Aane Donyi and Donyipolo flags are distributed free of cost. The flags are to be hoisted on or before 1st December every year. The household can either hoist the flag themselves or invite the priest(s) to perform some ritual on the occasion. The month of December, every year, is kept for annual offering month called Dor Chirnam. The devotees are allowed to give their annual offerings at the Nyedar Namlo on four Sundays of the month at their free will.

During the Corona Pandemic and Lockdown, the devotees could not attend the Namlos for Sunday prayers due to WHO protocol. However, options are also being made to introduce Mass Prayers at Home by the family members on every Sunday. Instructions have already been given to the respective families by CECNN. Some families have already started the prayers at home on Sunday.

With these type of sincere efforts and innovations we may be able to revitalise the Indigenous Faith of the Nyishi Community of Arunachal Pradesh. □



Golden Nyokum Yullo Celebration 2020 at Sagalee

Revitalisation of Indigenous faith: The Bathou Religion in Boro Society

Dr. Mangal Singh Hazowary

1. A short introductory note on Bathouism:

The Bathou as a religion is being followed and observed by Boro people since the time of immemorial. The Bathou is a blend of religious faiths, philosophies and guiding principles for Boro people. Their wise and spiritual forefathers have prescribed the scriptures of the Bathou after thorough research and purging them of undesirable elements. The principles laid down in the Bathou scriptures have been providing ideal guide and direction to Boro people to attain virtuous and disciplined living. They have eighteen pairs of forefathers. Among them, Mwnsin Sibwari and Mwnsin Siburwi are the founders of the Bathou religion. They have left us the minute details for performing the Bathou worship, the social rites and rituals. These are religious prescriptions and are being carried by practice and tradition through the ages. The Asari and Douries who had been helping in performance of all these rites and rituals including the Bathou worship have helped the Bathou being performed through ages despite it is being unwritten. Considering the need of a standardized and unified prescriptions for all Boro people in this regard, the All Bathou Mohasabha (दुःबाःगौः) after a thorough deliberation and keeping in view the observations received from the public, has taken to codify the Bathou Scriptures under the name and title 'Bathou Thandwi'. The Association has also framed guidelines on the roles of Bathou Guru, Gwthari, Asari, Douri and Dousi in the performance of various pujas and rituals. Bathou pujas and the Boro rites and rituals will hereafter

be performed by involving any or all of the following religious representatives, namely;

- i. Bathou Guru, ii. Gwthari,
- iii. Asari, iv. Douri v. Dousi,

These religious representatives shall hold their respective status and position as prescribed hereunder.

Bathou Guru :

The Bathou Guru shall hold the highest position of all the Bathou representatives. He shall be the supreme of all the Boro people following the Bathou religion. There shall be only one Bathou Guru among the Boro people.

Gwthari

Gwthari, shall be the religious chief of a district. He shall hold the position next to the Bathou Guru.

Asari, Douri and Dousi

Asari, Douri and Dousi will be responsible for performing pujas and observing the rites and rituals at village or local area.

(2) Qualifications of the Bathou Representatives

Bathou Guru

The Bathou Guru being the senior most representative, must possess thorough knowledge of the Bathou religion and all the scriptures of Bathou. He will be responsible for expansion of the religion. He should maintain solidarity and integrity among all the Bathou representatives and Bathou devotees as well. He must command

respect and honour from all the followers of the Bathou religion. He must have knowledge and expertise to explain any or all principles and concepts touching upon the Bathou religion. In addition to the above, he will have the following qualifications in particular.

- i. He should be loving and kind in nature.
- ii. He must have a heart to pardon.
- iii. He must be God fearing. Worship shall be his prime goal.
- iv. He must be ever willing to sacrifice.
- v. He must be able to control his emotions.
- vi. He must be always helping in nature.
- vii. He must be always calm and thoughtful.
- viii. He must be ever generous.
- ix. He must always cherish good and the truth.
- x. He must be practical and farsighted.

Keeping these qualities in mind the Bathou Guru should endeavour to settle all the issues placed before him for resolution. Love, affection and pardon should be the guiding criteria for him while dealing with persons of varied nature and habits. His objectives should be to bring peace and justice among the people through the practice of love and non-violence thereby discouraging the elements of malice, hatred and distrust. Hate the sin not the sinner shall be his guiding principle. He should give equal treatment to the sinner and the sinned and yet will bring change and reformation to the mind of the sinner.

The Bathou Guru shall not have any personal craving for anything. He shall not be angry in any circumstance. He shall not desire for anything for himself. He shall have no wish for himself. He shall be free from pride and prejudice. The thoughts and philosophies of the Bathou Guru shall be based on those heavenly qualities of life. He shall lead a simple and honest life. He will eat simple food and shall avoid at all times, alcoholic substances. He shall give up eating meat and fish. He shall avoid

sexual activities and stay away from all such sinful acts.

2. Gwthari

Gwthari shall hold and enjoy a position next to the Bathou Guru. Therefore, the essential qualities of the Bathou Guru must be with him as well. Besides, he will be responsible for expansion, reformation and spreading of the Bathou among the people. He shall be responsible for giving religious teachings to all the representatives of the Bathou including giving Dikhsha to them.

3. Asari

Asari shall be responsible for the performance of all the religious and social rites. He shall be well versed in procedures and Mantras. Therefore, the Asari is the speaking mantra for the Bora people. He shall ensure the performance of all the rituals beginning from the ritual to be observed at the time of birth to the ritual in respect of the death of a person. He shall maintain the society neat and clean.

4. Douri

The responsibility of maintaining a Bathou at every house shall be on the Douri. In the performance and celebration of a ritual, he will oversee the offerings to be made and all arrangements for such offerings should be made at the instance of the Douri.

5. Dousi

Dousi shall help the Asari and the Douri in the performance of all the religious and social rituals.

Qualifications of Asari, Douri and Dousi

The Gwthari, the Asari and the Douri should have the qualities prescribed at serial numbers from 1 to 10 for the Bathou Guru. The Dousi should have acumen for the performance of religious rituals and social rites. He must have unshakeable faith in the Bathou.

(3) Dress Code for the Bathou Representatives

All the Bathou Representatives from the Bathou Guru to the Douri should wear Gamsa and long Shirt (Kurta) of dark yellow color. They will have

Aronai (muffler) around their neck as specified below. The Bathou Guru will wear a yellow turban.

Representative Colour of the Aronai & Colour of Agor (Design)

A. Bathou Guru	Red	Dark green
B. Gwthari	Green	Red
C. Asari	Yellow	White
D. Douri	Light green	Red

The Dousi will wear a Gamcha (Short sized Dhoti) of green colour and a dark yellow shirt on it. He will keep a green Aronai having Agor (design) of yellow colour around his neck.

(4) Khira Hwnai (Giving Dikhsha)

When a child grows up and begins to understand the meanings of life, society and religion, a child is required to perform the Khira Hwnai ritual. This ritual may be performed at the family Bathou or at the public Bathou. Gwthari is responsible for the performance of this ritual. Douri and Dousi will help the Gwthari in this regard. The child taking the dikhsha should recite the following mantra before the Bathou with folded hands.

Wng — Hring — Khlings — Fwd — Se (5)

O Father, Bwrai Bathou,
 You are the creator of all,
 You have no beginning
 Nor have you an end;
 O Bwrai Bathou, father of all,
 You are the source of religions,
 You are the protector, the almighty,
 O father, Bwrai Bathou,
 You are the omnipresent,
 You are the omniscient,
 You are the omnipotent,
 You are the teacher of all,
 O father, Bwrai Bathou,
 You rule over the universe,
 You are the God of gods,

Under your care we live,
 All beings die as you wish,
 O Father Bwrai Bathou,
 On this holy occasion,
 I solemnly affirm that
 I shall follow the Bathou,
 I shall grow with the Bathou,
 I shall live with the Bathou and
 I shall die with the Bathou.’
 O Father, Bwrai Bathou,
 Help me to be true and honest,
 Let me be true Bathou follower.

After chanting the mantra he will bow to the Bathou. Thereafter, he will be given one spoon of holy water in the cup of his hand to drink. This will be repeated five times. On completion of this ritual the boy is treated as having been consecrated to become a Bathou devotee.

Newly selected Members

The newly selected members of the All Bathou Mohasabha (दुःबाःगौः) will be required to take an oath before they are allowed to resume their duties. The members selected for the Central Office will take oath before the Bathou Guru. The members selected for district or villages will take oath in presence of their respective Bathou representatives.

The Office bearers or the representatives of the All Bathou (Mahasobha) will take oath as prescribed herein below.

Wng - Hring - Fwd - Se (5)
 O father, Bwrai Bathou,
 To day at this holy moment,
 I Mr. XX (the name of the person),
 In presence of all present,
 Do solemnly affirm that
 As a member of YY (the Office)
 I shall perform my duties
 To the best of my ability and

Dedication and sincerity,
O Father, Bwrai Bathou,
I solemnly affirm in thy name.

2. The aim of reviving and revitalizing indigenous Bathouism (Sanatan Dharma -Sanskriti) of our fore father i.e. the traditional Bathou religion of the Boros.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, guru dev Kalicharan Brahma had in an attempt to showcase the Bodo culture / Boro culture as a civilized manifestation of an organised religion, introduced the Brahma religion among the Bodos. It was a departure from the animist religion that prevailed amongst the Bodos. By the turn of the century, many Bodos had turned Hindus (Brahmas Saranias or Christians, Buddhists or Islamic etc. Bathou religion, so closely related to Bodo culture, had begun to lose its importance. In such a scenario, the new ideas of Bathou propagated by All Bathou Religious Union (Currently known as All Bathou Mohasabha) and likeminded people came as a wakeup call to all. The said organization was established in 1992 i.e. 16th May, 1992 at Tribal Rest House, Guwahati, Assam. The all Bathou Mahasabha had, for better or for worse, brought in certain revolutionary changes as well as reforms in the Bathou religion, dismissing animal sacrifice and drinking of Jou (Rice beer or alcohol) during Bathou worship. The organization brought in the practice of flower- offering and singing of hymns (Bathou prayer song) for the welfare as well as betterment of the human beings of the world. At present, Bathou has adopted a completely new face, which many of us i.e. orthodox in olden faith and systems may find difficulty in accepting. But it has no doubt brought back many worshipers of Bodo society who had begun to give up Bathou religion, culture and language as well as civilizations. Because Bathou culture is Bodo civilization and

Bodo Civilisation is Bathou Culture.

The All Bathou Mahasabha observes that the conversion by other religions organizations or institutions are distorting and disturbing the peace, unity and brotherhood within the communities of our area. We, the organizers of the All Bathou Mahasabha try to control the bad elements and activists to maintain peace, unity, discipline, tranquillity and brotherhood amongst each other of our area. Because Bathouists believe the following sayings of Bwrai Bathou (All mighty God):

“Pray to God, the immortal
Aspire for Good and beautiful
Learn to love all living beings
Hate the sin not the sinners
Love the earth, do not hurt”

Our efforts for revival of the glorious traditional of the original faith i.e. Bathouism is spreading day by day throughout India as well as the world. It may be mentioned that the Bathouism is also facing tough challenges in conserving their cultural traits and religious beliefs like other tribals of the world. The increasing contact with advanced communities have effected huge changes and reforms in regard to their language, culture and religion. For holistic development of the All Bathou Mahasabha (Central), District, Biyab, and village level organizations are mobilizing and organizing the messages as well as rules and systems of Bathouism as per as possible along with construction of Bathou temples and office buildings in BTC area in Assam. The same activities are being organized in the state of west Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal and Nepal by the Bathouists. We hope our efforts for revival of the glorious traditions of the original faith i.e. Bathouism will achieve grand success in near future with the blessings of the Almighty Bwrai Bathou. ◻

Revitalization of Indigenous Faith of The Karbis

Dhaneswar Engti

The origin of the word 'Karbi' can be found in the 'Mosera Kehir' which is a kind of retelling of the origin of Karbi history. Historically and also by ancestry, the Karbis call themselves 'Arleng', which literally means 'Man' in Karbi language. But, the term 'Mikir' is considered as a derogatory form of Karbi identity. There is no definite meaning of the word 'Mikir' in the Karbi language. The closest meaning of 'Mikir' could be said to be derived from 'Mekar'. In regards to the religious faith of the Karbis, most of the Karbis still practice Animism and this is their indigenous faith or religion.

In the history of the Janajati communities, there is a close relationship with the rest of the Indian society, clan, lineage of priest/saints/ Rishis. Therefore, in the present day, the state of Assam is the suitable homeland of the Karbis. The Karbis are proud to call themselves as the sons and daughters of 'Hemphu and Mukrang Aso'; they also like to call themselves as 'Arleng Aso', which means son of man. The Karbis have a very strong spiritual and traditional connection with the indigenous faith of their own. They greatly believe in the existence of God, the Hemphu, who is also known as "Hemphu Arnam."

According to Stack and Lyall the original abode of the Karbis was the eastern portion of the Khasi and Jayantia Hills bordering the Kopili river. (The Mikirs (Reprint), Guwahati, p-4). But according to Jygoram Gogoi, the earlier settlement of the Mikir was in the hills called Nongpilar in the North-Eastern region and the Karbis came down to the plains and settled in the hills called Lumbajong lying between Dimapur and Diphu..(Asomor

Janajati, Jorhat 1963, by – Jygoram Gogoi, p-118).

According to G.C. Medhi, - 'the early habitat of the Karbis was in the hilly region between Nagaon and Sibsagar (present Jorhat) districts in and around Kaziranga forest. He further says that the very name Kaziranga was derived from Kajir-Arong, meaning the village of the legend Karbi lady, Kajir Ronghangpi.' (N.N. Barua, Karbi Sanskritir Dhara, an article published in the Assamese, Weekly Janambhumi, 30th June issue, 1976). In the said article, N.N. Barua also stated clearly that, - 'in regard to the settlement of the Karbis, he also opines that the area between Dimapur and the Kopili river called Hayong was inhabited by the Karbis in course of their earliest migration.

Karbis, previously known as Mikir Community, play a dominant role in North-east India. They are the oldest aboriginal tribes of North-East India. Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha has, therefore, called the Karbis as 'the Columbus of Assam'. Karbis are by nature eco-cosmologist and indigenous community of nature. They are closely related to natural objects and their rites and rituals are performed by adhering to the religious belief systems and conservation of natural resources and ecological ethos.

According to Ujjal Kumar Sarma, - "Eco-Cosmologies of indigenous communities with regard to the world of humans and the world of nature is closely related to each other, and rites and rituals based on such belief systems are important for the conservation of nature." He further would like to say that, - 'how the culture,

particularly the cosmologies and religious beliefs of a indigenous tribal group – like Karbis living near Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India have institutions for the conservation of natural resources. Based on his field work conducted in two Karbi villages, one still adhering to the traditional religion with deep seated reverence for nature and all life forms, and the other which has converted to a new religion, . He throws light in his paper on the changes and challenges to the indigenous ecological ethos in the preset context.”

The word religion is very special for a religious person and it is closely connected with belief in god or gods. It is also closely connected with the activities of praying and worshipping a god or gods in the temples or churches and other religious places of this world. Here, if we realize in the broader sense of the term, religion is a fastidious process of belief in a god or gods. So, all these spiritual activities which are closely connected with this process are call religion. It can be clarified that, - the definition of religion is a controversial matter and it is a complicated subject in religious studies. The scholars are failing to agree on any one of the definitions of religion till today. The Oxford Dictionary defines religion as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or Gods.

Thus, the Karbis also strongly accept as true the existence of one Almighty God in Heaven, who is known as *HEMPNHU ARNAM*. Hiassistant, Iru Songsarpo Marang, is the creator of our Mother Earth. At first, he created grass and straw, then he created plants and trees, after that he created hills and mountains, then followed streams and rivers, deer and hog, different kinds of birds, and other necessary items required for the sustenance of human beings on mother Earth, and everything looked good and it was made fit for human habitation. After completion of his creation he went back to his heavenly abode.

Thus, Iru Songsar Richo had beautifully created

our Mother Earth along with other necessary living and non-living things as per the directions of Hemphu Arnan from his heavenly abode. From the “Porom Alun”, we can easily understand that the Karbis are the believers of one Supreme God, and He is none other than - “Hemphu Arnam”. Everything is born out of His will and without His will nothing will perish from this world.

Sri B. S. Rongpi also writes about the sanctity of Karbi’s Religious Faiths that, – there are two kinds of gods and goddesses in this universe, – those who live in heaven and are not harmful to human beings and the other category of gods and goddesses who are harmful and are hiding within our surroundings. The Karbis worship both the categories of gods and goddesses of this universe. They summon gods and goddesses by chanting mantras on special occasions and ask them to help people when they fall in trouble like sufferings from serious diseases or some ailments and in return they perform blood sacrifices of fowls, pigs, goats and other worshipping materials to the deities during the religious rituals in order to get rid of the evil spirits who wreaked upon them and thus they try to appease those demi-gods and evil spirit’s persecutions. The Karbis also believe that, - the demi-gods and goddesses including evil spirits are hiding in and around their villages and in the forest, rivers, sky and the surrounding areas of mother earth. Therefore, it can be rightly said that the Karbis are the believers of many gods and goddesses, and also they do not hesitate to worship those gods and goddesses to protect themselves from the fury of the evil spirits, and thus, they have the habit of worshipping and respecting all natural objects including living and non-living things, and they also believe that hills, mountains, rivers, big trees, and all natural objects are the ideal homes of numerous gods and goddesses on this mother earth and thus, he has made it clear about the faith of the Karbis in his article *‘The Faith of Karbis’* very precisely. Here, Sri B.S. Rongpi also tried to justify, actually who is the real indigenous and

more aboriginal tribes of the North-East India. According to him an indigenous faith of the Karbis is the one who accepts the principles and practices of Hemphu – Mukrang and Rasinja's faith ; that means, one who do not believe the teachings of Hemphu, Mukrang and Rasinja cannot be recognized as the indigenous faith of the Karbis.

According to available Karbi's modern historical records, religious conversion started from 1880 taking advantages of illiteracy and ignorance of the Hills Karbis. Moreover, they were not aware and sensitive about the teachings of Hemphu Arnam during those days. Leonard Bey articulated about the art of the Karbis and its religious practices in his valuable article 'Art of the Karbi and its Religious Practices', published in the book *'Socio-Cultural and Spiritual Traditions of Assam'*, published by Heritage Foundation, K.B. Road, Paltan Bazar, Guwahati. Sri Mondol Sing Bey also writes about the 'Philosophy and Spirituality of Eternal Culture of the Karbis' in which he has cited about the Karbi's own faith and culture. Karbis have a strong theological background of religion. According to Karbi's belief, the God, 'Hemphu Arnam', advised his Deputy, Songsar Richo, to create earth and other living and non-living things on the earth. Accordingly, Songsar Recho had created the same and returned to his heavenly abode and finally the 'Hemphu Arnam' himself came down to earth with his sister to see the creation of earth, which was beautifully created by his Deputy, Songsar Richo. Finally, the 'Hemphu Arnam' taught the rules and regulations of worshipping gods and goddesses and imparted other necessary spiritual knowledge to the Karbis of this earth. After completion of his duty, Hemphu Arnam went back to his heavenly abode. In the later part of the time, the Karbis were taught to worship evil spirits (Hi-I' Arnam) in order to get protection from the evil spirit's constant harms and tribulations. Thus, the Karbis started to perform pujas to other gods and goddesses including other evil spirits (Hi-I'- Arnam) like other

aboriginal tribal communities of North-East, India. According to Sir Edward Stack, - 'the Karbis have no idols, temples or shrines; the entire natural objects of a striking or imposing character have their divinity'. In this regard, Dr. Rabindra Ronghang, M.Sc. Phil., B.Ed., has beautifully explained about the 'Traditional Faith of the Karbis on the Existence of God'. He further opines that 'Karbhis perform pujas (KARKLI) and adhere to their traditional animistic religion which is considered as one of the oldest form of Hinduism. They do not make idols, build temples or shrine.' But, there is a strong concept of good and evil spirits in the Karbi religion. They make an effort to believe that there are forces of good and evil working directly or indirectly in this universe, which affects human's life. Good refers to God (Arnam) and Evil or Demon refers to 'Hi-I' in Karbi religion. He also goes on to make clear about the concept of good and evil which is highly vibrant in Karbi society and based on religious practices of the Karbi people. There is a common belief that good refers to God (Arnam) and Evil as Devil or Demon (Hi-I'). God is good and sympathetic and helpful towards human beings, while 'Hi-I' is harmful and provocative in nature and always ready to harass mankind and likes to transport sorrows to human beings at any moment. Thus, 'Hi-I' has got more destructive entities and capable of inflicting it on people anytime. Above all, both 'Arnam' and 'Hi-I' possess equal amount of divinity and mysticism in the religious faith of the Karbis.

Sri Longsing Teron also elaborated nicely about the Avatar of Lokhimon Arnam. He believes that His Holiness Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself and Lokhimon is omnipotent and formless. The disciples of His Holiness Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek sincerely believe and follow his religious teachings sincerely with a consecrated and sanctified heart. His teachings are phenomenal; although he hails from a very poor family, without any formal education, he is indeed a good reformist." It may be mentioned

here that, - Lokhimon Religion does not believe in idol worship and perform rituals with blood sacrifices. The prayer of Lokhimon Religion is performed with whatever materials are available and what a worshiper can afford at the time of the Lokhimon Prayer. According to his Holiness Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek, -“One can offer a flower in his worship, if not, it is enough to have a pure heart”. It is the sanctity of the heart that matters by detaching one’s greed and evading the unholy demand to fulfill from the almighty God. According to His Holiness, Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek, - “God is everywhere; he looks in our hearts and sees what we do. God does not ask, he has everything, he is contented with our worship from the depth of our hearts.” The disciples of His Holiness Kurusar, Lokhon Engti Hensek, call the religion, - *‘Karbi Lokhimon Adborom’*. It is more or less a synthesizer of Hindu religion of the present time. His Holiness, Lokhon Engti Hensek, is the founder Guru of the ‘Karbi Lakhimon Religion’. At present there are large numbers of His followers scattered all over the North-Eastern region of India. I hope, His Holiness, Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek is a person who advocates for gradual reform and revitalization of the existing faiths of Animism rather than abolition of indigenous faith of the Karbis.

When mother earth was soft, there was a time when men and gods and goddesses exchanged their feelings and ‘Songsar Recho, the creator of the universe, was the wisest god among them. During those days, the gods and goddesses could not remain in their actual form and had created problems to the Supreme God, (Hemphu Arnam), so, he dethroned them from heaven and forced them to enter this earth with some paranormal powers to enjoy as means of sustaining life. In due course of time, all the gods and goddesses turned invisible and started to give problems to human beings. However, some gods and goddesses, having good qualities, got to enjoy high power and they remained in the utopia, an ideal place of living.

But, for those who enjoyed less power were compelled to approach human beings and started to ask their share of honour from the human beings and in return they promised to protect them from all kinds of diseases and ailments. In due course of time, most of them became the spiritual deities of the Karbi’s and finally agreed to remain with the Karbis as their household gods and goddesses. Since then, the Karbis started to worship those deities as their household gods and goddesses regularly. The Karbis got to believe that there are two categories of gods and goddesses – those who live in heaven are harmless, but others who live within our surroundings are harmful and the Karbis worship both the categories of gods and goddesses simultaneously. But, the Karbis give utmost importance to worship the absolute gods, ‘Hemphu’, ‘Mukrang’ and ‘Rasinja’. The puja or worship of gods and goddesses can be done individually as well as collectively. A person who performs ‘puja’ or ‘Karkli’ is called - ‘Deori’ or ‘Kurusar’. Generally domestic pujas are performed by the head of the family while collective pujas are performed by the selected pujari or priest. The collective pujas include ‘Dengja Rongker’, ‘Wophong Rongker’, ‘Than Rongker, etc.

The Karbis are habituated to worshipping family gods and goddesses throughout the year and it is called “Sekarkli” in Karbi. They worship different gods and goddesses and various kinds of deities. During “Sekarkli”, a he/she-goat, pig or piglet, cock and chicken, egg, rice and rice powder, master oil, etc. are used at the altar of gods and goddesses. They worship earth, sky, air, and fire during “Chojun Karkli”.

The Karbis also strongly believe in the concept of five elements of Earth, Sky, Water, Air and Fire in their philosophy of human’s life and it is a natural phenomenon of Karbi’s indigenous religious practices, which required in-depth studies to identify its ancestry. They also worship these five elements of earth, sky, water, air and fire during the

performance of “Chojun” puja (Swarag Puja). It is regarded as one of the most sacred duties of a Karbi family to perform ‘Chojun Karkli’ at least once in every five year. They are habituated to worship many gods and goddesses including all natural objects and these are mainly;- the sun, moon, mother earth, tiger, hills, mountains, rivers, and many other natural objects including air and rain. The Karbi deities can be broadly divided into three groups according to their function and these are – ‘Hem-Angtar’, ‘Rongker, (a community Karbi puja) and ‘Thengpi-Thengso Ase’. Some of the main family rituals and community pujas are, - 1. Chojun karkli, 2. Peng karkli, 3. Inglongarit, karkli, 4. Volo kasor karkli, 5. Longle Ahi-ih, 6. Rongker, etc.

Religious Conversion: - All the Karbis before 1880 living in the excluded and partially excluded areas of North-East India were animist. During those days, Karbi people were illiterate and they were the worshipers of Hemphu and Mukrang Arnam’ and there was no difficulty in maintaining their indigenous religious faiths. But during 1880 to 1885, the Britishers started colonizing the north-eastern part of the present Karbi Anglong, some of the simple minded Karbi families started to embrace Christianity due to constant persuasions by the church leaders. As a result, some of the like minded Karbi families had discarded their traditional system of worship and age old traditional customs and traditions. But, most of the Karbis living in the hills region still practice animism as their religion and continue to follow their age old culture and tradition most importantly. The practioners of indigenous faith of animism, like the Karbis, got to believe that there is reincarnation of souls and they generally honour their ancestors like veneration of the dead. According to some writers, it could be learnt that during the census of India, 1961, many Karbi people mistakenly recorded animism as Hinduism due to ignorance and confusion of their own religion, so, many Karbi people got to follow Hinduism as their religion now-a- days.

Karbi religion and belief system is basically composed of rituals, honouring their ancestors, worship of household deities and territorial deities like – ‘Rongker’, ‘Than Arnam Karkli’, ‘Rit Anglong Karkli’, including performing of ritual for their dead ancestors which is known as ‘Karhi’ or ‘Chomangkan/ Chomkan’. Therefore, the Karbis, those who follow Karbi’s conventional and indigenous faiths can be identified as the followers of ‘Hemphu and Mukrang Aso’.

From the point of Karbi religion, it is basically animist in nature and it is more or less a crude form of Hinduism. It can be found in their worship of gods, and goddesses and other deities which are still prevalent in the Karbi society. The Karbis got to believe in the immortality of the human’s soul and reincarnation of the soul. According to Karbi belief, it has been believed that, - ‘Songsar Recho’ or the Almighty God is the creator of this universe. Moreover, there are innumerable deities and some are considered to be benevolent and some others are malevolent in nature. Some deity has a role to play to cure a particular disease, and Hemphu and Mukrang are two benevolent household gods, who protect the owner of the house and his entire family members. For the appeasement of the deities, the Karbis have to observe many religious rituals throughout the year. During the religious rites, they have to sacrifice goats, pigs, and fowls and offer prayer materials which are indispensable to be made use of. The Karbis are not fully detached from appeasing witchcraft and practising black magic; they have learnt the practice of black magic from their neighbours, which is presently on the decline stage due to rapid spread of modern education in the hills region.

In the recent years, many Karbis have accepted new faiths like – ‘Aron Kimi’, which is an outcome of religious movement of Hinduism to the fore, -such as, ‘Lokhimon’, a variation of Vaishnavism founded by His Holiness, Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek. Apart from that – ‘Bhaktitom Trust

(founded by Smt. Ambika Tokbipi), 'Sat Sangha' (a reform of Hinduism founded by Thakur Anukul Chandra) including 'Honghari' religion of the Karbis.

At present, these religious movements have tremendously influenced a great segment of Karbi population in the Karbi Anglong district and outside the district of Karbi Anglong, too. Apart from these religious movements, the conversion of religious faiths of Karbi people is taking place rapidly in the hills. Due to these religious movements in the present time, many indigenous tribal people including Karbis have started embracing Christianity and other religious faiths day by day and it is very important for every indigenous people of the hills to know about the urgency of revitalizations of the indigenous faiths of the ethnic tribal communities of North-East India. The time has come to know about the actual reasons behind decline of the indigenous religions and to try to find out ways and means

for removal of those setbacks from the society. It is also highly essential to protect, preserve and revitalize the indigenous faiths of the Karbis and other ethnic Tribal Communities of North-East, India. □

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Present Indigenous Faith of KARBI in The North-East India

Thaneswar Singnar

Karbi tribe is one of the major ethnic communities in North-East India, especially in the hilly regions of Assam. Like many other tribes of the North-East, Karbi did not have a written language and hence there is no written history about its origin, migration and settlement. It is indeed a hard task to find out where the Karbis came from and how their identity is formed at present. Historiography of North-East is obscure regarding the origin of Karbi today. However, a few prominent Karbi scholars have attempted to document the vast oral sources and bring their past alive. It is true that ethnic history can be reconstructed from oral tradition in the absence of any written history.

The great artist-scholar Bishnu Prasad Rabha refers to Karbi tribe as the Columbus of Assam. The Karbis linguistically belong to the Tibeto-Burma Group. The original home of the various people speaking Tibeto-Burman languages was in Western China near the Yang-tee-kiang and the Howang-Ho rivers and from these places they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irrawady and entered India and Burma. It is believed that the Karbis have migrated to Karbi Anglong and other parts of the state and also to the states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Bangladesh and to other districts of Assam like Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup, Sonitpur, Biswanath, Darrang, Lakhimpur, Cachar and Karimganj.

The Karbis has a distinctive culture and heritage of its own which is very rich and sweet. The Karbis are a patrilineal society. They are composed of five major clans called "KUR". These are 1. INGTI (Lijang), 2. TERANG (Hanjang),

3. ENGHEE (Ejang), 4. TERON (Kronjang) and 5. TIMUNG (Tungjang). Each of the five clans are again divided into many sub-classes. These clans are completely exogamous and marriage between a boy and a girl belonging to the same clan can never take place since the children of the same clan are considered as brothers and sisters. Violation of this customary law obviously leads to ex-communication of the couple involved. Even in the cremation ground called Tipit or Thiri, areas are kept demarcated for each clan although all the five clans are socially equal. Monogamy is the prevailing practice there is no bar to polygamy and the cases of polygamy are very rare. Cross cousin marriage is preferential and like other tribal societies the Karbi do not have the system of bride price.

The settlement pattern of the Karbis is in the form of a village and each village has a headman called Gaonburas. Each Karbi village is named after the Gaonbura. The Karbis, like the other hill tribes, have a tendency to live on the hills. Most of the Karbis are involved in the Jhum cultivation which is also known as the slash and burn agriculture or shifting cultivation.

The Karbis have their traditional dresses which are artistically designed. These dresses are woven at their family looms. There are separate dresses for men and women. The man wear an artistically designed attire called Choy-nangpo, Choy-honthor, Poho, Releng Rikong and the Karbi women and girls generally wear Pinicamflak, Pe-pekok, Wan-kok etc. The ladies use coloured and striped Endi-Scarf called Khonjari.

The Karbis have their own native language

i.e Karbi language. Karbis are well versed in Assamese which is used as lingua-franca to communicate with other indigenous Assamese communities. But Karbi do not have its own script, and hence use English alphabets.

The Karbis have their traditional songs and musical instruments, the oral song which is different from normal spoken words. The Rangina Sarpo was the first mentor of music, art and culture of the Karbis who was believed to have enlightened them and brought a renaissance in the domain of art and aesthetics by acting like a sauntering folk singer assisted by the Mirjeng brothers. Karbi musical instruments are similar to other indigenous tribal musical instruments; the difference is in the variance of play and beat.

The custom and religion of Karbis are quite fascinating in nature as it is animistic and revolves around superstition, the ways of Verdures life. The present study is attributed to the quest for more informative knowledge regarding the Karbis and their indigenous religion. The Karbis are ideologically committed to "Hindutva". Most of the Karbis still practice Animism with their culture and traditional influence. The basic religious faith of Karbis is Honghari, i.e. Animism. There are 10-15% Karbis who got converted to Christianity according to the census of India 2011. The base of the Karbi religion and belief system was basically composed of the ritual of honouring their "ancestor", worshipping of household deities and territorial deities. Practically, it's the "Hemphu-Mukrang" that dominated the Karbi Panthan. Thus, those Karbis who follow the traditional practices are known as the followers of "Hemphu Mukrang" for which they prefer themselves as "Hemphu Mukrang" also. Among the festivals observed by the Karbis, mention may be made of the "Seh-Karkli" (offering to god), "Chojun or Swrak-Puja etc.

Honghari, the Animism is a wonderful liberal religion without any transcript due to which most of them also worship the Hindu god and have proximity with the mainland Hindus having assimilation and the liberty to worship made

vulnerable to other religion. Honghari is an indigenous religion which believes in polytheism and in the worship of nature. They sacrifice chicken and other animals in the name of god and goddess. The traditional alcohol making (Hor-kitun-kedang) by fermenting rice is very important in the entire social and religious or traditional rites and it is offered to the entire household without which all the social rituals are incomplete. In Karbi society women are not allowed to worship or attend all the religious functions. There are many instances of marrying from the other faith who generally convert to the faith of their female spouse. So, the conversion of faith takes place. In recent years, with the spread of the new faith (Aront Kimi) a number of new religious movements have come to fare, such as "Lokhimon Dhoram", Karbi Bhaktitom Trust, Sat-Sang. These religious movements have influenced a section of the Karbi population. Apart from these movements the change and progress are also achieved by a section of the Karbis by embracing Christianity. The one objective of "LOKHIMON" religion is to bring them back to the Hindu faith and to check the conversion to Christianity.

Lokhimon Dhoram (Religion) is a Proselytizes religion and an Episcopalian which originated from Karbi Anglong District in the North-Eastern State of Assam. Lokhimon was founded on 5th February, 1959 by His Holiness Lokhan Ingti Hensek (Called Kurusar in Karbi) Kurusar was a great number of Karbis from Karbi Anglong, Dima Haso, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Biswanath, Lokhimpur, and in the other state of Arunachal Pradesh Followers to Lokhimon faith. Lokhimon metamorphosed from the aboriginal religion of the Karbis, the Honghari. Lokhimon faith has no difference from the Honghari, as the base of the Lokhimon Faith is Honghari.

Kurusar Lokhon Ingti Hensek was born to Palom Ingti and Katu Rongpharpi on 16th of June 1946 on a Sunday in Karbi Anglong (Assam) in a village called Dolamara. He was strong and brave from his childhood. He was afraid of nothing.

There is saying that in many different times he knocked the Tiger, Python, Bear, Thunderbolt and on the other side he dipped into the deep water of Langkhang (Defulu) for three hours continuously. He was playing, having fun and also doing supernatural activities. He was a religious reformer in the cultural and religious history of Karbi society. He was destined to play a significant role in preaching humanity and protecting human religion. He was born in the midst of Karbi society to impart spiritual knowledge and morality. He was inspired to spread the Lokhimon religion to all Karbi people.

After the founding of Lokhimon faith, his Holiness, Kurusar Lokhon Ingti Hensek took to "Travel (Longri Kahumri) with a few selected disciples of his, like Sapharam Terang, Angjok Hanse, Jangphong Teron, Sarphu Ingti, and Longki Lekthe. The Travel started from DOLAMARA (dated 01/02/1961 to 18/02/1961) to Koronga (Gulaghat), Japrajan, Mikir Hills, Boku Sarlip Terang village, Hanjang Langso (Horihojan), Khot-Khoti, Long Kathar village, Denapur, Lokbok Tisso village, Lahorijan, Tenglagla Bey Gaon, Manja, Diphu, Mohong, Diyuva Tisum Gaon, Koli Gaon, Kopli, Diyang and Umti and the North bank of Brahmaputra like Dengkajuli, Sunajuli, Harmuti, Pilkhana (Lakhimpur), Balijan, Kokila (Arunachal Pradesh), Kerek Bari, Bihumari, Sirajuli, Bhorali, Serelia, Gutibari, Nahorbari, Samukjuli, And Balichang (Biswanath, Assam) and others places. He pointed out four places while travelling as to where to build and establish the Ashrams (Longri Kangthir) of Lokhimon religion and the four Ashram, henceforth, came up at-

1st Ashram : Dalamara (Karbi Anglong)

2nd Ashram : Japrajan (Karbi Anglong)

3rd Ashram : Kokila (Arunachal Pradesh) and

4th Ashram : RangNagar (Karbi Anglong)

During his travel, he preached his followers about their actions and responsibilities and exhibited his miraculous powers. His Holiness taught them

the way to worship Lokhimon and to all-in redemption. Initially only the under privileged followed him as they are the class who are unable to perform the rites of their present faith as the rituals involved a heavy expenditure. But gradually after the in-depth observation and its outcome, the other classes who were well enough to feed themselves and wanted a change their faith to Lokhimon for salvation. Since then the search for Lokhimon faith and embracing it became continuous and till now the faith is spreading to the neighboring districts and states which soared from a few penurious disciples to the affluent families.

Kurusar Lokhon inspired a man as to how one should live his life i.e how to tread on the path of truth, fight injustice and be a righteous person. He used to stress on the belief in one and the only God. Hunting animals is strongly prohibited even if it is an insect. He said believing in one God is more appropriate than believing in many Gods. One only needs a pure heart and an open mind and simple living to purify the mind, body and soul. In this religion every being is equal. He said that God lives in humanity. He had respect for every religion and for all people. Even all the animals have the soul of God. Knowing that great truth everyone should be treated respectfully.

There are certain things which his Holiness (Kurusar) has asked his followers to give up. One of the most significant one was to give up alcohol. The others were tobacco, and the sacrificial offerings. Above all drugs is the most harmful for body and soul. He advised his followers not to take meat or offer it to guests as happiness cannot be obtained at the cost of life of another soul. So, partaking of meat or fish in feasts is not justified.

Kurusar Lokhon Ingti Hensek termed the journey of life as "KAI PORAM" and "SOT PORAM". The one who is born is bound to die. The cycle will continue. It is the way of nature. He classified human life into three stages-

1. Grown Up : Marriage,
2. Child : Birth and

3. Old : Death.

In these three chapters he narrates the period from birth to death of human being and all that exist in this world. The preaching laid down under Lokhimonism aims to bring the poor and the ignorant above their present level.

In preaching the teachings of Lokhimonism among the poor and the ignorant with a view to bring them above their present level. He ignored so many obstacles in preaching from the very beginning in the long run of 61 years till today. He believed and always said that we cannot make the poor and ignorant rich by simply giving them wealth, but we can make them rich by giving them knowledge and good character which means giving them actual love. He gave the message that- No deed is complete without devotion and without effort devotion is incomplete. If they unite then Lord Lokhimon does not hesitate to bless his devotees. Utmost faith, steadfast resolution, unchanging perseverance can work wonder. A man can do whatever he wishes. As life is the gift of God we cannot repay Him even if we take hundred births. His holiness shows us the power of devotion. He showed us what can be achieved through steadfast resolution and devotion. To establish the relationship of a devotee and god, the almighty god has prescribed code of conduct for all human beings.

As per the preaching of Lokhon Ingti Hensek, Lokhimon is the one who controls the world. Lokhimon is the one who is Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, merciful and Patient, Holy, Unborn, imperishable as well as destroyer. He is the creator of nature and is the one who has created everybody and protects his devotees. He is the reliever of all sorrows. He is always beside us and helps us in distress. Lokhimon is the real supreme God, his physical form cannot be comprehended. He can take any form as he is formless. Therefore we can imagine him as the image of Kurusar Lokhon and we all should pray to him with a pure mind. Lokhimon religion believes in the flame of the burning lantern (Chakki) as a

symbol of the most Holy being. That is why in the Lokhimon religion, the symbol of Lokhimon (God) is used to serve the flame of the burning lamp. As the light of the lamp is the supreme power, the power of light can save and destroy. It is believed "Lokhimon is as complete as the lamp which lights the other lamps". But yet he is intact.



DONKAM PHO

The symbol of Lokhimon is the five steps (DONKAM PHO) and at the top there is a lighted earthen lamp. The flame of the lighted earthen lamp symbolizes the supreme power. It indicates the attainment of salvation of our soul. The five steps have to be crossed to reach salvation and ultimately to Lokhimon.

1. Kekroi (Belief or Faith)
2. Kero-Karcho (Priest to God by chanting devotional Songs)
3. Keklem-Kedam (Selfless service to God)
4. Kachehodai (Total submission to God)
5. Bidi-Gyan, Karjong-Kangthir (Spiritual Knowledge or enlightenment, Sacred Soul).

By overcoming these five steps with true heart, the soul will be redeemed. It is the step to reach salvation of our life in the belief of God, Lord Lokhimon. In Lokhimon Adovan (Temple) the five steps and a lighted earthen lamp is used at the altar. It symbolises peace, belief and also the five-exogamy clans of the Karbis, the tribe of this religion.

Kurusar Lokhon Engti Hensek ordered all the devotees to build the Lokhimon Temple (Dovan). In Lokhimon religion, the temple is the heart of the human race or religion. It performs the functions of race and society in the same way that in the human body. Its concentration, thoughtfulness awakens the Holy Spirit and liberates the Soul. It is also considered as the center of development of national social life, religions, language and culture. It is a sacred institution built as a center for remembrance in which devotees can enjoy the bliss of the society by praising Lokhimon (God) along with Guru Lokhan, the founder of their culture society or religion. By constructing such a temple the devotees can always devote to their faith, reverence, prayers etc. To follow God in the footsteps of the devotee and in the process of playing a major role in this regard, they are able to transcend the way of life for the welfare of the human society. More than 110 numbers of Lokhimon temples have been built in Lokhimon religion across Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Lokhimon Temples is attached with five headed Snake Sculpture in the Ashram while the remaining temple has one head snake sculpture. Inside the temple it has a "HOTON" where a devotee and priest perform "Kangthir Methek" (Hawan). The Kangthir Methek is the highest form of prayer for Lokhimon sect. It is a ritual of sacrifice and performed to please the God. It involves pouring ablation into the divine fire. The main thrust of teaching was based on the values of helpfulness and protecting each other during the time of crisis.

Kurusar Lokhon Ingti Hensek has bulked to hold the part of woman as belonging to contribute in the creature of the world. That the love and affection for the world, inspiration and courage

to endure a lifelong companionship can be giving only by a woman. That is why God has created woman without love and affection the world cannot be get the peach. The man take the form of a husband, father and son and the woman prosper as a wife, mother and a daughter. The God bestows upon woman the feelings of love, affection and compassion and the man is endowed with powers of a protecting nature and preservers. He advises the woman to stop doing all normal duties during their menstruation period. In such a way apart from their keeping purity in all religious related rites that needs to maintain sacredness during this period of time, they restlessly carry all the works at all time. And his Holiness eradicated the system and made man and woman equal in all the social functions and positions as well as allowed women to worship freely.



Lokhimon Temple

Dress code refer in Lokhimon religion about taking step popularised traditional dress, producing and imparting training to weavers at (Phirthak-kethak-Ahem) making with a slight modification in the traditional design, awesome to look at the beautiful dresses in the religious rituals with lovely attires.

To maintain the role and discipline on wearing dresses, there already made the uniform on attire dressing in Lokhimon society at presents.

Karbi Anglong in Assam which is located in the North-Eastern part of the country and the Karbi tribes living in different parts of the sub-continent are backward compared to the other tribes. It is natural for human society, culture and religion to change with the passage of time in order to develop the Karbi society in a holistic manner to live with the present times.

Lokhon Ingti Hensek has been preaching the religion and guiding the basic path of human society. For executing all round development of Lokhimon religion he (Kurusar) formed Lokhimon Sangha which means Lokhimon society. The Lokhimon Sangha or society is already working towards establishing a moral, spiritual and controlled lifestyle in the society as opposed to the present day consumerist society keeping in view the ideals and goals.

Ideal: Love is the foundation of a new and benevolent all-encompassing society based on ethics and humanity. Without love, truth and non-violence life is meaningless. Children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are cherished by each, Peace fills the house and prevails in every household, region and country.

Goals and Objectives:

1. To enlighten the Karbi society which is being overshadowed by superstition and non-reforms with the light of spiritual knowledge. To awaken the general public with the universal message of Guru Lokhon and inculcating deep devotion and faith in the supreme God one must worship Lord Lokhimon as a completely new Vashnavite Panhara by abolishing the practice of sacrifice to get rid of all kinds of rage and drugs from the society. Contrary to the prevailing expensive marriage system, a non-alcoholic and less expensive marriage can be performed at a lower cost that can be borne by all sections of the society. Removal of all forms of malpractices and anti-culture from the society is the need of the hour.

2. It is necessary to create a revolutionary change in the agriculture sector by involving the farmers in farming through Co-Operative system in order to

increase the yield as well as the work culture of the general farmers.

3. Special emphasis on education for the overall upliftment of the weak and backward Karbi community is necessary. This is the reason why the youth of Lokhimon Religion have been organizing programs like Karcho Amei (Felicitation Program) every year and encouraging the students with the help of educated people.

4. Efforts should be made to ensure relief measures during the time of hardship and natural calamities and to provide facilities for the weavers (handicrafts and handloom arts and loom looms) in rural areas for improvement and development of their skill.

5. Emphasis should be placed on expressing interest in the truth by raising public awareness against untruths, malpractices, injustice, exploitation etc. It is necessary to understand that to become a true devotee of religious philosophy, one must carry out public welfare to ensure that daily life of one's family is filled with true religious practices.

It is hoped that the Lokhimon tradition which has permeated the hearts and minds of the Karbis of entire North Eastern, will bring in a flood of religious renaissance.

O Thou Lord Lokhimon
 O Thou Master of the Universe
 O Thou Father and Mother of Strength.

Take away my weakness,
 Take away my unmanliness-
 And make me a man

(The author of this article is the President, Youth Committee, Lokhimon Sangha 3rd Ashram Under District Biswanath, Lakhimpur (Assam) and PapumPare (A.P.)

An Attempt To Revitalize The KMAN & TAWRĀ Mishmi's Faith

Dr. Sodyong Kri

I. The Kman & Tawrā Mishmi Tribes: Out of the 26 major tribes that live in Arunachal Pradesh, Mishmi tribe is one of the major tribes having three sub-tribes namely Kman, Tawrā and Idu Mishmis. The Kman and Tawrā Mishmis are concentrated in Lohit and Anjaw districts whereas the Idu Mishmi tribe inhabits upper and lower Dibang Valley.

The Kman and Tawrā Mishmis have been referred in some colonial literature and official documents, but they still remain largely unknown. The Kman and Tawrā Mishmis are popularly known as Miju and Digaru Mishmi by outsiders. These sub-tribes are distinguished from other tribal brethrens by their attractive hand woven cloth and long hair twisted into a knot secured on the top of the head by a wooden pin and covered generally with a black turban. Varrier Elwin in his work describes the Kman and Tawrā Mishmis as “their weaving is probably the finest in the whole area and the Kman and Tawrā women are distinguished by their attractive hand “Woven cloth, coiffure and silver ornaments gave them an unusual and striking appearance” (Elwin-1987.p.xvi). The Kman and Tawrā Mishmis differ only in dialect and are not easily distinguished (Elwin, 1958.p.xv). Their spoken language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the main Sino-Tibetan family. The Kman and Tawrā Mishmis inhabited area is bounded on the North by China, on the East by Myanmar, on the West by Upper and Lower Dibang Valley and on the South by Changlang District and the state of Assam. The principal rivers are Lohit (Talloh), Kalung, Dav (Katuh), Dalai (Glai), Tidding (Krick), Tawong, Shang, Hali, Sar, Chowoh, Kamlang,

Kanjang, Lai, Dimwe, Dora Nallah, Digaru, Paya. etc. It lies between 95° 15' and 97° 24' East Longitude and 27° 33' and 29° 22' North Latitudes.

II. Faith and Belief Process of the God and Goddesses by Kman & Tawrā Mishmis

The Mishmis live in close proximity with natural environment which has a hard and rugged topography, dense forest and unfriendly mountains from centuries. They had to adapt themselves to the climatic conditions, physical and topographical constraints prevailing in that region and through this their way of life emerged. Nature fulfilled all their needs depending on their customs, traditions, demographic structures etc. The Kman & Tawrā believe in numerous god and goddess and spirits. They also worship celestial and natural bodies like the sun, moon, earth, and water bodies. Apart from worshipping numerous god and goddesses, spirits, celestial and natural bodies one of the objects Kman & Tawrā regard as sacrosanct is the Bronze Metal. Kman & Tawrā believe that copper is the property of god and goddesses of nature in oblation. Therefore, the religion of the Mishmis can be classed as a magic-religious or alias shamanism in nature.

In other words this can be described as animistic or animism or naturalism or indigenous. They worship nature like the sun (Θmik), earth (Nyai), water (Θtih), Mətai and so on, which is the purest form of belief based practice in the world.

III. Types of Spirits:

1. Protective Spirits: The spirits which are believed to safeguard the general health and interest of a person, family or a village or clan are

the protective spirits and are considered as the gods.

BRŌH: The spirits which have their influence on an individual or the family or the clan is called the “BRŌH”. These are inherited from the ancestors and may come to the family through matrimonial alliances. The BRŌH which comes down from the family tree is called the “AWAISAH BRŌH” i.e., the “Paternal brōh” or the “Male brōh” and the brōh which passes to a person or family from matrilineal tree is called the “KŌMAISAH BROH” meaning the “Female brōh” or the “Maternal brōh”.

2. Benevolent Spirits: Apart from the “Brōhs” there are many other spirits which are responsible for the well being of the people. These are appeased separately by the individuals or collectively by the village. These spirits counter the evil effects of the malevolent spirits. That is to say that they are appeased to ward off the evil effects of the malevolent spirits. They are also the protective spirits. The benevolent spirits existing in the Kman & Tawrā Mishmi beliefs are as follows-

- i. 1. Əmik/Ringya 2. Mətai/Jawmalu
3. Shutō/Dəyuyu
- ii. 4. Bəru/Buruhya 5. Timik/Buruhya
6. Dah-Kətan
- iii. 7. Kanggam/Kabruhya
8. Hutung/Dowpaah 9. Talih
- iv. 10. Kambing/Apey
11. Lambok/Rachaiya 12. Kausak
- v. 13. Shamur/Takka 14. Khrony

3. Malevolent Spirits: Some of the malevolent spirits existing in the Kman & Tawrā Mishmis are-

- i. 1. Kəsha/Khənum
2. Thənggi-Həpuw/Dakgeh
3. Takcho/Malu
- ii. 4. Kamow/Tagrah
5. Kəsha-Kənam/Bəyah Khənum
6. Təhal/Apeh Malu
- iii. 7. Glong
8. Kəsha-Kənam/Kənum Pacha

9. Kəsha-Təpai/Thyah

- iv. 10. Khənum
11. Mulu-Kənam/Dabrah Pacha
12. Shupah/Kapa
- v. 13. Kūmbəe/Khənum Raplah
14. Hul-Bowng/Aah Khənum
15. Silam
- vi. 16. Suun/Dholak Khənum
17. Si-Krong
18. Kəsha Kəmah
- vii. 19. Talü 20. Ka’chiel
21. Syambram

IV. Reformation/Revitalisation of the Kman & Tawrā Mishmi’s Faith

In order to stop further dilution by the alien cultures upon their rich culture and faith system, the Mishmi Faith Promotion Society was formed on 16th June 2012 with its headquarters at Tafragam Village, Tezu; Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh. Its main motive was to preserve, protect, reform and revitalize the traditional culture and faith systems of the Kman and Tawrā Mishmis of Lohit and Anjaw District. The Kman and Tawrā Mishmis believe in the almighty god named “Əmik-Mətai/Rəngya-Jawmalu”.

The main objectives of the MFPS are as under-

1. To preserve and protect age old culture of the Kman and Tawrā Mishmis.
2. To promote and revitalize faith/belief system of the Kman and Tawrā Mishmis.
3. To promote, preserve and protect our tradition, culture and heritage.

To fulfil the main objectives of the organisation, it has initiated various activities such as -

- i. The society has initiated weekly mass prayer at a particular house by all the villagers. The prayer house is alternated after each prayer.

ii. Since its inception the MFPS has initiated prayers at various locations in the Mishmi belt and is able to make temples locally called 'Tachow-Klumya'.

iii. It has initiated visiting the entire Mishmi belt door to door to promote and simultaneously provide a prayer book, locket, *Ōmik Mətai* Flag and secret turmeric called 'Høleum' to the members present.

iv. The society also initiates recreation activities such as the traditional game and sports and the display of cultural programmes.

In every gathering the society discusses spiritual mantra, customs and customary laws, prayer systems, etc. Moreover, cultural programmes and traditional games and sports are also conducted and are considered as part and parcel of these gatherings.

Some of the commendable achievements or its impact being observed are given below-

i. The youths came to learn mantra chanting in their own dialogue through this platform.

ii. Many temples called "Tachow-Klumya" have been established and praying at village level is being practised along the entire Mishmi belt as of now.

iii. The devotees are increasing and paying visits at prayer centres called "Tachow Klumya".

On top of that, the society has organised three priest conferences for in-depth understanding and revitalisation through reformation in the practices of faith and believe systems in the Kman and Tawrā Mishmi society.

V. Conclusion:

The elderly people of the communities often talk of unity and diversity in the Kman & Tawrā Mishmis since the inception of the society. Their opinion about faith system is invincible

in the past and it won't be distracted in generations to come as well. So, in a nutshell, it can be stated that the faith and belief systems of the Kman & Tawrā Mishmis is all about building a conducive environment in the community.

The society is trying to push out the disharmony created by alien religious believers in their community, which has created religious tension and diversions in the Kman & Tawrā Mishmi society. This organisation endeavours to preserve and promote age old rich tradition and culture of the said tribe. The organisation is also trying to create awareness about multifaceted socio-cultural aspects of the Kman and Tawrā Mishmis so that their rich culture, tradition and heritage is preserved and passed on to the new generation.

Above all, good understanding and practising the age old traditions, culture and faith system amongst the community people is the need of the hour. By doing so, the solidarity and cohesion within the community will prosper which in turn will bring reiteration of its relations with their own brethren as well as the rest of the world. □

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Revitalization of Culture: A study on the Hill Tiwa

Dr. Raktim Patar

History of Christianity as an organized religion has been based on its missionary activities. The missionaries aimed at the spread of the gospel and proselytization among the followers of indigenous faith. In order to attract the Tribal population they would initiate educational, health and hygiene, music choir and spread the message of superiority of Christianity over the indigenous faith and believe system. With the progress of time they would gradually ridicule the people who would not adhere to the philosophy of Christianity calling them as non believers.

From the Roman, Greek, English, Scott traditional religion to the indigenous faith in Latin America and in North East India, the Christian missionaries has been adopting various means to spread the gospel and attracted the indigenous people to accept Christian philosophy. With the change of religious views and philosophy gradually a new way of life and thinking emerges among the people whoever accepts Christianity. The process of change of faith and way of life from one believe system to another has been termed as religious conversion. Many European scholars considered the religious conversion as cultural genocide as it not only changes the religious behavior of the individual but also alters the tradition established culture and history.

There is no denying that the Christian missionaries has been actively involved in spreading western culture and philosophy since the mid 19th century in North East India. They are by and large successful in their mission in hilly areas of this region which has immensely

contributed for the extinction of many indigenous traditions and customs of different tribes. The *morung* or the bachelors dormitory system, reverence to ancestor worship, rituals associated with agriculture cycle are some of the examples that were wiped out among the tribes who have embraced Christianity. The response to the gradual proselytization among the indigenous population in North East India has been both spontaneous and clumsy. It is worthwhile to mention that Christianity came to this part of India with the coming of the British colonization. In fact British administration encouraged and provided all support to the Christian missionaries to work among the local population in Naga, Khasi-Jaintia, Mizo and other hill areas in order to pacify them. It immensely contributed for strengthening the grip of administration in North East India. It is because of the fact that the hill people were the main obstacle for the British in achieving their goal of political supremacy in North East India, the missionaries worked both as religious and political agents. During the initial period there was strong resistance against the Christian proselytization process by the local population. There are many instances against the Christian missionary activities in Mizoram, Nagaland and other parts of North East India. In the recent years to counter the widespread conversion many farsighted tribal leaders have intensified the movement for revival of traditional believes system among different tribes. In the light of the above discussion this paper attempts to study the impact of Christianity among the Hill Tiwa and the response of Tiwa people against the evangelization.

The Tiwa is an Indo-Mongoloid tribe and descendent of the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family. Settled in Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup, Jorhat, Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, the Tiwa have long been referred to as “Lalung” or “Laloo”¹ by other neighboring groups (Khasi-Jaintia, Karbi). The *Buranjis*² (Ahom chronicles) used terms like ‘Lalung’, ‘Garo’ and ‘Dantiyalias’ interchangeably to denote the Tiwa people³. The people in question however, refer to themselves as Tiwa. They are divided into two socio-cultural groups, those settled in the plains who speak Assamese and follow a patrilineal descent⁴ system bearing Assamese patronyms, and those residing in the hills, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language of the Bodo-Garo group, that follow a matrilineal descent⁵ system. Thus, the Tiwa follow a *bilateral descent*⁶ system which recognises that descent may be traced from either the father or mother, depending on the decision taken at the time of marriage. In most cases, the husband goes to live with his wife's family (*matrilocality*), and their children are included in the mother's clan. However, if the woman goes to live with her husband (*patrilocality*), the children take the name of their father. Thus, the Tiwa follow the ambilocal or biolocal marriage residence rule where a newly married couple is free to choose whether they will live with, or near to, either the parents of the bride or the parents of the groom⁷.

With the coming of Christianity and development of transport and communication the Tiwa living in the Western Karbi Anglong district got exposed to culture change. Protestant Christianity came among the hill Tiwa during the 1920s through the Khasi Presbatian mission but could not make much progress. They preached Christianity to the Tiwa through the medium of Khasi language, Khasi hymns, Khasi prayer books etc. which did not make much impact. Subsequently, the Presbyterian evangelist used

Karbi language to preach Christianity without much success. According to late Singmon Mithi of Punduri Makha village, those Tiwa who converted to Christianity through Khasi Presbyterian mission became Khasi and those who converted to Christianity through the Karbi Presbyterian mission had to accept the Karbi identity. He stated that, the Khasi Presbyterian mission at Nongpoh was the first to make contact with the Tiwa of Morrow village, an offshoot of Amsai with twenty eight families. After their conversion they had to pray and practice the newly embraced faith in Khasi language as the pastors were Khasi and preaching was also in Khasi language. Due to these difficulties some of the families decided to move to Khasi village at Mawlen and Umsingup, and some went to Karbi village at Umswai Model. Later those who went to the Khasi villages became Khasi and those who went to the Karbi village became Karbi. Those Tiwa who refused to become either Khasi or Karbi went to Amsolong, a Tiwa village.

Catholic faith came to the Umswai valley in the mid of the first decade of the 20th century through some Karbi people who went to Garo hills for work and came in contact with the Catholic missionaries. According to records in the Roman Marjong church some Tiwa who were converted to Catholic had to become Karbi as there was no Tiwa Catholic village to live. They eventually decided to change their ethnic identity from Tiwa to Karbi and lived among the Karbis. According to S. Karotemprel⁸, since the first Catholics were Karbi, hence the newly converted Tiwa had to accept the Karbi language, dress and prayers and eventually adopted their culture.

The second wave of conversion started in the later part of 1940s under the Nongpoh parish. In 1948 some of the Tiwa were converted to Christianity under the aegis of Fr. Potto, an Italian Salesian priest. One of them was Singmon Mithi

of Amsolong. He was a Presbyterian who settled at Amsolong after their fellow villagers at Morrow either became Khasi or Karbi. Meanwhile in 1951 some of the Tiwa families of Amsai also embraced Christianity and left their village to settle at Punduri Makha. The families who came to Punduri Makha in 1952 were of Bin Maslai, Lobon Kholar, Sing Mithi, Samual Lumphoi and Panthai Amsi. After hearing the news of the newly established Punduri Makha village, Singmon Mithi also came to live there and the first Tiwa catholic community was established at Umswai. Our informant late Singmon Mithi stated that in 1952 the total member of Tiwa catholic was twenty six individuals out of whom fifteen were male and rest were female. They constructed a small chapel in their newly established village. As they were the first Tiwa Catholics and there was no Tiwa bible or prayer book, thus Jonis Phangcho, a Karbi catechist of Roman Marjong village used Karbi language to preach the gospel.

Since then there has been a gradual increase in the number of Christian converts among the Hill Tiwa. According to records in 2014 the Catholics under Umswai parish stood at 3500 out of which 80% were Tiwa. According to our field study the following are the Tiwa villages which are scattered under the Umswai and Amkachi parish in west Karbi Anglong and Umsolait parish in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya: Pundurimakha, Chikdamakha, Amsobra, Tipali, Mokoidhorom, Orlongluri, Similikhunji, Thawlaw, Sondrophali, Khumkhunji, Sapali, Tarikhunji, Umbormon, Sinani Roman, Solaikhunji, Mawpyenjeng, Mugaguri, Mayong, Ti-iami and Orlongshadali.

It is interesting to note that after conversion the Tiwa have to leave their root village and settle in a Christian village or establish a separate settlement elsewhere. This happens due to the well organised village administrative system. The Tiwa village administration functions according to the traditional religious and cultural values. Hence any believer in alien faith has to leave

the village. The above mentioned villages are formed by the converted Christians and their families came from different Tiwa root villages.

The response to conversion to Christianity has been a serious issue among the Tiwa. Whenever a family or individual belonging to a traditional Tiwa village embraces Christianity, the village elders' body; the *pisai* considers it as a violation of traditional values and appropriate actions are taken. They mainly excommunicate the converted family and order them to relocate to a different place. The Tiwa would not maintain matrimonial ties with the Christian families. Whoever marries a Christian girl have to move to the wife's village or his wife is adopted into the Tiwa traditional faith after performing some rituals. If a Tiwa girl marries a Christian Tiwa man she may bring him to her residence as *Kobiya* (resident son-in-law) and introduce him with her clan deities and follow the Tiwa traditional religion or she can go to her husband's house as *puhari*.

Given the fact that traditional Tiwa villages are closely knitted and well organised, hence the intensity of religious conversion to Christianity are lower than the other Hill tribes in North East India. Despite rigorous evangelical process and tactics, most of the Hill Tiwa are adhered to their traditional religion. The traditional villages are the centre of all Tiwa religious activities and Tiwa families are the core of the traditional believes system. The religious activities are practiced both at the community level as well as in the family. Every family has their ancestral spirits, *phidri* whom they worshiped under the sacred post, *thuna* inside the house called *nobaro*. At the village level several annual religious ceremonies such as Sogra, Langkhon, Phidri Chongkhong, Thurlu, Mahadeo, Wasi Kara etc. are celebrated under the aegis of the *pisai*. Different Tiwa root villages celebrate large religious ceremonies like Wansuwa, Yangli and Kabla puja once in five years.

During the 1960s a few farsighted Tiwa people

founded *Lalung Darbar* a Socio-political organization with a primary aim to secure a district comprising Tiwa areas both in the hills and plains. With the establishment of the first organization the Tiwa became more conscious of the preservation of their cultural identity and heritage. The leaders of the *Lalung Darbar* initiated a process to revitalize the traditional religion and culture as it was the backbone of Tiwa identity. Their effort to revitalize traditional religion yielded good result and process of evangelization was minimized among the Tiwa. Subsequently another organization *Sodo Asom Tiwa Sanmiloni* was established in the 1970s which also contributed for the preservation of traditional religion and cultural practices. They were partially successful in containing the process of conversion. But the establishment of All Tiwa Students Union in 1989 was a landmark in the history of Tiwa people. It brought about a considerable change among the Tiwa attitude towards the issue of conversion and advocated for upholding Tiwa ethnic identity. Their nationalistic appeals and programmes were readily accepted by the Tiwa general mass and contributed for the containment of proselytisation. Interestingly among the leaders of these organizations were educated Christian converts who preferred to advocate for revitalization of Tiwa traditional believe system in place of Christianity.

From the 1990s several Tiwa organization such as Tiwa Mathonai Tokhra, Tiwa Cultural Society, All Tiwa Women's Association and in recent years the Hindu Tiwa Kanthichuri Chomot has been consistently working for the revitalization of Tiwa socio-religious and cultural values. Our observation suggests that these organizations have successfully carried out its activities for the attainment of the objective of securing the Tiwa culture and tradition. The response of common Tiwa people towards these organizations has been positive. In several Tiwa villages the *Samadi* or the bachelor's dormitory system which was gradually

fading away due to the influence of modernity was successfully restored. With the intellectual support and advocacy for traditional institutions and culture, the Tiwa people revived their religious festivals, dances, traditional games, institution of marriage etc. Our recent field work found that there were very few conversion among the Tiwa during the last decade. There were only a few isolated cases of conversion on account of family dispute and other causes. On the other hand we have come to know that several Tiwa who converted two decades ago willingly abandoned Christianity and joined their fellow families in practicing traditional religion. □

Notes and References:

¹The Khasi-Jaintia refers to the Tiwa as 'Lalung'. Interestingly the Tiwa maintain that the Khasi-Jaintia refer to them as 'Laloo' which is also the name of a founding clan in the Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya. It may also be mentioned that the hill Tiwa have an oral tradition which claims that the Tiwa assisted the Jaintia king in erecting megaliths at Nartiang and were subsequently absorbed as a clan within Jaintia society.

²S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Deodhai Asam Buranji* (4th edn.), DHAS, Guwahati, 2001 and S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji* (3rd edn.), DHAS, Guwahati, 2012.

³The *Deodhai Asam Buranji* has a chapter, entitled *Dantiyalia Buranji* which talks about the people of the margins/borders adjacent to the Ahom territory. An analysis of the different terms used in the Ahom chronicles to describe the Tiwa is given in chapter V under the theme Socio-Political Organization/Institutions.

⁴Patrilineal descent is traced only through the male and the children of both sexes belong to the kin group of their father.

⁵The Tiwa living in the hills of West Karbi Anglong district of Assam and the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya follow a matrilineal descent pattern.

According to oral tradition maintained by the hill Tiwa, there were twelve sisters who were the progenitors of twelve original clans of the Tiwa, suggesting that the Tiwa were originally a matrilineal society. However there has been a drastic change in the descent system of the hill Tiwa since the early part of the 1980s primarily because of the impact of their patrilineal counterparts in the plains. Moreover improved means of transport and communication and establishment of markets in the areas dominated by the hill Tiwa are also responsible for the changes in their descent system.

⁶The term 'bilateral descent' has been defined

by Thomas R. Williams in his book *Cultural Anthropology*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1990, p. 267, wherein he writes, "...if descent is recognized culturally as taking place more or less equally in both the male and female line it is called bilateral descent".

⁷Ibid. p. 265.

⁸S. Karotemprel, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church among the Tiwa*, Sacred Heart Theological college, Shillong, 1981, p. 16

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Revival of Faith and Religion of the Rabhas

Charu Mohan Rabha

Introduction:

The Rabhas are one of the Mongoloid communities living in the North-Eastern part of India. They have a significant contribution to Assam's cultural mosaic. Nobody can deny their contribution to the greater Assamese society.

Demography:

The Rabhas have been accorded ST status under the Indian constitution and are largely concentrated in the lower Assam as well as in the Upper Assam districts. According to 2001 census, the total population of Rabhas was 2,77,514. Apart from Assam, there are Rabha population in neighbouring Meghalaya. Some Rabhas reside in Bangladesh and Nepal as well. There are some divisions among the Rabhas. They are: Rangdari, Mayatari, Tati, Dahuti, Hana, Totla, Chonga or Kocha, Modahi, Bitaliya. Their classification may vary but all of them share a common language and tradition.

Tradition:

The Rabhas live as a societal group. For smooth functioning of the society, they have their own traditions and customs. Rabhas follow the path of Hinduism, they are nature worshippers. They believe God to be omnipotent. The Rabhas have strict social norms. In marriage, monogamy is preferred. But if some couple do not have any children, then the male may go for a second marriage after recommendation from their kiths and kins. The Rabhas have some unique way of worshipping their Gods and Goddesses. They do not have written hymns. Traditionally they put a

symbolic stone under a tree and worship that as their Goda and Goddesses. In that stone they put vermilion. It is believed that without vermilion, God is never satisfied.

Social Structure of the Rabhas:

The Rabhas have a strong social structure. Earlier it was a matrimonial society. As time passed, the Rabhas moved towards patriarchy. If there is no male progeny, the girl child inherits the property of its parents and if there is no girl child, the male child becomes the sole inheritor. The children inherits the title of the mother. The Rabhas have many 'gotras' or titles. They are: Kema, Khanda, Kam, Chungchung, Rudung, Nibari, Toya, Serenga, Rangkha, Mayta, Major, Chanda, Nasan, Nabra, Khanon, Jor, Dhakasam, Eto, Byga, Tarang, Bakso, Dayanang, Nokser, Darang etc. Among the Rabhas, marriage within the same 'gotra' is prohibited.

Marriage system of the Rabhas:

There is no rigidity in the marriage system of the Rabhas. The marriage ceremony is solemnised at the groom's house. The groom cannot go to the bride's house. The parents look for a bride for their son. Precautions are taken before stepping out for the bride's house. If the groom's side finds the girl suitable, then the bride's side is invited to the boy's house. The bride's kith and kin visit the groom's house. If all agree to the marriage, the groom's side takes the bride to the groom's house and they tie the nuptial knot. The village priest offer prayers and he also offers a cock and a hen to the Gods and chant mantras. When the chanting ends, the assistant to the priest sacrifice the cock and the hen.

Mode of worship:

The Rabhas are mostly agriculturalist. Agriculture is the main source of living for the Rabhas. Rice is their staple diet. To have a good harvest, the Rabhas worship Mahadeva and other Gods on the day of the full moon in the month of 'Jeth' (May). Goddess Bamkhou is worshipped. The Rabhas observe Jeth as the beginning of the New Year. Earlier the Rabhas used to hunt pigs, rabbits, deer etc in the forest. The Rabhas worship multiple Gods and Goddesses. Among them Rishi, Darmang, Dharam, Budaba are prominent. Some religious traits of the Rabhas are-

1. Blood is offered to the Gods and Goddesses.
2. Prevalence of 'ga-dhan' at the marriage of girls.
3. Use of home-made wine.
4. Consciousness of their respect and faith.
5. Responsibility to maintain their identity.
6. Simple living and equality among all castes.

In the 'Dew' puja, the Rabhas do not use cow milk. They use home-made wine in their religious ceremonies. The sanskritised Rabhas, however, do not follow these customs. Some had been induced to Christianity and coming under the influence of Christianity they have forgotten the customs of their forefathers.

Folk Belief and Customs:

Among the Rabhas some tantric beliefs were prevalent. There are some superstitious beliefs like witches. Some of the Rabhas believe that with the help of 'mantras', some male or female may get some extraordinary power and those male or female may cause damage to the society. These 'mantras' have both positive and negative affects. Sometimes they use the mantras with some ulterior motive and the result is the cult of witchcraft. Lack of scientific knowledge, illiteracy may be responsible for such superstitious beliefs. Many believe that people bitten by snake may be cured by mantra chanting. This may be said to be another

example of superstitious belief.

Some Folk belief of the Rabhas:

1. If earthquake comes, there will be rain
2. If there is a downward movement of the moth with their eggs, then there will be rain.
3. If ants come out of the soil and move upward, there will be rain
4. If there is a downward movement of the ant and they enter into the holes on earth, then there will be dry season.
5. If a dog digs the soil of the verandah of a house, then miserable days are ahead for the family.
6. If stray dogs come into one's house and stays, this indicates miserable days for the family.
7. If someone climbs the roof at night, then something untoward happens.
8. One should not plant bananas during the month of September.
9. During the menstruation period, women should not pluck betel leaf.
10. If someone dies and after touching the corpse, if someone plucks betel leaf, the plant dies.
11. One should not enter the house while coming from outside. One should first wash his/her hands and feet and then enter.
12. If someone sets out to some places and encounters a black cat on their way, then the purpose of the journey remains unfulfilled.
13. Women should not take twin bananas and if they take it is believed that they will have twin babies.
14. While having food, dogs should not be allowed to enter the room.
15. One should not throw the remaining food to dogs and other animals. It is believed that if someone does so, then Goddess Lakshmi gets furious.

16. If one encounters a dead body at the outset of their travel, then the purpose of their journey gets fulfilled.

17. If utensils slips from the hands while washing, it may indicate the arrival of some guests.

18. If cocks fight, this indicate the advent of some guests.

19. If one sees two mynas together then it indicates some blissful events.

20. If one sees a dove in the courtyard, it indicates that some undesirable incidents may happen.

21. If bees form hive in the house, it is seen as a good sign. If birds build their nest at the roof of one's house, it indicates bleak days are ahead.

22. If crows sing at the roof of one's house, it is considered as a ominous sign.

23. If vulture defecates on the roof of one's house, then the head of the household may have some serious problem.

24. If one encounters elephant at the onset of their journey, it indicates a blissful day.

25. If someone encounters snake on their way, it indicates some ominous happening.

26. If dogs or foxes bring bones of dead animals to one's courtyard then it has some ominous implications.

Apart from all these folk beliefs, the Rabhas have some more beliefs in relation to animals and trees.

Funeral Ceremony of the Rabhas:

The Rabhas either bury the dead or cremate. Both the customs are prevalent among the Rabhas. After the cremation, the left out ashes are accumulated and a small hut or a small wooden house is built upon it. Colourful clothes are tied upon those houses. The Rabhas believe that the soul of the dead reside in the cremation site for long and they seek love and care from their kith and kin. That is why the relatives of the dead go to the cremation site and offer rice and water to the dead once a week. For peace of the soul of the dead, funeral is rites are performed. This ceremony is observed either on the 11th day or 13th day or within a month. This funeral ceremony is called 'Farkanti'. Remembering the dead soul on the day, Rice, water and wine are offered at the cremation site in remembrance of the dead and the weeping relatives play 'suti-tal' with a very poignant tone.

Conclusion:

The Rabhas should be aware of their own culture and revive as well as preserve it. They should not compromise their own culture by getting converted into Christianity or other alien faith. If the Rabhas accept an alien way of life, then they will loose their unique identity. They have to take committed steps to protect their religion, culture and tradition. Religious conversion should be allowed to happen. A common platform for all the tribal communities should be formed to protect their rich cultural heritage. □

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Revitalisation of Donyipolo Yelam Kebang

Dana Moyong

The Donyipolo faith followed by offsprings of abo tani clan of Arunachal Pradesh was originally inherited from their forefathers but was on the verge of extinction perhaps due to the impact of alien forces from west, affect of modernization or lack of proper guides and leaders. The society started disintegrating slowly, lost its identity and was almost on the verge of loosing its tradition and culture. Everyone felt the danger of its extinction but nobody had any idea for its rejuvenation. The situation was very dismal and disheartening.

At this critical juncture the god arrived in the form of Talom Rukboh, who took up the responsibility of revitalisation of the faith after tendering his resignation from handsome government jobs. The talom Rukboh, popularly known as Golgi Bote was born to late Rukpaying Rukboh and late Odam Rukboh on 1st December 1938 as per record of 'engena puune', the book written by Shri Kaling Borang. Shri Kaling Borang although far junior to Golgi Bote was his constant companion and follower and can be counted as one of the strong pillar for the work done by Golgi Bote.

Once Shri Talom Rukboh entered in the social work he never looked back, he toured everywhere to study the physical status of society at grass root level, he participated in many symposiums and seminars in India and abroad. In the long run, he formed a committee, which included shri Kaling Borang for organising the Doyne Polo faith system in a proper and systematic manner. As a result of this extra ordinary effort, on Saturday the 31st December 1986, the first Donyipolo prayer was

introduced and sung at the present Lamrung Gangging, the then solung ground.

The birth of Donyipolo Yelam Kebang turned to be an epicentre for awareness of indigeneous faith. The devotees started congregating at the prayer hall (Gangging) in their traditional dresses, reviving the practice of using their traditional dresses and respect for them. The weavers started to improve the designs, which added to modification as well as beautification of traditional dresses resulting an creatibng employment oppurtunity for the unemployed youths. Consequently the demands increased tremendously fetching good prices. The traditional dresses got its value not only in religious matters but also its use increased on different social occasions like marriage, birthday party, festivals, ritual, gifts to friends and relatives etc. Hence the introduction of traditional dresses during prayer in those days is indirectly responsible for promotion of the importance of traditional dresses today in the society.

But due to evil influence of westerni culture the people started believing that offerings to the tribal gods and goddesses are equal to offering to devil, superstiuous and very expensive. So the offerings to gods/goddesses during celebration of festivals, became redundant and treated as out dated, old fashioned and every one started hesitating to respect their own festivals rather embraced alien festivals and culture in order to show themselves as most civilized and modern. So the the colour of indigeneous festivals started fading and become laclusture. Fortunately the emergence of Donyipolo Yelam Kebang, the mindset of the people took a sharp turn towards a good direction.

Everyone started to favour their own festivals, searching originality of its background rhapsody and are trying to adjust themselves to their indigenous rituals. The real lovers of indigenous faith took up the traditional celebrations as their own and has started observing them with gait and fervour. The involvement of youths, especially the girls in ponung dance during festival is coming back day by day thereby the un-seen ornaments/dress/cultures etc re-surfacing in the society again.

On the other hand, in lieu of many like minded organisations working together for preservation and promotion of not only faith but also its language (dialect) culture, games and sport, the dangers were no less. Some dialects are spoken by very few people which indicated their deathknell and future extinction. Traditional games and sports remain unadorned and neglected. The patronisation of torn long pants, mod hair styles, restriction free indulgence of liquors/drugs etc are not good signs. The initiatives for the preservation and promotion of traditional customary laws through the indigenous faith movement alone is impossible and not strong enough to handle the deteriorating situation. In such a situation, the creation of the department of indigenous youth affair vide order no. 122/2017 dtd 20th september 2017 by government of Arunachal Pradesh has been highly appreciable and was the need of the hour. With the creation of such a department, it will certainly mould the life of youths in a right direction for better Arunachal Pradesh.

The formation of Donyipolo Yelam Kebang in an organised and systematic form in Adi community has inspired other communities immensely. As a result of this they too have started to understand the evil effects of alien culture and religion and have started forming their own organisation to fight back the alien forces. Now-a-days there are number of organisations coming up for safeguarding the ancestral legacy and share the problems unitedly under the single umbrella of indigenous faith and cultural society of Arunachal Pradesh which was formed during 1999 and its head office located at Itanagar.

Today the people feel proud of their own religion and started to look down at the person who opted for alien religion. Some persons are even coming out of the laps of the adopted mother's religion and returning back to their roots. There are some, who are repenting for the mistakes done by their parents. So the revitalisation of indigenous faith (Donyipolo Yelam Kebang) in an organised manner saved a major part the denizens of Arunachal Pradesh from becoming victims of conversion to other alien religions. The architect of the revitalisation of indigenous faith of the Adi community was possible only due to tireless efforts of Talom Rukboh who sacrificed his life for the sake of the society. The society in turn anointed him with the title of 'Golgi Bote' which means "immortal father" in recognition of his huge contribution towards the Adi society in particular and the people of Arunachal Pradesh in general. □

Bomyerung Donyipolo

The religious practices of the Misings (Revitalization of Indigenous Faith)

Rameswar Medak

The Misings are one of the leading tribal communities of Assam since time immemorial. They are known as Miri in the Constitution of India but they are happy in being called as Misings. They belong to the great Mongoloid stock of human race. It is said that they once lived in present day Arunachal Pradesh for ages and migrated down to the plains in search of arable land and peaceful living. The period of their migration to the plains is not ascertained as of now but the available historical sources show that they came down to the plains during the Chutia reign and socially, politically as well as militarily established themselves in the Ahom reign. We do not have much documents about the Chutia rule but it is well-known that the Ahom ruled Assam for about six hundred years from 1228 A.D. up to 1826. After the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 almost two hundred years have elapsed. Thus the Misings have already lived in the plains for some eight hundred years. They have come across many groups of people along with cultural as well as matrimonial exchanges with those groups of people they came across especially with the Ahoms. The aged people of the community are of the opinion that many of the traditional practices of the Misings have set to extinction due to acculturation with these groups of people. Living in harmony with the people of the plains for ages, the Misings still have retained a few traditional practices of their own to establish their unique tribal features. Dobur, Urom, Taléng Ui and Dodgang are some of the religious rituals the Misings still observe with great serenity.

Dobur: Dobur is of various kinds viz. aríg dobur, burté dobur, ko:son dobur (or sikari ko:son, the dobur performed by the hunters) and okum dobur. We shall basically remain confined within the discussion of burté dobur only, which is performed at village level in the end of May i.e. on the fifteenth of the Jaistha month. The same is also observed at the end of October by some other sub-groups of the Mising community. Whatever may be the situation, the dobur is performed for overall well-being of the village preferably at the western end of the village in a remote jungle area. On the appointed day, the elderly people of the village clear the spot and build up the altar. The stem of a ficus tree, various species of fern, finely splitted bamboo sticks of various sizes and mérpung (a bamboo-made tool) are used to build the altar. Once it is ready, the elderly people set out to the village and start beating the stilt houses from the eastern part uttering hymns along with carrying the animals duly encaged in bamboo-made container, meant for sacrifice. The men engaged in this act collect alms from every family like eggs, ginger, turmeric and a little salt, which is known as ajéng. The hosts also offer the items with due devotion in the hope that the dobur will help them stay free of ailments throughout the year. As it comes to an end, they again assemble at the spot and sacrifice the animals. A virgin she pig of black color and a number of fowls are necessary for the sacrifice. The pig is meant for the mother Earth, a red fowl for the mo:di ka:bang or the dangoriyang (the deity on guard of the Earth), a white fowl for

the taléng mirém or the heavenly deities, a white hen for the ko:je yanggo or the goddess Laxmi, a stripped fowl for karsin kartang or the creator, an ash colored hen for the do:mug dongkang or the lightning and thunder bolt and two eggs for the bíri biág or the totem of the dragon. The animals are sacrificed by beating their heads against the stem of the ficus tree and the blood that oozes out from the sacrificed animals are allowed to fall into the ground within the altar. Afterwards the sacrificed animals are cooked without chilly in it and eaten up.

The basic objective of performing dobur is to protect the farming field from pest and such other untoward incidents which may reduce the produce of the field. Earlier, the Misings used to cultivate by cleaning, cutting, burning up the jungle and hoeing up the soil. Thus scores of pests over and underground were indiscriminately killed in that process leading to an act of bloodshed. Seeking sanctification from that act of bloodshed and for a good harvest at the same time, the dobur used to be performed. No specific god, goddess or deity is worshipped in this ritual. The hymns uttered in the dobur vary from place to place or sub-groups to sub-groups. Whatever may be the situation, the hymns generally include the prayer to the deities of the Earth, trees, rugji-me:rang, do:nyi-po:lo, karsin-kartang, ko:je yanggo, air, water etc. for good health of the village people along with a good harvest.

Usually, children, the young unmarried men and womenfolk as a whole are not allowed to attend the dobur. As the dobur comes to an end by the feast, the village people are warned to fetch water for the following day by the baríg (the traditional public announcer); because a taboo is observed until instituting yodlen; a ceremony to break the taboo by the next day. During this taboo, outsider of any kind is not allowed to enter the village, fetching of water, consumption of chilly and mustard or any kind of edible oil is prohibited and eating of melon or such other round-shaped

vegetables are restricted. Gitpun sticks duly pierced up and decorated with feet and wings of the fowls and mérpung are placed at almost every entry points to the village to inform an outsider of the observance of dobur in the village. An intruder is duly punished or finedy. Of course in case of emergency, an outsider may enter into or exit from the village by keeping back a valuable item with the village people and the same can be collected the next day as and when yodlen is over.

Taléng Ui: Literally taléng means the upper part or the upper world i.e. the heaven and ui means god, goddess or deity. Thus taléng ui means the deities of the upper world. The Misings believe that occurrence of natural hazards like lightning and thunderbolt, house set on fire, drying up of farm field etc. are due to evil cast of those deities. Basically taléng ui was performed when thunderbolt falls upon trees, man, house, cows etc. of a particular family. A deity named La:mang Boté is considered responsible for such hazards. Tosag or promise is made by the host to this deity at the spot where it falls. It is said that earlier it was performed beneath a tree beside the place where the thunderbolt fell. Nowadays it is observed annually by some people and some others performs it biennially or quinquennially at the convenience of their own. But it is also equally true that it is performed by the respective family immediately after the occurrence of thunderbolt. The place of performing this ritual has now come to the porch of the granary of the family. After holding the ritual, the offerings are placed at the front protruding end of the granary as a token of respect to the deities.

An altar is made at the porch for holding the ritual. Grinded rice powder and charcoal are used to make a kind of reed, known as pi:ro in Mising language and leaves of métpesoni: herb. As soon as the ritual is over, a píde: is performed using cane shoot, edible aurum, métpesoni: and melon. As it is impossible to observe acute taboo, the deities are offered prayers that the family members be

pardoned if the tabooed items may have been eaten without knowledge during the taboo period.

The objective of observing this ritual is two-fold. Generally it is done to appease La:mang Boté so that it does not cast its evil sight upon the family throughout the year or until the next observance of the ritual. The Misings are agrarian people and they are required to toil in the field around the year. So, out of fear of those deities, they remain sure by performing this ritual that they will not be attacked while working in the field or staying at home. By performing the taléng ui, it is traditionally believed that the host gets a good harvest and he remains wealthy in terms of food grains for the whole year.

The materials required for observing this ritual are almost equal to that of the dobur. Only a black-colored hen is an extra necessity. The black-colored hen is meant for the deity who causes burning of human habitation and the crop field. While sacrificing, prayer is made to this deity so that it remains well-satiated and it does not disturb human beings.

Taléng ui is generally performed during the middle part of the month of April. It is the beginning of the rainy season in the Mising inhabited areas and rain is accompanied with lightning and thunderbolt. After holding of this ritual, the family observes a taboo. During this period the family abstains from giving alms to beggars, issuance of native wine or rice etc. to the neighbor or borrowing etc. It continues till the disappearance of the moon and it is broken when the same appears in the sky.

Dodgang: Dodgangis is the final death rite of a person. As soon as a person dies, tiloni is performed on the following third day. Some people prefer performing the urom apin, a ritual to offer homage to the soul of the departed person alone, along with tiloni but others observe it along with the dodgang and still some other perform it independently. Only then the dodgang is arranged.

Dodgang is a costly ritual in terms of time, money and effort. It basically requires a pig for the priests. The pig is ceremonially offered to the departed soul and then killed by strangulation. A little ritual called dangoriyang is performed on the previous evening of the dodgang where permission is granted to the po:bor strainer and the pig strangulator to carry on their jobs at the day break on the dodgang day. Po:bor is a conical-shaped bamboo-made instrument for straining apong, the native liquor where apong is strained to receive the guests. Along with apong food items are also offered. Preparation of apong involves quintals of rice and the apong so prepared takes time to get properly fermented. Earlier, invitation of guests from at least five different villages to the dodgang was considered a must. But nowadays it turns into a huge gathering and to receive such a huge flock is a matter of concern to the host which makes the dodgang one of the greatest challenges in the community.

On the appointed day by dawn, killing of the pigs and straining of the apong go hand in hand. The formality of the ritual starts by chanting hymns in which the materials required for the ritual are placed at the altar. Then cooking starts. At the end of the dodgang a little merry making is done using drum and cymbal accompanied with singing and dancing. It is said that the soul of the departed person is sent toward the realm of the deities. As the priests perform this noble job, they are honored by performing this merry making. Of course, nowadays it is not done.

Urom: Urom is a quinquennial ritual observed to remember the departed soul of a family. After performing dodgang, the family jointly or personally arranges this ritual. It is said that it cannot be performed if there is a deceased person in a family whose dodgang has not been performed. In some families persons from the families who have to perform dodgang are even not invited.

The Misings believe that the soul of a deceased

person enters the world of uroms after performing dodgang in their name. There are three worlds of uroms viz. romku, romnu and romle:. Sometimes some of these uroms may cast evil sight upon their relatives in this mortal world due to some reasons and thus a man is supposed to fall ill. Such incident is detected by the mibu or mirí; the two traditional priests of the Mising community. As soon as it is detected, urom a:g or urom tosag or urom dí sag is done. It is an act of making promise to the deities that the expected ritual will be performed in due course in their name. So it is prayed that they leave the soul so that the person may recover from illness.

A pig is a must to perform this ritual. In most cases the pig is not killed by strangulation but by inserting a piece of split bamboo into the liver of the pig. While doing this, the priest keeps chanting his hymns by sprinkling rice over it. Then the liver of the pig is taken out and prophecy is made by observing it. Afterwards the formalities of the ritual are carried on. The first cooked food is offered to the souls of the deceased persons. Some of the people do it in the hearth whereas some others do it on the ground by lifting a little soil in line and the offerings are made one by one.

Priesthood: It is said that the priesthood was effected by the mibu or the mirí. They were the traditional priests of the Mising community for ages. But due to some unknown reasons the availability of these priests have come to a complete stop in the community and now the priesthood is conveniently effected by some initiated people under Kevalia or Kal Samhati sect of neo-Vaishnavite religion that was preached by Sankardev. A new religious cult is seen peeping into the greater Abotani group of people of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in 1985, known as Do:nyi Po:lo Yelam Kébang. The Misings do also consider themselves as sons of Abotani and are eventually influenced by this religious cult. Today there are scores of followers of this new cult among the Misings. It has a co-relation with the traditional religious rituals of the Misings. There are well-defined codes of conduct to perform all the traditional rituals chanting specific hymns for specific ritual. They have separate prayer book for the purpose. We personally have not seen any mibu or mirí performing a ritual of the Misings. The initiated people under Kal Samhati sect sing numbers of hymns at the time of performing the rituals. Their way of pronouncing the hymns is not easily intelligible as they use to sing them



partly. Their authority of priesthood is doubtful in terms of their educational qualifications, as most of the initiated people are illiterate. But contrary to this, the leading people of this cult among the Misings in Assam are mostly literate people; people like college teachers are seen playing the leading part. Thus Do:nyi Po:lo Yelam Kébang is gaining due momentum in the community and it is expected that involvement of the literate people will make the new Avatar of Mising ritual a milestone in the new millennium. □

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Informants:

1. Mr. Rajen Pait, age – 57 yrs., Practising Mibu, DPYK, Gogamukh Circle.
2. Mr. Keshab Pait, age - 60 yrs., Tajik village, Gogamukh.
3. Mr. Chandra Kanta Changmai, age – 67 yrs., practicing native priest, Moinapara village, Gogamukh.
4. Mr. Lukunath Pegu, age – 57 yrs., practicing native priest, Moinapara village, Gogamukh.
5. Mr. Jewel Pegu, age – 49 yrs., Ex-Secretary, DPYK, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh.

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Indigenous Faith: Revisiting the Belief Systems of the Koch-Rajbangshis of Undivided Goalpara District in Assam

Introduction:

The undivided Goalpara district in Assam refers to the existing districts such as Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Chirang, and South Salmara-Mankachar located in the western part of Assam. From time immemorial, people of different castes, creeds, and communities have lived in this region peacefully. The aboriginal Koch-Rajbangshis are one of the major communities of this region that have upheld their language and culture intact despite recurrent testing times they have come across. Although Goalpara district got divided into several parts due to various political reasons, the Koch-Rajbangshi community has still remained united both linguistically and culturally. The language and culture that have flourished in this region based on the folklore of this community are known as the Rajbangshi language and culture. The people of this community are the harbingers of the folk traditions of this region since ancient times. As the folklore of the Koch-Rajbangshi community is multifaceted, based on which various folk festivals are being observed, it is difficult to deal with every socio-cultural aspect of this community

in one attempt. Keeping in view the socio-cultural multi-dimensionality of this community, the present article is motivated to study various deities, their indigenous worship systems, and the folk festivals associated with such worship practices done by the Koch-Rajbangshis.

Hoodooom Puja:

Hoodooom puja is one of the most familiar form of worship of gods prevalent among the Koch-Rajbangshi women. Love for nature is one of the aspects of this puja (worship), where natural elements such as banana trees and birds are worshipped as symbols of gods. On the mystical level, this puja is seen as an offering to Barun, the god of rain or water. On a deeper perception, Hoodoom puja is regarded as a prayer to the sky representing masculinity and its counterpart, the earth, the receptive, feminine aspect of universal energy, for their communion resulting in showers of rain, thus activating and enhancing fertility of agricultural lands.



It is believed that, when cultivators have to wait for a longer spell of time for a shower of rain for their dried up agricultural lands and to enhance their fertility, the Koch-Rajbangshi women normally organise Hoodoom puja in a darkest

mid-night at a secluded place away from their homes, in a bid to invoke Barun. Entry of males, young or old, is strictly prohibited in this puja. As a process of the puja, the women gather together and plant a banana tree in the middle of a large agricultural field and offer a puja with natural ingredients with the presence of a hoodoo, a kind of bird. As a practice of the puja, the women wear clothes as minimum as possible and sing to the god of Barun in a language which is not normally used in day-to-day situations. The Koch-Rajbangshi women believe that, it is the intensity, passion and force of the language used in the prayer/song that the god of rain gets easily invoked and pleased. Being satisfied with their songs, the god blesses them with a shower of rain that helps the cultivators.

Kati Puja:

Kati puja, which is held on the last day of the month of Kati, according to the Assamese calendar, is also associated with the women folk, where the presence of their male counterparts, except the priest and the dhakuwa (one who plays the big drum), is forbidden. The women associated with this puja keep fasting all through out the day and offer a pair of earthen pots with betel-nuts to the god Kartik, the son of Shiva and Parvati. As for the preparation, the worship of Kartik which is held in an open and isolated place is performed in a make-shift temple built with the plantation of four banana saplings. On the altar the idol of Kartik is placed along with His riding companion, the peacock. With a canopy over the altar, the fighting tools of Kartik such as a bow and arrows are hung on the banana saplings. Songs of procreation are sung at the start of the puja, describing the birth history and the idol of the god Kartik. Women who are desirous of having a baby boy keep fasting and make special puja arrangements by designing a winnowing fan with flowers and ceremonial lamps and dance to the songs sung by the fellow devotees in obeisance to god Kartik. It is believed that, if Kartik gets pleased with the prayer, the women are blessed with baby boys.

Sonarai Puja:

Sonarai puja is also referred to as the worship of the tiger god. It is traditionally worshipped in the Koch-Rajbangshi society on the last day of the month of Pooh, according to the Assamese calendar. In the past, people used to live in the jungles and their livelihood depended on the forests, streams, and rivers. To avert attacks from tigers on their lives and domestic animals, they have maintained the practice of Sonarai puja. In this puja, no idol is placed on the altar. As a symbol of the god, a structure is prepared with seven nard grasses cut equally which are tied to the flowers made of jutes. These flowers are again dyed with three different colours – red, blue and white. Unlike the Hoodoom and Kati puja, Sonarai puja is generally done by young men. A group of young men visit door to door and collect gifts all through the month of Pooh by singing Sonarai songs, holding the holy structure of Sonarai on their shoulders. On the last day of the month, the young men organise the puja in an open space with the gifts and money collected from households. Instead of the priest, the head of the group or someone who know the Sonarai songs well offers the puja.

Marai Puja:

Marai puja is also known as Manasha puja. Marai is traditionally worshipped as the snake goddess. It is organised at the individual as well as at the community level. To get rid of snake bites and to do away with any misfortune, Marai puja is held. As Marai is worshipped in every household, it is often called a home deity. It is a traditional practice among the Koch-Rajbangshis to worship Marai when any marriage ceremony is solemnised in their family.

Marai is generally of four types such as (a) Gota Marai, (b) Lakhol Marai, (c) Deriya Marai, and (d) Dhum Marai. Along with the worship with traditional puja ingredients, a group of professional men enact a mythological play based on the lives of the virtuous lady Behula and her husband

Lakhindar. It is believed that, Chant Sadagar, father of Lakhindar had lost several of his sons for refusing to worship goddess Manasha. Lakhindar too met the same fate. He died of snake bite when he was sleeping on the night of his marriage, as his father had challenged the goddess Manasha that he would not worship her. However, by dint of her fervent prayer and virtue, Behula got her husband back to life. Based on this belief, Marai is worshipped when any marriage ceremony is solemnised in the Koch-Rajbangshi family.

In comparison to other pujas, Marai puja continues for a few days and nights. As mentioned above, a group of skilled persons, some of them appearing as sookri (lady dancers), stage a mythological play based on the lives of Behula and her husband Lakhindar, describing the actions and pro-actions of the goddess Manasha, with a detailed theatrical performance. Songs and dances are indispensable parts of this puja, where traditional musical instruments such as Khol (a king of cylindrical drum), flute, harmonium, Khapi (a kinds of instruments made of metals), etc. are used. Basically, Marai songs are presented either by standing or by sitting. The songs of the Padmapuran are normally presented in the Marai puja.

Baash Puja:

Baash puja is held on a particular day in a year, i.e. on the auspicious day of Madan Chotoordashi (fourteenth day of a lunar fortnight) in the month of Chot, according to the Assamese calendar. There are various forms of Baash puja such as Madam Kam, Kamdev, Chatali Baash, and Aakal Baash. Baash puja is also known as the puja of Kamev, the god of love. It is a fact that, love or lust is the genesis for procreation of living beings on earth.



As a symbol of the god, a collection of decorated bamboo poles wrapped in red and white clothes are erected in the middle of a yard in a household by a couple of devotees, who have to maintain ritually pure living practices and they wear new gamocha(s) along their waists. Hair-shaped jute is set on top of each of the bamboo poles. These auspicious bamboo poles are worshipped with traditional puja ingredients such as flowers, tulsi leaves, earthen lamps, etc. along with the playing of drums and shehenai (a kind of flute). Thereafter, the people associated with the puja visit every household in their neighbour by carrying the bamboo poles on their shoulders by dancing and singing songs related to Baash puja. This puja gets over on the Pratipada, i.e. on the

first day (after the full moon) of the lunar fortnight. The devotees get assembled and lower the bamboo poles amidst singing hymns and take them to the river in a procession. After washing in the river, the bamboo poles are again put together in a separate place. Again, in

the evening, the devotees assemble together and offer puja to the god by singing hymns and then distribute prasad (food items offered to the god) among themselves.

Suwasoni Puja:

Suwasoni puja is very much prevalent in the Koch-Rajbangshi society. Etymologically, the word Suwa means a vice, or an offence among the Koch-Rajbangshis. It is basically a woman-centric traditional puja which is primarily held in the family to do away with any kinds of adversity, or calamity from the family. No priest is required in this puja. Suwasoni puja is generally held in the early morning on Tuesdays and Saturdays only, with a view to averting impending danger or misfortune and to remove vices and imperfections associated

with the members of the family and the household. It is believed that, the goddess Suwasoni gets easily pleased with betel-nuts. If anyone offers puja to goddess Suwasoni with betel-nuts and sincere prayers, her wishes get fulfilled.

Joka Puja:

The practice of Joka puja is very much prevalent in Dhubri, a western most district in Assam. From time immemorial, people are always scared of ghosts and evil spirits. To get rid of the wrath of the evil spirits, people are seen offering pujas to some other lesser gods, and Joka is one of them. It is a common belief among the Koch-Rajbangshis that, children are the easy prey to Joka. To please the Joka, the parents normally offer puja to the god. The god Joka is of two kinds – Boistom (Vaisnavite) Joka and Kaal Joka. While the Boistom Joka helps people in removing physical ailments, the Kaal Joka causes ruin and brings misfortune.

As far as the puja processes are concerned, aadhiya kola or vim kol (a kind of banana), twelve types of fried crops such as rice, wheat, barley, sesame, etc. and a pair of pigeons are offered along with other puja ingredients to the god. Unlike other deities, Joka is not worshipped within the compound of the house. It is believed that, after offering puja, none bow down their heads in front of Joka as a mark of obeisance. In doing so, Joka feels invited to the worshipper's home.

Baisto Puja:

Baisto puja is very much prevalent in the Koch-Rajbangshi society of western Assam. It is associated with agriculture. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the Koch-Rajbangshis and rice is one of the major agricultural produce. The storeroom where rice is stocked up for the whole year is called a Macha or Machang, i.e. granary. Indeed, Baisto puja is related to Lakshmi, the



goddess of riches and wealth. As far as the puja processes are concerned, a four-foot long bamboo and an earthen pot, wrapped in a piece of white or red cloth are planted near the entrance of the granary. Soils from seven different places like the teeth of an elephant, entrance of a prostitute, sands of river Falguni Ganga, etc. are inserted into the pot along with betel-nuts, a leaf of Akshyabot (a banyan tree at Gaya in Bihar under which Lord Buddha used to meditate), some gold and silver. It is worshipped every morning and evening by lighting ritual lamps in adoration of the goddess Maha Lakshmi. The Baisto puja is of various types such as (a) Bamoni Baisto, (b) Girtheni Baisto, and (c) Maileni Baisto. While the Bamoni Baisto is worshipped by a Brahmin priest, the Girtheni Baisto by a housewife, the Maileni Baisto is offered puja by nursery level girls.

Mashan Puja:

Mashan is basically an evil spirit. It is believed that, there are 120 types of Mashan of various shapes and colours in western Assam. However, due to the age-old and deep-rooted traditional beliefs associated with its puja practices, Mashan is upheld as a demi-god. In various parts of western

Assam, Thans (hut-shaped temples) of Mashan are seen which are normally situated away from homes, and in some of them, annual worshipping are held by the Koch-Rajbangshis in a big way. Children are usually seen to be disturbed by the demi-god. It is worshipped so

that it does not disturb the peace and tranquillity of a family. It is believed that, Mashan lives in water, especially in large water bodies.

Mashan puja is also associated with the fisherman community. The people whose profession is related to water tend to perform

this puja. It is a current practice that, before catching fish in a beel (a large water body), or a river, fishermen are seen offering puja to Mashan near a beel, with a view to averting hazards and to fulfil their wishes.

It is pertinent to mention here that, to study the significance of Mashan in the social life of the people of this region, a regional seminar was held at Chilarai College, Golakganj in the district of Dhubri (Assam) on August 4, 2005.

In addition to the above, there are several other gods and goddesses such as Ghar-Goshani, Rakhal, Thakurani, Shitalata, Dhumiya Thakur, etc. who are traditionally worshipped by the Koch-Rajbangshis in the undivided Goalpara district.

Conclusion:

The gods and goddesses and their traditional puja practices indicate the unique and distinctive characteristics of the aboriginal Koch-Rajbangshis of western Assam. The traditional and indigenous belief systems of this community are closely associated with agriculture, their means of livelihood. The increase in agricultural production

and a prayer for safety of all in the society are the main purposes of worship of the gods and goddesses. This apart, such puja practices not only provide peace and pleasure to the minds of the people, but also constantly remind them of their ancestral belief systems that have solidified and intensified their national and religious integration. □

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Culture and Indigenous beliefs of the Koch Tribe

Vedvyas Koch

The Koch language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family which is surrounded by a linguistic diversity. Koch tribe has eight sub tribes. They are Harigaya, Tintikiya, Wanang, Banai or Dasgaya, Chapra, Satparia, Sankar and Kocha. Each sub tribe has their own dialect. But there are a lot of similarity among them. So it is very easy to communicate with each other. The Koch people are an ancient tribe of India. They are found in the Rig Veda, Puranas, Yogni Tantras and also in the great epic, Mahabharata.

In the present day the Koches are mainly found in the West Garo Hills, South West Garo Hills, North Garo Hills and East Khasi Hills districts of Meghalaya. In Assam Koches reside in Goalpara, South Salmara, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Golaghat, Udalguri, Dhubri, Baksa and also in some districts of Bongaigaon, Chirang, Sonitpur, and Karbi Anglong. They are mainly found in Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal, some parts of Bihar and also in certain countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

The Koch people have their own culture, folklore, literature, beliefs and traditions. Koch women wear a cloth from above chest up to the ankle which is called Liphon and a Sokatharay wrapped above the waist. They also wear silver ornaments on certain parts of their body. The Liphon and the Sokatharay are colourfully hand-woven cloths with various floral designs. The design is decorated on a piece of cloth known as Mug Paini (Designing).

The Koch women are efficient weavers in making traditional dresses. They wear various kinds of dresses in day-to-day life. Both male and female

worship different types of deities and during festivals they have to wear their traditional dresses.

Some of the Koches from Kokrajhar and Dhubri districts of Assam have converted to Christianity. So they don't worship indigenous deities. But most of the Koches of Meghalaya and other parts of Assam are Hindus and they still worship indigenous gods and goddesses. Some deities which are found in the Koch tradition are as below:

Paboni Wai is a most important deity and His worship is celebrated as a traditional festival every year. The Koch people are dependent on agriculture and plantations. In the past, most of the Koch people used to practice Haba Haoni (Jhum cultivation) but due to certain issues they stopped shifting cultivation. At present the main occupation of the Koch tribe is agriculture and more number of people are focussing on engaging plough culture. They are also engaged in rearing cattles, poultry and fishery. The word Paboni or Paoni, means welcoming the Baishak, the new year (according to Assamese calendar). The festival is being celebrated since time immemorial. The festival is usually held, in the month of April during spring season. Each village takes its own time to prepare for the festival. The girls and boys invite their loved ones to the Paboni ceremony. In the morning villagers assemble at the Pabuni Sali (Temple) where the fest is organised. The girls come in full traditional attire wearing Gangamari and boys in Jharua dhoti. The festival begins under the banyan tree which is decorated by a bamboo circular fence. The rituals are done by the Deusi (Priest) and the Chathung Laoni (assistant) helps

the Deusî in every possible way. This worship is followed by chokot aro fap baraini or offering of liquor and rice cake. Then the Deusî prays to the Paboni goddess to keep the cattles healthy and bring prosperity to the society. This is done with the accompaniment of traditional music. After the liquor is poured over the places where the worship has been done the Deusî tastes the liquor and passes it on to the elderly persons of the society. Then the villagers are allowed to worship the Goddess. After drinking liquor the Deusî along with the boys and girls perform traditional songs and dances to the rhythm from the Dudumari (Big Drum), Wa khanding (Bamboo Flute) and the Musikorong (Buffalo horn). The Deusî also wears a fap mala (garland of cake) on his neck and dances around the banyan tree along with the villagers. The merriment goes on till the sun goes down. Pabuni is one of the festivals where group dances takes place. This festival is also used as an occasion for boys and girls to meet together and select their brides and bridegrooms. After the festival is over the people go back to their respective homes.

Halepa Wai is a deity who is worshipped only when someone falls sick in the family. In order to cure the patient the members of the family perform the rituals at night in a quiet place where they sacrifice animals and on a plantain leaf they offer pork or chicken to the deity.

Baus Wai is a nature god who is worshipped every year in every Koch village in the month of October. It is a welcoming day for the crops. On the puja day the people of the village gather at the Baus Than (Shrine) which is also called the Sali (Temple) located at the outskirts of the village. This is where the Deusî (Preist) perform the rituals and sacrifice Goat, Pig, Hen and Tortoise to the

deities to keep the cattles and villagers healthy. After the end of the ritual the villagers drink chokot (rice beer). Then they sing and dance by playing the traditional music.

Kani Wai or Maro deity is similar as Manasha Devi which is the goddess of snakes. It has been seen not only being worshipped by the Koch villagers but some other tribes are also seen performing Maro puja in North East India. The ritual starts by singing the Padmapurana songs by Geetals along with playing of the Mridanga. The puja goes on for two days and in the end an animal is sacrificed chiefly for the prevention and cure of the sick person.

Runtuk puja is mostly done by the the Wanang Koch. Generally the Koch people make two rooms. One is the main room and the other is called Paknok (Kitchen). In the main room above the roof is where they preserve their weapons. This is where the puja ritual is done by offering egg on the rice filled pot with betel nut and chokot (rice beer). The puja rituals are done by Ajeng (Preist) and mantras are chanted following the rhythm of the flute. The priest also spills rice on the ground to the deity. Then the animal sacrifice is made to keep peace in the village.

Hodum is the god of rain. When there is no rain and people face drought, the ladies of the village make a group and worship the deity. The ladies of the society dance naked and sing together to call the spirit. Thus the puja is performed at night and the men are restricted from taking part in the puja.

Koches traditionally practice a few animistic rituals. However, today they more than often follow a faith, which is a blend of Hindu and animistic rituals. □

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Revitalization of TINGKAO RAGWANG CHAPRIAK In North East India

Dr. Kamei Rockos

The Kabui (Rongmei) is one of the ethnic groups of Zeliangrong tribe, who live mostly in Manipur, Nagaland, North Cachar Hills and other parts of North East India. They follow a profound indigenous religion called *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak* (TRC). This ancient religious faith and practices are preserved and handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition for centuries. It is a primordial religion, which is equivalent to the Sanskrit word “*Sanatan Dharma*” meaning an ancient and eternal religion. This religion is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the people. They, like any other tribes of North-East India, have their own religious faith *Tingkao Tagwang Chapriak* which means religion of the heavenly God, whose abode is in Heaven. The Kabuis are religious and God fearing people.

The Zeliangrongs (Kabuis) believe in the existence of one supreme God, who is the creator of the universe, man and all living beings. He is the regulator of universe, giver and source of life, the dispenser of plenty and justice. He is named *Tingkao Ragwang* (Heavenly God). The Kabuis worship the *Tingkao Ragwang* on all occasions. Though they believe in *Tingkao Ragwang* yet they also believe in other Gods. Kabui religion is polytheism, believing in many Gods (Supreme God and pantheon of Gods). The pantheon consists of Gods who were entrusted with the affairs of man, animal and things on earth. These Gods are below the *Tingkao Ragwang* (Supreme God). He entrusted Gods of the lower realm to look after the earthly world of man. *Na-Ragwang* is the King of Gods of the earth. Importance is

given to *Na-Ragwang* and also to his seven brothers who are divinities. They are as follows:

(i) *Na-Ragwang* : He is the King of Gods of the earth (Lower realm).

(ii) *Bisnu* : He is the most powerful God on earth who looks after the affairs of men, nature and animals and communicates with men.

(iii) *Chonchai* : He is the God of health and giver of blood. He looks after the health of men.

(iv) *Napsinmei* : The God who is in-charge of food grains.

(v) *Charakilongmei* : He is the God who keeps peace and wards off disturbance on earth.

(vi) *Koklou* : The *Peipou*, the owner of the office of the Gods’ court.

(vi) *Karagong* : He is the God who is the healer of man suffering from dizziness and a teaser of unruly and misbehaved persons particularly youths.

(vii) *Dimei* : He is the God who remains in water. He is worshipped during *Ralenloumei* ceremony.

Besides them, there are other Gods and Goddesses, such as, *Didimpu*, *Didimpui*, *Dampapu*, *Dampapui*, *Pon-gwang*, *Mai-gwang*, *Dui-gwang*, *Bambu/Shong* (village deities), etc. However, they do not believe in the worship of stones, trees, forests or mountain peaks. The Kabuis also practice the worship of their ancestors known as *Kairao* who ensure safety, prosperity and well-being of the family or the lineage.

The *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak* (traditional

religion) of Zeliangrong has stood the test of time uninterrupted till the beginning of the 20th century. However, with the coming of Christianity in Manipur and its subsequent spread to the hill districts including Zeliangrong (Kabui) inhabited areas of north-east India, the traditional religion came into conflict with Christianity. As a result, some left their traditional religion and embraced Christianity and this brought about a lot of confusion between the traditional cultural value and the new Christian faith in the Zeliangrong society. Among the Kabuis, Christianity was first brought in by *K. Namrijinpou* of Makuwa village of Tamenglong District, Manipur in the year 1915. He became the first Christian convert among the people of Kabui in Manipur. It was in 1897 that *Mr. Hezeilung* became the first Christian convert among the Zeliangrong people of Nagaland. And in 1910, *Dituing* of Haflong was the first among the Zeliangrongs of Assam to convert into Christianity. Thus, Christianity spread in the Zeliangrong areas during the first part of the 20th century.

The existence of the *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak*, traditional indigenous religion was threatened with the rapid spread of Christianity among the Zeliangrongs (Kabuis) in the hill districts of Manipur. The evangelization activities of the missionaries were so intense that more new conversions took place in many parts of the state. At this crucial juncture, *Jadonang Malangmei* of Pulton (Kambiron) took up the cause of reviving and reforming the traditional religion. Thus, he founded a new cult called "*Charaa Riak*" based on the doctrines of *Mujungpu Charakbandi*, the priest of the supreme God. He constructed four temples for worship at different places in Zeliangrong inhabited areas. The name of the villages where he constructed *Kalum Kai/Ki* (Temples) was Pulton, Longkao, Tazeikaiphun and Binnakandi of Assam. The construction of a place of worship of *Tingkao Ragwang* was first executed by *Haipou Jadonang* in 1929 as he was the pioneer of construction of a place of worship in Zeliangrong community. The reason for the construction of

a place of worship was that unless the same was constructed the indigenous religion of Zeliangrong could not be protected. It was the philosophy of *Haipou Jadonang*. He had also composed several hymns, songs and dance forms which are still remembered today. Of all his prayer-hymns, the *Jug-Neipuilu* (the song of a time or jug) is still popular even now. Besides, he purified the Zeliangrong religion by abolition of innumerable taboos and gennas. In his reformations many of the unnecessary and less important ritual ceremonies and sacrifices were cancelled which made the religion simpler and more rational. Another remarkable work of *Jadonang* was the invention of a new script which is said to have learnt by him from Goddess called *Kangrellu* who lives in Bhuvan cave. A number of spiritual and ritual songs for worship of God, etc., were written with the newly invented scripts, and hundreds of people including boys and girls are said to have come to Kambiron village to learn the new script and other socio-cultural activities of *Jadonang*. Later in 1931, a reformed traditional religion called *Heraka*, meaning pure in *Zemei* dialect, was formed and which laid down the following principles:

1. Worship and fear God.
2. Do not take or swear in God's name for falsehood.
3. Do not fear anything except God.
4. Do not harm or murder human beings.
5. Do not commit adultery.
6. Do not steal other's things.
7. Do not tell lies; Speak the truth.
8. Do not covet other's land.
9. Honour your father and mother.
10. Venerate the earth which gives you life.

After *Haipou Jadonang* was hanged by the British on false charge of murder in 1931, his lieutenant *Rani Gaidinlu* revived the predecessor's legacy after her release from British Jail in 1947. As a successor of *Jadonang*, *Rani Gaidinlu* organized the *Heraka* camps to teach basic concepts of *Heraka*,

practice of folk songs, weaving of customary garments, religious songs and dances. Moreover, she also composed hundreds of devotional and patriotic songs. This religion, *Heraka*, is a pure or reformed religion of the Zeliangrong people, believing in *Tingkao Ragwang* or *Tingwang* (Supreme God) and life after death. The followers of *Heraka* worship only the *Tingkao Ragwang*. But, they do not believe in the worship of spirits or smaller gods or goddesses. The aim of *Heraka* is to bring good and prosperous life to men individually and collectively through the grace of God. The idea of a kingdom of God where there will be no wars and sufferings is also visualized by the *Heraka* (a legacy of *Jadonang*). The *Heraka* is not a departure from the traditional religion of Zeliangrong people but a rational improvement on it. During this period, the Christian missionaries also gave much effort so that many of the Zeliangrongs in the hill areas were converted to Christianity. Today, the followers of the traditional religion (TRC) exist in few numbers in the hill districts of Manipur. This religion, TRC, however continued to exist and flourish in Imphal valley and Cachar valley of Assam and Dimapur of Nagaland.

In the beginning, the traditional indigenous religion had no name so the Zeliangrong community assembled at Imphal and christened it with the name of *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak* (TRC) in the year 1994 with *Laogai Karikmei* ritual. Tracing the footsteps of Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinlu, the followers of this traditional religion under the initiative of Professor Gangmumei Kamei have further reformed the religion by forming Zeliangrong Religious Council under banner of which the temple called *Tingkao Ragwang Kalumkai* was constructed at Chingmeirong, Imphal. Besides, other 25 branches of this TRC temple (*Kalum kai*) have also been established in different parts of North East India. Of these, twenty-one temples in Manipur, three in Assam and one in Nagaland are supervised by each village level TRC Committee and the TRC devotees worship *Tingkao Ragwang* regularly. More TRC temples are under

construction and it will be completed soon and inaugurated within a short period of time. Moreover, the council has also adopted the cosmic circle as the *Boudaan*, symbol of *Tingkao Ragwang*. The symbol is now widely used for all religious purposes. Further, the council organizes prayer meetings accompanied with the sermons from the pulpit on every full moon day and every Sunday at the *Kalumkai*. This temple became the religious centre for the devotees to the indigenous religion (TRC). Few Zeliangrong Christians who have embarked upon the “Universal congregation” are now returning steadily to their indigenous faith of their forefathers. Besides, followers of other faiths like Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism and Jainism and Islam have been paying visits to this sacred house of worship. The religious books, prayer booklets, song books and other aspects of the TRC religion have been published and circulated widely. Today, every household use these books in their daily prayers and worship.

The Christian missionaries in their mission to expand Christianity tried to destroy the social and cultural life of the Zeliangrong people. They banned dance and music, the dormitory system and the authority of the Village Council (*Pei*), causing great damage to our culture and the social setup. Culture is a vehicle of Zeliangrong religion. So, culture and religion is indivisible in TRC faith. In this regard, Rani Gaidinlu said that “Loss of religion is loss of culture, Loss of culture is loss of identity”. The educated Christians are again resorting to promotion of their culture and customs. The devotees of the traditional faith (TRC) had withstood the onslaught of Christian evangelism, that there could be education, economic development, high standard of living, Govt. employment and modernization even without conversion to Christianity. Now, time has come for us to rectify the past weaknesses and promote our culture, custom and religion by making our identity known to the world.

Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC) in association with the liberal minded institution like Kalyan

Ashram Manipur (KAM) has taken up the challenge in fighting for the improvement and recognition of Zeliangrong religion as an official religion status under the constitution of India. It is worth mentioning here that, KAM always worked for upliftment and revitalize the indigenous faith like TRC in nurturing their traditional practices of the Zeliangrong people. The legendary leaders Haipou Jadonang, Rani Gaidinlu and Prof. Gangmumei Kamei who stood tall as outstanding figures in the society did yeoman service not only in the upliftment of the down trodden people but also initiated a lead role in the reformation of the Zeliangrong religion in protecting and preserving the indigenous faith, custom and culture. They were the guiding figures and gurus of the indigenous faith followers particularly among the Zeliangrong cognate tribes. Even though they are not with us physically their legacies continue to live in the hearts of their dear and near ones and the society at large.

The devotees of TRC are sincerely committed to the protection, preservation and promotion of the rich culture, traditions and belief systems of their forefathers and because of their contribution and commendable works the Zeliangrong traditional religion is growing day by day with the firm support of the devotees in spite of different mechanisms to bring down the strength of the TRC people by the Zeliangrong converts. Lastly, it may be stated that the Zeliangrong (Kabui) world of traditionalism (traditional religion) was caught off-guard with the coming of Christianity. The

Zeliangrongs see the alien religion as an obstacle to their custom and a hindrance to the way of their socio-religious reformation. Although much improvement and development has taken place in the socio-cultural life as of now, yet there is no scope for relaxation but to be on constant vigil to ward off any attempt by alien forces to destabilise the traditional indigenous religion (TRC) of the Zeliangrongs. □

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Revitalisation of Religion and culture of the Hajongs

Arnab Hajong

Northeast Bharat is home to a diverse population of indigenous aboriginal tribes among which the Hajong community is a foremost group. Outside the Northeast, a tiny number of their overall population is in west Bengal and Bangladesh.

Religious beliefs:-

1. In Hajong society, it is believed that there are invisible entities beyond the visible world. They are considered to be in possession of supernatural powers that have impact on the physical universe. These entities or Devatas, who are synonymously called “*Deo*” in the Hajong language, hold the capability of bringing forth misfortune if they are discontented. Therefore, they have to be pleased with prayers and offerings for the sake of the well being of the society.

2. Because of the indefinite existence of the deities, no depiction or portrayal have yet been made possible. However, they can take any form of earthly things they want, and usually emerge before humans as a form of lustre or light. Earthen effigies called “*Thaibaan*” are built on altars to worship them. They are offered fruits, flowers, and other eatables. Sometimes animals are also sacrificed.

3. Each of the deities are has specific charges of earthly matters e.g., agriculture, wealth, curing of diseases, good health of humans and animals, hence they play a major role in the day-to-day lives of the Hajong society. Likewise, the very existence of evil spirits is also widely believe. Although such forces aren't venerable, they also like to receive

offerings given by humans to save themselves from misfortune.

4. Shelter, which is the utmost necessity of human beings irrespective of their belonging to any race or community is dependent on the environment for all round growth. The deity who is considered as the saviour of households is called “*Baastu Deo*”. While constructing a new house, it is considered necessary to worship the Baastu deo in a dedicated place called “*Baastu Hali*”. The Baastu Deo Pooja, which is a prominent occasion of the Hajongs, can be collectively performed by many households. The Baastu Hali serves as the worshipping place of other deities too, that is why it is considered as a place of great importance.

5. Besides the Baastu Deo, there is another deity called Griha Devata. Every morning and evening the Griha Devata is worshipped. In addition to that, the deity is to be worshipped on the occasion of every festival observed by the households.

6. Apart from the above, for the betterment and development of oneself, people devote themselves to the worship of a particular God of their choice in pursuit of redemption.

7. It is worth mentioning that exercise of sorcery power or black magic is prevalent in Hajong society. People would use such powers to fulfil their good and bad intentions as well. Therefore, it has become necessary for leaders of the society to arrest these practices. According to beliefs, Kamakhya Devi is the deity of black magic. Presently in Bangladesh, there are three places where temples of Kamakhya Devi are

located. These are: Porakandulia Village, Ghosh Gaon and Mojakhali village of Maimansing Dist. of Bangladesh. The uniqueness of these temples are that only the Hajong priests can perform puja of the deity Kamakhya on every Saturday.

Religious culture:-

1. Since the primary source of income in Hajong society is usually agriculture, it is important for them to please the deity of agriculture. At the beginning of each of the steps of farming, such as ploughing, sowing, planting, harvesting of crops etc., prayers are offered to the deity.

2. As elements e.g., soil, water, sunlight etc. provide the matrix for agriculture; for high yield of crops, blessings are sought from the respective deities of these elements. As a form of respect and gratitude, offerings are presented to them before the newly harvested crops are used for human consumption. This ritual called "*Naya Khawa*" is performed inside the Baastu Hali.

3. Marriage keeps the cycle of growth of a family going forward. In Hajong society, for a prosperous and happy married life, it is mandatory to worship and seek blessings from "*Kani Deo*", the deity of Marriage. Earlier this deity was formless but later on the Hajong community gave it the shape of "Manasa Devi" as mentioned in the Padma Purana. It may be the result of the influence of Bengali or Assamese culture. At present Goddess Manasa or "*Kani Deo*" is one of the Griha Devatas of Hajong household. It is necessary to add here that before the commencement of the married life of a couple, their bodies are required to be purified by listening to sacred mantras chanted by the "*Adhikaris*". Known as "*Kan Fuka*", this ritual must be performed before entering married life.

4. Any well-to-do family or any ordinary family that has made any commitment in front of "*Kani Deo*" for the happiness of the Bride or Groom then that family is required to perform "*Maaro Puja*"

which is a devotional ceremony collaborated with chants and dance performances. The chanters or performers are called "Geetalu" and "*Mao Geetalu*" is the chief of them. This event lasts for three days.

5. "Gotra" i.e. caste, means a group of people belonging to a particular ancestry. In the Hajong language, "*Nikni*" is synonymous to ancestral lineage or caste. In order to show respect to the soul of their forefathers, the Hajongs worship this deity once in a year.

Religious inversion, Course and Tactics :

When Muslim invaders captured India, they insisted on creating a base of native supporters, which was later done mostly through forceful conversion into Islam.

In due course of time, the British Raj started, and then the Christian missionaries took great advantage of the prevailing confusion in the Indian society. They figured out weak points of contemporary societies and planned their target. They targetted mostly the tribal societies with a planned mission of religious conversion hidden under a layer of social work that included helping people with basic necessities such as food, clothes, education etc. The contemporary issue of casteism that divided the Indian society fuelled their agenda. Many tribal communities in the North East fell into their trap. Continuous efforts were made to bring the Sanatani Hajongs into the traps of the missionaries, but such attempts went in vain, as the Hajongs had deep rooted belief and respect for their own religion and culture.

It is very natural for the human beings to hold fast to their beliefs, both culturally and religiously. Followers of different religious beliefs seek to broaden their community. But, since the last few decades of the twentieth century, it has been observed that followers of some particular religions prioritize on broadening their community by various unfair means such as "love Jihad",

temptations to wealth, etc. Some tried to make the weaker sections of the society fall prey to their agenda of conversion disguised as cultural ostentations. These kinds of filthy activities left an impact on the Hajong society. Usually the missionaries are expert at motivating the younger generation and using them as their tools to achieve conversion. However in spite of motivated initiatives by these misguided youths, the missionaries failed to influence or convince the Hajong society.

Initially, the Christian elements planned to figure out ways to make the people feel inferior regarding their traditional religious beliefs and cultural traits. Their next step was to detract the Hajongs from their traditional society and their ancient religious scriptures. To achieve this they felt it necessary to denounce Bengali and the Assamese language which the Hajongs used as their medium of education and communication. Therefore, a revolution for introduction of Roman script was initiated, followed by adaptation of the Roman script for Hajong language for publication of books in Roman alphabet.

As a reaction to these kind of activities, prominent people of the society came forward to express their concerns. Serious criticisms came from social organisations. Protests were organised by Hajong Bhasha Bikash Parishad, a Hajong linguistic organisation. Misguided opportunists took the Bikash Parishad as a hindrance to their malafide intentions. In order to get rid of this obstacle, they didn't hesitate to take support of extremist groups as well. On December 11, 2005, the then President of the Bhasha Parishad was brutally attacked by a group of 8 motorcycle borne miscreants, but fortunately the President survived. Such mischievous activities aroused harsh criticism and objections following which these foul attempts came to an end.

Meanwhile, in view of the ongoing issues, Hajong society decided to devise measures

through which their religion and culture can be safeguarded. It is a well known fact that unemployment among young generations leads to poverty and growth of anti-social activities. Hajong women who are known for their simplicity were manipulated into the trap of "love Jihad".

Revitalisation and its impact :

When the movement of Vaishnavism professed by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in West Bengal was at its peak, impact of it was observed in nearby areas specifically in the states of Assam and Tripura. This didn't hamper the tradition and culture prevalent in Hajong community, rather it cleaned the existing dirt. Hence the emergence of a contingent of followers known as "*Adhikari Sampradai*" took place. The Adhikaris, who are vegetarian and worshipper of lord Krishna, profess Vaishnavism in their respective areas and are authorised to convert people willing to become "Vaishnavite". They mixed freely with the Hindu Brahmin and other castes because they believe only in the human being. The enlightened people about "Atma", i.e. soul, and its liberation and about upholding religio-cultural traditions.

Mentors can lead people to the threshold of overall human wellbeing and character building. Therefore a tradition called "Guru-Shishya Parampara" prevalent in Indian culture is regarded to be of great importance. In search of the path that can lead human beings to knowledge about materialistic or spiritual way of life, people started approaching mentors or Gurus to lead them to light. Known as "Ustar Dai" in Hajong society, this system of mentorship helped develop spiritual inter-relation between different sections of the society. In course of time the name of Ustar Dai was substituted by "Guru Baba".

As mentioned earlier, Vaishnavism considers love and devotion for Lord Krishna as the means to find redemption. Accordingly, dramatisation

(musical drama) of incidents that took place in the childhood and young age of Krishna were introduced. As a result of this initiative devotional-musical dramas like “Krishna Leela” and “Hau Thakur” achieved great popularity.

Modern attempts of revitalization of religion, faith and culture:-

In view of the facts mentioned above, the elders in the society felt the need for taking appropriate steps to tackle contemporary issues that were badly affecting the society. They suggested the following

- a) Strengthening the culture of respect and belief in religion and culture
- b) Rendering of Hajong literature into written form which will help cast aside the feelings of inferiority among the youths of the society
- c) Establishment of Yuva Chetana Barga (youth awareness camp) for propagation of thoughts and ideas.
- d) Spread of awareness among women through Mahila Chetana Barga (Women awareness camp)
- e) Urge to social organisations to work more responsibly for the upliftment of the society.

Consequently, following achievements could be obtained as of now.

- 1) A magazine titled “Rao”, published occasionally by the editor Hajong Arnab, has been serving as a means to quench the thirst of written literature in the Hajong language since its first publication in 1997. Thus an early presumption that pronunciations of the language can't be rendered correctly in written form in Assamese or Bengali proved to be wrong.
- 2) With the emergence of written literature, it is deeply felt necessary to foster new generation of writers in society so that they can contribute to the mutual cause. Therefore, the Hajong Bhasha Parishad was formed, which played a great role in Hajong literature. Poetry was taken up as the first

theme the organisation plans to get started with in order to attract new writers. A self composed poetry recitation competition is organised annually, and the participating poems get published as a collection. Later on, a growing number of prose writings helped Hajong literature grow.

3) Under the supervision of Heritage Foundation and by virtue of the kind encouragement from Shri Bharat Kumar, a social worker from Guwahati; the Shrimad Bhagavata Geeta was translated into Hajong language by the author of this article. This created awareness among the Hajongs regarding their language as it is not a language of less importance. Rather, it possesses the potential of rendering epitomes of spirituality such as the Bhagavata Geeta, as elegant as it originally is.

4) It is emphasized to make mandatory the use of Hajong language in all kinds of social activities such as writing, music, speech etc. Hajong music has began to flourish with hordes of new composers.

5) With the kind assistance of Shri Bharat Kumar, Sanatana Satsanga Samity, Garopahar is formed with an aim to unite different communities with shared interests and to work collectively for the development and preservation of religion and culture. Kalyan Ashram Garopahar was established in 1995, hence Mr. Kumar was entitled the charge of both Kalyan Ashram and Satsanga Samity for smooth coordination of work between the organisations. During the annual convention of the Satsanga Samity, a spiritual event called “Geeta Utsav” is organised which focuses on various socio-religious issues.

6) There are Hajong social organisations in Assam and Meghalaya, prominently - Assam Hajong Jatiya Parishad in Assam and Meghalaya Hajong Kalyan Samity in Meghalaya. These organisations represent the Hajongs on various

issues. Both the organisations have respective regional committees.

Conclusion:-

In course of time, the Nation revived. It revitalized its identity and became more glorious. In this great ‘Bharat Bhoomi’ India, different groups of people with different types of faith, culture and traditions are living peacefully since time immemorial without any kind of conflict. This internal unifying thread leads to the development of Nationalism. There have been several invasions by external forces who were trying hard to disturb this unity of our country. Consequently, these forces became as powerful that they appeared to be almost successful in their mission; but in due course.

Our motherland is full of diversity of culture and tradition and faith followers. It was India’s

speciality. Diversity in food, clothes and life style is the result of diverse nature. Sometimes we see the sun, which is the brightest of all, shadowed by dark clouds; but when wind blows, the clouds move away resulting in the sun shining as brightly as before. Similarly, some evil forces from other parts of the world tried to annihilate our ancient faith, tradition and culture, but the sincere efforts of our people did not allow that to happen.. Revitalisation and rejuvenation of our tradition and culture will help us to rejuvenate our Nation with added prosperity. Bharat is destined become Jagat-guru obnce again.

(The author of this article is the Founder President of “Hajong Bhasa Vikash Parishad”, Founder General Secretary of ‘Sanatan Satsanga Samity’, Founder Editor of “RAAO”, a publication in Hajong Language and is credited with the invention of Hajong Script)

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Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith in North East Bharat

Sumneibul Hrangkhoh

Northeast Bharat comprises of 8 (eight) states and share a total geographical area of 262230 sq. km. It accounts for 7.9% of the total geographical area of the country. The total tribal population of the region accounts to 8.55% of the Indian total population (Census, 2011). Northeast Bharat is a land of homogeneous tribes and communities. There are about 145 tribal communities of which 78 are large, each with a population of more than 5000.

According to the demography watch (Swarajya) the centre for policy studies (CPS) has published its latest note on the Religion Data Census of 2011. The note shows how the demographic of the northeast have drastically changed in the last century. Northeast India forms a major region of Christian concentration in India today of the 2.78 crores Christian counted in 2011, 78 lakhs are in the Northeast (including Assam). This is the largest concentration of Christians in India after the coastal region stretching from Southern Tamil Nadu and Kerala to Coastal Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra.

But unlike other regions, the spread of Christianity in the Northeast is almost entirely a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Much of the Christian expansion in the Northeast occurred during 1931-51, and more prominently during 1941-51. This expansion has continued unabated since 1951. The tribal populations of

Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland have now become almost entirely Christian.

Over and above the 42nd Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution of 1976 give a chance to the Christian and Muslim in India for such expansion. Under this Act, Secularism was added in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution-explaining the meaning of Secularism as adopted by India, Alexander Owics has written – ‘Secularism is a part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution and it means equal freedom and respect for all religion’.

In spite of that, it is largely interpreted in other ways by the so called intellectuals and religious leaders. It is in fact, the secularism is more extreme and harmful in the context of the Hindus.

It is a known fact that since the advent of Christian Missionaries in Northeast Bharat, the tribal are becoming a divided community in-respect of religion and beliefs thus causing religious tensions, fractions and disharmony in the region. In a casual term these communities are sustaining conversion and converting in silence. It is an aggression towards the Hindus and the Indigenous faith and beliefs. So, for the greater interest of Sanatan Dharma followers’ anti-religious conversion bill should be introduced and implemented in our country as early as possible by way of amendment of the Indian Constitution.

To revive the indigenous faith and identity different social base organizations have come up since last few decades like Zeliangrong Hereka Association, Dularai Boro Harimu Afat, Jamatia Huda etc. Like these organization, many more such type of organizations in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Assam, Sikkim, Tripura and Mizoram are there and able to establish their identity in society, In fact, indigenous traditional faith movement has gained momentum not only in Northeast Bharat but all over the country. Still it cannot be termed as a mass movement. It is in progress only up to organizational level. It is to be noted that no dedicated workers are coming forward for this work. This is the irony of the situation.

However, it must be admitted that Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Seva Bharati etc. are functioning almost like a mother organization and are trying to save the indigenous faiths of the tribals of North East. They are playing a very important role in hand holding the indigenous

tribal people in-respect of social upliftments and in preventive measures to arrest the religious conversion. Janajati Faith and Culture Protection Forum (JFCPF), Guwahati is also another important forum whose main aim is to train the worker and bring all the related organizations under one umbrella with a common aim and object.

Rangkhoh Sonong Reformation Council (RSRC) is also a part of it, working under the Hrangkhoh Community, established in the year 2011. The organization aim to reform the Hrangkhoh Community and develop the Boljol (Temple) including protection and preservartion of tribal culture, customs, traditions and heritage. Now, the Reformation Council has started working on the mission mode. So far it has organized 3 (three) Annual Conference at Lungkhok village of Dima Hasao District. For mass awakening programme monthly programmes are arranged preferably on 4th Sunday of every month. This is the only organization purely lead by indigenous faith believers not only in Dima Hasao District but in the state of Assam also. □

Revitalisation of Indigenous Faith In The North East Bharat

L. Dilungdang Zeme

North East India is thinly populated and its forest cover is about 60%. During the colonial rule, British Education System and Railways had affected the people of North East Bharat in many ways. Transition and transformation coupled with modern approach had influenced the North East people. They were attracted to the modern life style and living standard. The western culture diluted the North East culture. The superior classes were highly regarded and respected. They dominated over the inferior section of the society. In the olden days, wars, were frequent, mainly motivated by territorial expansion, monopoly in trade and commerce, exploitation of natural resources, acquiring bonded labours and collection of taxes.

In this computer age people are becoming more comfortable with sedentary life style and have started depending more on technology. They now prefer to shop online, work from their chosen location, do business and take part in, video conferences etc. from the comforts of home. The world has become one and human being has become its citizen. India is a country of diversities culture and tradition. This diversity is clearly visible in color, creed, religion, customs etc.

North east India consists of eight states Sikkim, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. People of North East practice different culture and faith. They also have rites and rituals of their own. Religion wise, we have Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Jainism. Before the advent of the British most of the people of North East India practiced nature worship and were isolated from the outside world. The cock was considered

as the holy bird; Banana leaf is used for ritual purposes. Most people were engaged in agriculture. Due to illiteracy and ignorance there were superstitions and some people followed them blindly. Modern education has changed the outlook as well as the literacy rate. People started realizing the value of their roots and culture. They started researching and introspect about their great origin. Therefore, education played an important role in this trend.

Zeme Tribe community has its origin in Makuilongdi village in Senapati District of Manipur. The place is about 20 kms away from its District head quarter and takes 45 minutes to commute by vehicle. This community has been sparsely distributed in different locations of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. The community practices Pau-pai Renet (Indigenous faith). Now they are mostly found in Zem-nui (Yangkhullun) village in Senapati in, Manipur and Zeme dominated areas in Halflong, Assam. Only a few elders are from Nagaland. The original faith was Nvung tak Renet. This belief was very critical and complicated as shared by the elders.

There are some rites and rituals which are practiced such as Heming Kang, Heda Pe and Manei respectively. The most popular one is *Melei-Hengi* which means rituals cum post harvest festival which last for ten days and includes *Hobo* (War Cry) Wrestling, Long jump, collection of firewood, bathing and washing at *Teizai* (Holy pond), feast with dear ones, Ngiching, fishing etc., especially when there is a marriage in the village; prayer for good deeds and luck for the year in the community. It is believed to be one of the oldest practices and beliefs till today. Zem-nui

(Yangkhullen) village is set to become a hanging village for tourism purpose in the near future.

In my opinion the original faith has been left out either because it is too complicated or outdated, not getting along or incompatible with today's generation. There are also some other factors that leads to the elimination of this belief. These are missionary works such as preaching, promotion of Christian faith and distribution of pamphlets and holy bibles amongst the ignorant and illiterate villagers in the line of education. Christian schools and hostels practice and promote Christian faith, people admire Christian standards and civilization, liberal lifestyles also attract them. Since villagers who are mostly illiterate, lonely and scattered, the church came as a rescue and became an institution for learning, praying, singing and togetherness.

There are many organizations which are working for socio-economic cultural cause. Some of them are Kalyan Ashram, Heraka (Ranima Gaidinliu) foundation and my Home India. According to me Kalyan Ashram an NGO which is serving for the welfare of the tribal people in the country is tirelessly trying to revive the culture in the north-east region under the initiative of Late. Shri R. Luhing Zeme. Primary schools upto class-III has been established and is now functional in Zem-Nui (Yangkhullen) village. Now Shri Hezeting Hoi led managing board of the committee has taken charge of the responsibilities of the Board. He has been a pillar of strength to our people and has worked tirelessly for our community in preserving our culture in the country.

Faith and belief which is very critical to mankind promotes emotional attachment. Therefore whenever the subject of conversion

arises there is always a tussle, war of words and conflict of interest and propaganda. Economically well placed and political class intervene and take interest in propagation of Christian fath. They try their hands in various manners for advancing conversion which leads to the interference in culture and abandoning the customary practices resulting in insecurity and disturbances in the local atmosphere.

The best medium to change is education. Since people are illiterate and uneducated, I would recommend and suggest young and old to become literate. Education brings awareness and gives ideas. It changes our mentality and brings new awakening. There are many who have forgotten their folk song, dance and traditional attires. I would encourage our Zeme brethren to remember our roots and sing and wear their traditional dresses on occasions. Since I am passionate about writing, I have also expressed my thoughts in social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp on population explosion, global warming, transparency, accountability, unemployment etc. Slogans like 'Know your roots modernism with tradition values enhance and electrified to the mass'.

Transformation and change is necessary not in the name of religion. All religions teach the path of righteousness. 'God has made man not religion', God is the truth and therefore we need to think rationally. It would be unfair if we do not apply our mind and logic in the faith. We cannot be above God Almighty, who is the creator, and all powerful. Faith is a way of life maintaining the decorum in society. Now a day's people realize how great their ancestors were. They were strong and wise. 'Old is Gold'. Man started looking at their roots and culture to know where they belong. □

Revitalization of Indigenous Faith of North East Bharat: A Thematic Overview

Dr Ranga Ranjan Das

Faith and belief have prehistoric existence. It has been long back when faith and belief has occupied its' own space in the human psyche. The thunder, storm, lightening, birth, death of of prehistoric men compelled them to think about the existence of supernatural elements in their immediate surroundings composed of nature. Totem, taboo, animism, animatism, naturatism, mana, bongaism, etc. are some of theoretical concepts that were explored on the basis of 'faith'. Some of the exponents were E.B. Tylor, Emile Durkeim, Max Muller and others. Their work was on interpretation of faith and mind of traditional people. It is difficult to understand their genesis until we have a clear concept on evolutionary trend. The testimonies of their (Lamarck, Darwin, Herbert Spencer) observation in the form of biological and social evolution have pointed out how things got changed, transformed and graduated from one stage to another with a kind of mental framework. Scholars assert that there is psychic unity of mankind in their mental development but there are variations due to various impinging factors as asserted by many scholars. It is observed in the indicator of development of various communities residing in the one geographical unit as a state or a nation. There are sharp variations. The process of change, transformation, and acceptance has also been found in the 'faith' of the human societies across the world. 'Faith' on existence of supernatural elements in this planet earth, is transformed into classified religion prescribing lots of tenets, norms, rules and standard regulations. We have a number of classified religions where most of the world population are confined. The present world due to rapid innovation,

scientific temperament, information technology revolution has been at the realm of digital age with ultra-modern way of life. The people are adjusted with the classified religion according to their birth and choice. In spite of that there are people who are labeled as 'indigenous people' or 'traditional groups' in this world. They inhabit in the nook and corners of the world mostly in African, Asian, Latin American countries like Brazil, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand with their self sufficient economy and identities. One of the key concerns of their identities is their age old 'faith', belief and practices which is reported to be continued till date. No doubt, most of these regions were erstwhile colonies of a few developed states where attempts and process were made to negotiate their 'indigenous faith'. A process of conversion was seen among most of those native people. Due to economic condition of the natives, most of them surrendered to alien region and embraced new thought and faith abandoning their original 'faith'. But their original 'faith' has still relevance. Exponents of primitive religion have categorically explored the various dimensions of indigenous faith by examining the collected materials from indigenous groups. They explained how various objects of nature whether from plant and animal kingdom carve a niche in the primitive religion. Their interpretation is moved beyond when scholars like E.B Tylor and Spencer pointed out that the soul is the central in religion. As observed by Davis (2013: 519-522), "religion is a part of society. It is common to the group; its beliefs and practices are acquired by each individual as a member of the group. The relationships of people to the gods and the relations

between the gods parallel those in the society itself. The worship of the gods is a public matter, supported by the community and performed for communal purposes. Religious belief and practice are primarily directed toward super empirical realities; these for purposes of definition and convenience may be classified under three heads: subjective states of mind (peace, salvation, nirvana), transcendental ends (immortality, purification), and imaginary creatures and objects (gods, spirits, centaurs, heaven, hells). The characteristics of these realities are their intangibility. Since they cannot be observed directly, they can only be represented or symbolized by sensory reality. Concrete objects which happen to be sacred are not sacred because of their sensory qualities but because of their symbolic connection with the super-empirical realities”.

Scholars developed various concepts on the basis of ‘faith’ and the acceptance of the people. Concepts like animatism that believes many key objects in the environment are alive and have some special energy that can be communicated. Animism, is on the other hand belief in individual spiritual beings and in a future state present in the universe. Another important concept is mana, which emphasizes non-individualized supernatural force, independent of specific supernatural persons. They are responsible for the effect of magic and for unusual qualities to have power for good and evil (Tylor 2005). It implicates that there are existence of ‘faith’ in different forms and contents. The various materials from the indigenous societies in the present context reveal that their faith has been in connection with their immediate nature. Different malevolent, benevolent spirits, deities, gods and goddess occupy an important place in their religious world view. These are categorically observed among the tribal communities of India in general, north east India in particular. Studies explore that there are impacts on their indigenous faith due to factors like cultural contact and external agent. Earlier scholars found that most of

traditional societies profess their belief and faith without any formal religious structures. It is found among the Hindus as temples for various gods and goddess, and church for the Christians. Due to prolonged cultural contact, members of the some indigenous communities often attracted to Hindu way of belief system in the temples. In Assam, such influences are found among the Pati section of the Rabhas. They have prolonged contact with their neighbouring Assamese Hindu caste population. It is therefore many of Hindu religious elements have percolated into the domain of Patris. They follow it along with their own faith. Among some communities, there is also incorporation of Hindu gods and goddess in their localized version. They have their own name for them. Another interesting valid reason for development of their faith is their own lifestyles. There should be an interesting comparison of their place of residence. They inhabit in a rural area, in the midst of nature, and some of them, may have adjusted with forest, river, hills in order to sustain livelihood. Lets us take some examples. Some hill dwellers are adjusted with *jhum* cultivation in the hilly terrain. The members of a particular community undergo certain rites and rituals for certain specific gods or goddesses whom they believe to be residing deity of the entire *jhum* cultivation plot in general, their particular plot in particular. They believe that without appeasing such gods/goddess, they cannot be successful in their cultivation. For this particular environment, they have no other option. In most of the traditional societies, it is also observed that there is a synergy between religious and economic life. Some of the communities are also signified as forest dwelling communities. Their inhabitation is being surrounded by forest. However, they led a sustainable livelihood without disturbing the ecological balance of the forest. Among some communities, we have also found the concept of ‘sacred grooves’. These communities believe that there are several guardian deities for the forest. They never indulge in any act that makes any gods angry. They try to appease as they can. The

community decides when and how it can be done. In this way, such practices are embedded into their 'faith' forming indigenous religion. It is interesting to note that such 'faith' is unique to a specific group or groups of societies. For example, Tani groups of people in Arunachal Pradesh are the followers of Donyi Polo (sun and moon god). Other important aspect is that they are the marker of ethnic identity. Apatanis believe various deities as benevolent such as Kharung-tamu, Pilya-Chatung, Donyi-Polo, Ude-ie, Neli-Kiru. Nyibu plays a significant role in performing various rituals like pilya rites for getting rid of accidents, chatung for keeping home safe, kharung-tamu by public personality for saving from curse, etc. Even such gods also come into action in case of oath. Sometimes, a man is falsely blamed, he says, 'Ayo Donyi ha-talya totka, Ato polo ha-talya totka, ngo luyano hend: matoka, mogya no hand: matoka Nopa ngomi solo pah solyi hamfo lyino?' (meaning: oh grandmother the Sun, oh grandfather the Moon, I don't know my mistake, I don't know my misdeed, then what am I blamed for?) (cited by Kojing 2002: 80-83). Similarly, among the Dimasa Kacharis of Assam, we find existence of 'daikho' faith which is unique. It is asserted that the noteworthy feature of Dimasa religion is the abode of gods and goddess. Earlier, the whole Dimasa kingdom was divided into twelve religious areas called daikhos. It is believed that the gods and goddess residing in a particular daikho protect the people of that area and control their destiny. The names of the twelve daikhos: Alu, Baigiai, Hamri, Daman, Laongmailai, Manja, Misim, Mongrang, Ranchandi, Riao, Waibra and Woa. There are twelve priests for twelve daikhos known as Zonthai. He is all in all in religious matters. It is believed that the daikhoes were originally clan jurisdiction. They have a tradition of worshipping the clan gods once a year. In the past the members of a particular clan had their jurisdiction in a specific area and in course of time the clan members had become the priestly clan (hojai) of that area so far as the worshipping of the clan god/gods of that area is concerned. In due course the area

became a daikho- a territorial jurisdiction. The twelve religious divisions have their own presiding deities. Since they do not have representative images of gods and goddesses, they raise some earthen mounds to represent their deities at the time of worship. Over the twelve zonthais of twelve daikhoes, there is a principal priest or chief priest called gisia who perform annual worshipping for the entire community (cited in Bordoloi 1984: 67-68). In the words of Thaosen (2014-15: 1-13) "the Dimasas have a unique system of double descent by virtue of which they have an allegiance to both male and female clan parallel. There are forty-two female and forty male clans in all. Each of the members propitiate clan gods of each of the respective two clans, one belongs to. There is a traditional form of worshipping the male clan ancestor-gods (in one special case, female clan) in twelve territories distributed throughout the Dimasa-inhabiting areas of northeastern India. These twelve areas also referred to as sacred groves, are known as 'daikhos' or the 'abode of the gods. The daikho system of worship constitutes one aspect of the traditional faith system of the Dimasas, propitiated by virtue of male clan or patriclan called sengphong. This pristine form of worship affiliated to twelve daikhos in all, presents in itself a uniquely observed complicated mosaic of rituals". It is part of indigenous faith where re-vitalizing process is yet to be done. Because most of them still adhere to their traditional faith. No doubt among them impact of Christianity is found but in less number. But another group, Zeme Naga confined to the same territory reflects different scenario and approach. There are other issues and concerns that vary from one group to another.

With the time and various others' factors, there is a transformation of the societies where emerging generation develop new choice according to preference. Some find other categorical religion is more acceptable than own. It is more external influence than voluntary. Other finds the

scope of 'revitalization' in their faith to make it more acceptable and allow a chance for conversion. Along with other parts of world and India, a process of 'revitalization' of indigenous faith is observed in the north eastern context. An attempt is made to explore such process considering a few groups from the three states of the region.

Lets' start with the meaning of 'revitalization'. What is revitalization? The word 're-vitalize' is used as action word to mean 'to make stronger or more active', in the sense that it empowers own faith by providing space and infrastructure as others. In the north east, it is observed that while a few group made such attempt but at the same time other groups' shows inclination towards Christianity. Even a section of those few groups has converted. Leaders, social workers, well wishers of the community make an attempt to examine their existing 'faith'. They made a comparative assessment with categorical religion where their own people shows inclination and found the scope of addition, deletion and modification of their 'faith system' in several ways. There are some examples. Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu introduced 'Hereka' as new religion among the Zeme Nagas. The traditional Zeme supernatural belief system primarily develops centering ancestral cult. All the supernatural personnel, i.e. gods, goddesses, spirits and deities have been considered to be their distant ancestors. Banglawang is believed to be the creator, who has shaped the earth suitable for human habitation as well as for other living creatures. In 1931, the Zeme King Jadonang formally conceived a new religion by reforming existing faith known as Heraka, which later on propagated by Rani Gaidinliu. It is based on one supreme god-the Tingwang, where Hera being benevolent supernatural forces and Herasiabe, being all malevolent powers (Roy 1995: 51). Indigenous scholars have wonderfully explored the origin, concept and mode of worship under Hereka. Newme (1974: 4-5) revealed that "after thousands of years passed, again God's gifted Heraka religion was revealed to Haipau Jadonang and Rani

Gaidinliu by the almighty at Bhuban cave in 1927. Thereafter they started preaching the essence of Heraka religion to people as per revelation of God to abolish the unnecessary practice of genna and taboos observed in the prophetic (Kali Yug) religion. With the direction of the almighty God, Heraka religion was first introduced by the great Banglawang for the mankind of all corners. Heraka is the pure productive religion of the supreme God but it is not a man product like any other religions which have founders". Explaining the literal meaning of Hereka, it states, "Heraka literally means pure and not impure which was spelled out by the Supreme God. The words Heraka is HERA+KA=gods+elimination which means all gods (evil spirits) had been eliminated from the Kingdom of Almighty God, the main concept of Heraka religion is that those whosoever could obey the authentic principles of Heraka religion would be blessed good fortune in their life and also the immortal souls of good doers would go to God's Kingdom. So, we the Hereka people believed in Him only. Perhaps, one may call Heraka religion is as a reformation religion so far it was re-introduced by Jadonang and Gaidinliu as per revelation of the almighty God. But now, it is cleared to all of us that this Heraka religion is the primordial or eternal religion practiced during the Ist era to till the end of the 3rd era according to the statement made by the Herakandingoeu and the Zeliangrong histories tellers. It is an eternal God gifted religion for the earthy people of all societies in this world. Therefore, any deserving persons/society/community of others religious beliefs can be proselytized into this Heraka religion by simple performing rituals followed with sprinkling of telau dui (holy water)". So, it is observed in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, there more or less equal number of Hereka followers. It is also revealed that new generation belonging to Hereka family hardly makes any inclination to switch over Christianity. In the Zeme Naga villages, there are temples under Hereka faith. We may also exemplify the Zeme identity with Hereka faith. It is a

wonderful example of re-vitalization of indigenous faith of this region.

Inroads of Christian missionaries in this region have impacted multidimensionally. Scholars analyzed the situation in two ways. While modern education and modernization are considered at positive side, at the same time, it has made serious threat to indigenous cultures and faith. It is exemplified in the narratives of Seng Khasi movement in Meghalaya. One of the narratives¹ as found is as follows: “when the British first reached Meghalaya through present day Bangladesh, they weren’t exactly welcomed. Any attempt to approach the wary indigenous people would end in bloodshed. The British brought religion to the region; they opened Christian schools that taught the Bible, hospitals that offered advanced medical care, gradually making inroads into the populace. The British also brought alcohol, which the locals weren’t used to (having previously only consumed small quantities of rice beer) and quickly developed a taste for. With education restricted to the primary level, the Bible and alcohol, the locals were made subservient to the British, easy to exploit”. It adds, “however, a group of 16 individuals who managed to leave the region and gain college education in Calcutta, realized the British depredation within their community needed to be urgently addressed. This group came to an understanding that the community’s rituals and custom needed to be formalized into a proper religion to stymie further conversions and the resultant exploitation. On 23rd November 1899, these 16 men came together in Smit village to form a new religion called Seng Khasi. ‘Seng’ means beginning or foundation and the Khasis are the indigenous people of the area. The religion rests on three tenets: 1. Tip Briew Tip Blei: knowing humans is to know God, 2. Tip Kur Tip Kha: Knowledge about your clan, 3. Kamai Yakahok: to earn by righteous means and take only what is yours. The followers of the religion are called ‘Hynniew Trep’ (seven huts). The name is a nod to the seven huts presented on Earth, in

which we live. A pilgrimage site at Lake Umiam apparently marks where these huts existed. Every year Seng Khasi congregate to celebrate the founding of the religion- a festival Lypung. Children taught in weekly meetings called Seng Pyni, Seng Kyrseiw- going one village to another village to motivate people remain in Khasi. According to Seng Khasi belief-Heaven and earth were connected by a tree. People would work on earth during day, returning to the huts in heaven at night to rest. Devil cut the tree, but tiger licked it and rejoined. But finally devil manages to destroy the link between heaven and earth. The other important belief is that there is no hell in Seng Khasi- we pay for our deeds during our life times”. The attempt of 16 men though a part of history, yet they sowed the seed and encourage other to work for the greater interest for the community. However, it is difficult to withstand the outlook of present generation and seen in increasing number of Christians in Meghalaya.

Categorically, the Bodos are the major and largest plains tribe of Assam in terms of size and number. Besides, their politico-geographical distribution in the Bodoland Territorial Council, they are widely spread in various pockets of Assam. They are traditional society in terms of culture, practice and identity. Bathouism is their key religion encompassing various rites, rituals, sacrifices, uses of rice beer and others. In bathou, ‘Lord Shiva’ is considered as a supreme deity of adoration and identified by siju plant (*Eurphobia splendis*). In every community, there are certain specific individual who led the entire life for the upliftment of the community in one way or the other. Kalicharan Brahma, founder of ‘Brahma Dharma’ among the Bodos, had such kind of mind. Mukherjee (2006:208) reveals, a socio-religious movement began under the guidance of Srimat Kalicharan Brahma in the early part of the nineteenth century. The religious reform movement called Brahma movement was instrumental in the cultural and political consciousness among the

Bodos. Guru Kalicharan also represented to the Simon Commission for reservation of seats in the State Legislature and government services for the tribals. Devi (2006: 219-220) found that some of the Boro-Kacharis of Lower Assam also became the disciples of Kalicharan Brahma, the founder of 'Brahma Religion'. They gave up their traditional practices and followed the Brahma religion where they performed *jajna/ahuti* followed by sprinkling of ghee, rice, frankincense, etc. in the fire. The rituals begin with the mantras. Guru Kalicharan Brahma along with the propagation of Brahma religion launched campaigns for social reforms. He encouraged trade, business, weaving, carpentry, etc, and changed the bride price at exorbitant rates. He urged the then British Government for schools in the Boro dominated areas in English language, where educated unemployed youths could get opportunities to teach. Efforts of Kalicharnan Brahma have not only re-vitalize Bodo indigenous but it guides in the upliftment of the society. In some of the Bodo dominated villages, we observed Brahma temple.

Earlier, in most of the indigenous faith, the concept of temple or any permanent place is missing. For example, Bodos worship under *siju* plant. Believers on 'sacred grooves' keep whole forest area for ritual purpose. But later on for community worship most of them start keeping some specified space for annual religious purpose. Except 'church' for the Christians, there was no such place of worship among different groups of Arunachal Pradesh. Gradually they also feel the importance of permanent place for worship. One such attempt is the establishment of 'gangging' by Minyongs of Arunachal Pradesh. We know Donyo-Polo is one of the important traditional religions among the various indigenous groups of Arunachal Pradesh. It represents sun and moon as their principal deities. It recent times, it is wonderfully shaped. It is nicely elaborated by Nirupoma Kardong (2015:55-62) exploring the

concept of 'gangging'. Miniyong, a sub-tribe of Adis is residing in East, West and Upper Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. They believe in animism and residence of deities in hills, water, etc. A *gangging* is a common name for a temple of the Donyipoloist faith, especially among Adi area. It is a sacred enclosure popularized by Donyi Polo Yelam Kebang since 1996. It is reported that Donyi Polo religion had not specific place of worship. Through this *gangging*, there was an attempt to revitalize and institutionalize donyipolo religion in response to spread of Christianity and absorption of Hinduism. It had happened under the leadership of late Talom Rukbo who found the word *Gangging* from *Gangging Siring*, an imaginary land or spiritual tree exist between spiritual and natural world from where objects and non-living came into existence. In their belief system, presence of *uyus* and benevolent and malevolent spirits are of prime significance.

It is observed that communities have their own concern towards own indigenous faith and belief system. They are trying to explore the ways how to retain their own indigenous faith. In Arunachal Pradesh, people celebrate Indigenous Faith Day. It is praiseworthy. At the time, while World Indigenous Peoples' days are celebrated at the global level, the celebration like 'Indigenous Faith' means a lot. Changing scenario and new mode of life have snatch many things from us. We are always taking about our 'heritage'. What is our heritage? Yes, our language and 'indigenous faith' are key part of intangible heritage. Our tangible heritages are replaced by items of modern economic practices. We have no choice, but we have to accept it as it is the demand of the time. Abandoning 'own faith' has several impacts on our customs and practices of our society. So, we have to think. These are our common property passed from our ancestors. So, if we have any opportunity to modify our 'faith' to fit with the time, we may go ahead with common consensus. Efforts seen in case of Hereka, Seng Khasi, Brahma, establishing

Gangging was the beginning to re-vitalize 'Indigenous faith', should be followed by others in order to avoid future intrusion by others. □

END NOTE

1. www.firstpost.com/india/seng_khasi_lore_of_several_link_between_heaven_and_earth_plays_out_in_locals_lives_in_Smit_meghalaya_7825491.html, Seng Khasi lore of several link between heaven and earth plays out in locals' live in Smit, Meghalaya, access on 4.29 pm on 26.6.2020

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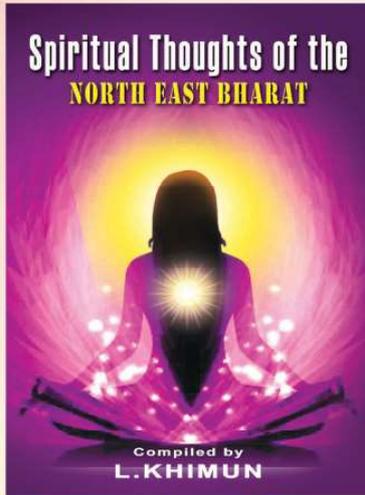


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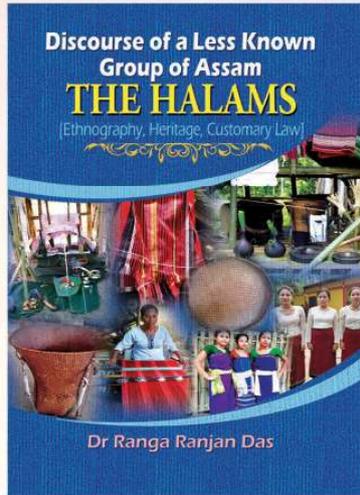


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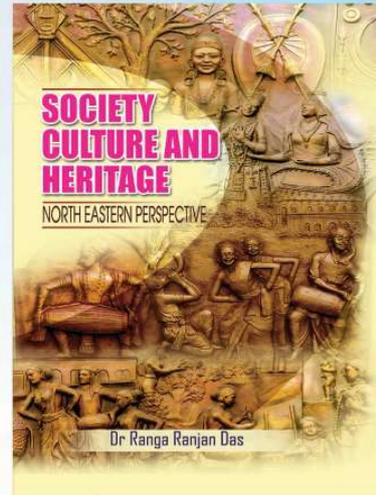
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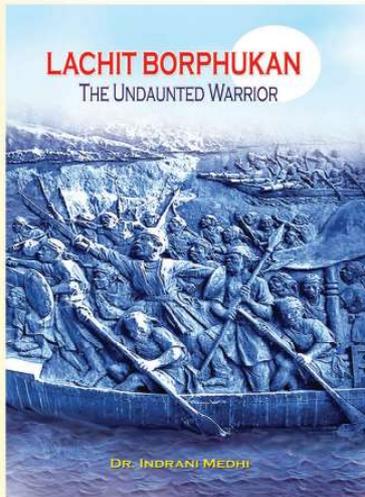
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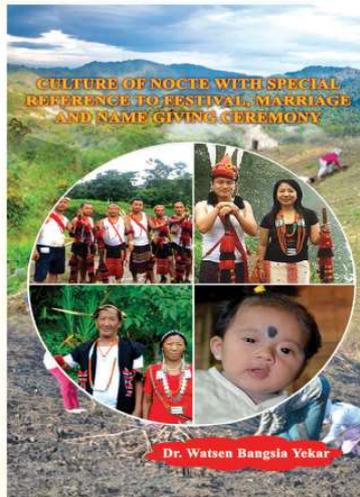
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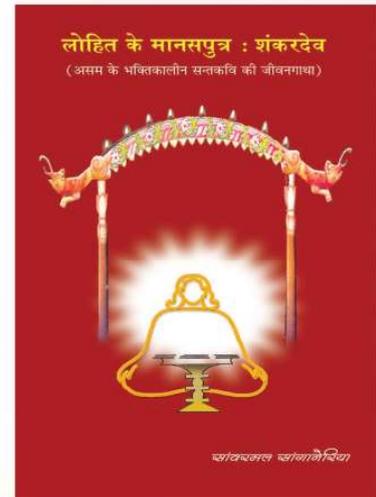
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Rangfraa Movement in Tangsa Community of Arunachal Pradesh



Reshma Rekhung

Introduction

'Rangfraa' literally means "God i.e. the supreme spirit of being, which is absolute, autonomous, self-effulgent, all-pervading and all-transcending in nature". The name of God 'Rangfraa' itself is a combination of two words. i.e. 'Rang' and 'Fraa'. These two words represent the two different aspects of God. Rang is the divine power or the will that operates the whole universe, hence the objective aspect of God. And 'Fraa' is the subjective aspect which is the symbol of "love, compassion, wisdom, peace, tolerance, forgiveness, sacrifice, etc". According to the Holy textbook of Rangfraism "*The Great Third Coming of Rangfraa*", Rangfraism is theistic but very different from other theistic religions due to the concept of 'Eternal Gap'; the gap between the known and the unknown, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, perfection and imperfection and ultimately Man and God. It may be viewed as the difference between potentialities or intensities. The religion is monistic as it holds the view that different things in this universe are the manifestations of the same reality in different modes and patterns and it has to retreat and dissolve into the same source from which it emanated i.e Rangfraa, which is imminent and autonomous in itself.

Rangfraism is one of the important indigenous religion which started its movement around the late 90's in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It plays an important role in Tangsa as well as the Tutsa community. Tangsa and Tutsa are the predominant communities residing in the Patkai hills in the Changlang district of Arunachal

Pradesh. Even though Rangfraism is widely practiced in other communities such as Tutsa, Nocte, Wancho, Mishmi, and some Tani groups of the state, the article specifically discusses the Rangfraism practiced in the Tangsa community. Tangsa people are an indigenous ethnic group of Arunachal Pradesh and consists of around 30 different sub-tribes. Few of the Tangsa population are scattered in neighboring areas especially in Margherita sub-division of Tinsukia in Assam and Sagaing region and parts of Kachin State in Myanmar. Thirty different sub-tribes are put into two groups namely *Pangwa* and *Non-Pangwa* based on their common ancestry. Pangwa group are those sub-tribes who sing a particular cycle of ritual and historical songs, called the "*Wibu Song*" or "*Sahwi Song*". They trace their ancestry from one common parent. Non- Pangwa groups are those groups who do not sing this Sahwi song. Rangfraism is a dominant religion among Non-Pangwa such as *Muklom*, *Longchang*, *Ponthai*, *Tikhak* and *Havi* sub-tribes of Tangsa while the majority of Pangwa sub-tribes are Christians now.

Rangfraism is not a newly founded religion but its origin is grounded in the indigenous and traditional faith of the land, their ancestors' faith that was animistic and shamanistic, involving animal sacrifice. The idol of Rangfraa is designed based on the depiction given in the Tangsa Mythology and the source for this Rangfraa Mythology is the folklore of the tribe. In *Muklom*

sub-tribe, the myth of Rangfraa is sung through *Rubun* song, especially during the *Mob-Mol* festival, celebrated annually in the month of April-May. The mythology of Rangfraa dates back to time immemorial. Generally, elders of the Tangsa community pass the myth orally to its younger generation through folksongs or folktales. Muklom referred to God as “*Chengwa*” in the *Rubun* song rather than Rangfraa because the source from which the myth is derived is sung in old Tangsa language which is different from the present day Tangsa language.

Rangfraa as Chengwa in Tangsa Mythology

According to Tangsa’s mythology “Once in an unknown past, Rangfraa appeared on earth as ‘Fraa’ amidst those lost races, in the disguise of a guest, poor and a sick old man from the unknown origin for the safe-guard of the innocents and to annihilate the sinners”. Some narration of the myth says that the old man who looked dirty, poor and sick, wore a bunch of paddy on his right ear and earthworms on his left ear, holding a one edged spear, wearing only a lungi, once came to earth to ask for fine (*khotuk thang*, a fine in the form of cash or kind imposed on a person by the bereaved family, when the person kills someone from their family) imposed on his son-in-law for he has murdered the old man’s daughter. He tried to climb every house in the village but was not allowed inside even by a single house giving different excuses. Some said the head of the family went to the paddy field, some said they had conducted a ritualistic offering (which prohibits people to enter the house for three days), and so on. Only the orphan siblings, who were extremely poor allowed him to enter their house. When the old man asked them whether they would allow him to enter their house or they were also observing some kind of rituals, they said “starvation and hunger” were the only things they would restrict to enter their house. Later, when the old man saw that the orphan siblings were extremely poor and did not have enough food to eat to fill their bellies he asked them to open a mat and there he poured out

uncountable varieties of cereals from one ear and uncountable varieties of vegetable, seeds and tubers from the other. In this way, it is believed that all the food grains, vegetables, tubers, and any other edible plants were also his gifts. When he went to ask for his daughter’s murder fine from his son-in-law, his son-in-law too was poor and could not pay him the money. So, he told his father-in-law to wait until he returns after collecting some amount from somebody. But in reality, he played a trick on his back. Instead, he collected piles of rubbish under the house and burned it due to which even the heaven went up very high (actually here heaven means the world of gods and divine beings) that was very near to the earth before this incident. Therefore, the old man got extremely angry and wanted to punish him for his mischief. Besides, he also observed that humanity was gone from the earth because people became hypocritical, greedy, and rude. There was no compassion in them for the poor, the old, the sick and they even did not want to welcome guests who instead should be served well. Only the orphan siblings were the one who was compassionate and caring towards the old, sick, poor, and the guests. Therefore, *Chengwa* told them that he will annihilate the sinners on the earth after a few days through an Apocalypse where no human will be left on the earth except the orphan siblings. So, he gave them a knife and two different types of birds (*woshukchal*, *wokhit* and *naabkhiyaak* [wild banana leaf]) to use during the apocalypse. He advised the orphan siblings to dig a pit under the Bamboo plant where they will be hiding while an apocalypse will occur. After finishing digging the pit, he asked them to give him a signal by showing the opposite side of the wild banana leaf towards the sky (leaf has powdery white color on the opposite side). They dug the ground as asked by *Chengwa* continuously for a few days. The villagers saw them and bullied them, laughed, and made fun of the siblings while they were digging the ground. But the orphan siblings did not pay attention to any of their rude comments and continued digging and eventually completed it. They gave the signal by turning the

banana leaf to the Chengwa. He came and told them that the bird (*wosbukchal*) will sing before the apocalypse occurs. So, they should hurry and enter the pit on the ground with essential items and should not come out until the other bird (*wokhit*) sings. That evening, the *wosbukchal* bird sang so they hurried quickly to the pit. The apocalypse started and continued throughout that night. The weather turned dark and gloomy. There was thunder and lightening along with storm. Heavy rainfall started along with hailstone. The hailstone was huge like a boulder and rocks fell on every human being on the earth and some of them were also killed by it. The mountains and hills, the plains and river, everything turned upside down which killed and annihilated every living creature on earth. This phenomenon continued until the next morning. The next morning, the other bird sang and then they came out. Later, they saw that everything including hills, mountains, rivers, trees, turned upside down, and not even a single human being was left on earth except them. In the later part of the myth, the story continued where it is told that they were the progenitor of all the human beings present on earth today. In this way, sinners were annihilated from the earth and humanity restored.

How the abstract idea of Rangfraa/Chengwa was concretized into Idolatry

So Rangfraa is the same old man who came to earth once in an unknown past known as *Chengwa* in 'Tangsa's' old language. But he was only in the minds of Tangsas and was worshipped only through an individual prayer made to him in times of adversity and diseases. Peoples' faith was not strong enough because of no proper prayer and worship system. A proper and systematic institutionalized religion was needed to intensify the faith of people. Also, not all but few traditional practices were based on superstition rather than logic and reasoning in Tangsa's society which also added to the weakening of people's faith in the indigenous practices.

Shamanism and Superstition before Rangfraa Movement

Amidst cultural and traditional rituals which are performed for the interest of all living beings including both human beings as well as flora and fauna, the vast Tangsa traditional belief also included Shamanism. This included a sacrificial ritual called *Tinghun* to cure individual illnesses and diseases. It was performed by a Shaman called *Tingwa/Tumsa/Samaal/Shamma*, etc. by different sub-tribes of Tangsa. The *Tingwa* would himself perform the divination and recommend the patient about which *Tinghun* should be performed to cure the patient. Different types of *Tinghun* were meant for different types of diseases and it would also involve sacrificing different types of animals such as fowl, piglets/pig, cow, or buffaloes. The sacrifice was made to the evil spirit that they believed to be the one responsible for their illness and diseases. This chain of appeasement never ended after performing *tinghun* once or twice but was required to perform again and again. When the *Tingwa* was satisfied that he had performed the ritual properly then only some minor illness would be cured but in times when he felt some mistakes were made during the *tinghun*, the sick person would fall ill again after the *tinghun* also. Generally, light sickness such as stomach ache, headache, and body pain was cured by *tinghun* in certain cases rather than curing severe diseases like cancer, tumor, TB, leprosy, and so on. So, to some extent Tangsa's traditional faith was partially Shamanistic.

Besides Shamanism, Tangsa used to believe that some natural phenomenon are caused by either God or by evil spirits. Natural phenomena like striking of house, tree, paddy field, or any other animate or inanimate objects by lightning, the birth of twin babies, stillborn babies, death by accidents, fire, suicide, homicide, death during pregnancy and so on were seen as abnormal. So, when lightning struck on any movable or immovable property, they used to abandon it thinking that God does not want the proprietor to own those properties. Likewise, *Muklom* believed the birth of twin babies

to be inauspicious and bad omen for the parents of the twins or the whole family. Here also they thought that if human beings normally give birth to one child, how is it possible that two babies are born in rare cases. So, it was seen as abnormal and thought it to be the deeds of evil spirits or ghosts. Thus, they would not raise such babies. But some of the Pangwa group would raise twin babies. They too followed certain taboos in case of stillborn babies. Fear was strong enough in people's minds in case if a person dies an accidental death, death during delivery of a child or a pregnant lady, etc. Several taboos were observed during such type of untimely and unnatural death. They thought that such type of people's soul turns into an evil spirit called *Sonja*, which causes illness, and sufferings in human life.

It is very rare in the history of mankind that any civilization must have existed without any superstitious practices. Superstitious beliefs and practices are an unavoidable part of a pre-scientific society. It is born out of ignorance, illiteracy, and lack of scientific knowledge. In a pre-scientific society, almost all the continents have been the homes of superstitions. Superstition is the imagination and belief sprung out from one's intuition of the unknown and the unseen.

A Chain of Proselytization

The traditional superstitious practices required substantial wealth along with manpower and besides, it did not cure people completely of their diseases. But still, it was the only hope for the people to seek cure as there was rarely any primary health care center or any dispensary. Therefore, people started looking for other alternative which would cure them in fewer expenses. Especially in the case of those who had undergone such problems. In such perfect timing Christian missionaries, those who came from outside acknowledged the situation of the community and started manipulating their minds. They told the simple-minded and innocent people that they were worshiping *Satan* and Satan will not allow these people to stop practicing ritualistic sacrifices and observing taboos until and

unless they convert to the Christian religion as embracing Jesus Christ alone can save them from damnation. So, for the poor Tangsa man, who could not afford to go to a hospital in a neighboring state and who could not afford to perform such ritualistic offerings thought it reasonable to convert. But in fact, they were unknowingly doing this at the cost of their cultural identity, especially of their future generations. They also thought that conversion would save them from the evil spirits that they used to appease before. The other problem in Tangsa society is the problem of kin. When a person is in need and in time of difficulties the closest people who would support or help them will be his family members. The society also helps them when they are in dire need and grief but consanguine kin is the closest among all. Therefore, sometimes a person whose family members have already converted will automatically follow them.

Conversion will not be considered as immoral until and unless it becomes a cause for one's cultural degradation. It cannot be considered wrong as long as it works for the integration and unity of the people. It should integrate people into their culture and tradition which is the root and soul of a person. But here in the case of Tangsa, the conversion is the root cause of the cultural degradation of society. In the case of Tangsa people, conversion means not only changing one's religious practices, rather it is a divergence from one's tradition and culture.

The converted masses do not think it essential to perform and observe various other cultural festivals and rites of passage which is deeply rooted in Tangsa philosophy of life. What is wrong when Tangsa celebrates the *Mob-Mol* festival which marks the beginning of the year in the Tangsa traditional calendar? What is the problem if they participate in the celebration of the *Chamtuk* festival which is a welcome festival for the Goddess of paddy (Goddess of wealth and prosperity)? In fact, their philosophy shows deep respect and honor to mother earth and the nature around us. The nature

from where we obtain everything is deeply revered and understood by Tangsa which underlies their festivals and rituals. Tangsa has several rituals and customs which are solely performed and observed for the well-being of the whole creation. There are certain traditions which strengthen the unity of the society too. In times when a person's house is gutted by a fire, all the villagers, both men, and women irrespective of their age, clan or social designation come together to that person's house bringing with them various food items, clothes, utensils and whatever essentials required for that family. Each household brings bamboo, palm leaves, and any other raw material requirements for building a house. All the male members get together in that very moment and bring timbers from the forest. All the villagers together build a house for that family and will finish it on the same day. This is the power of unity maintained by Tangsa's traditional culture. Another good example can be seen from the rituals called *Shah Khob Khib* and *Worang Khob Khib* (the term slightly differs in pronunciation of all the sub-tribes) which was performed by Tangsa in the traditional culture. This ritual is the best example of Tangsa's philosophy which shows their understanding and respect for even an animal. The ritual is performed when a tiger or a lion is accidentally killed or knowingly killed by anyone from the village. It pays homage to the soul of the lion killed by singing a ritual song and arranging a grand feast. Such philosophy which values the life of all living-being plays an important role in the ecological balance too. So, if a couple of rituals are giving trouble to any person or any other living being, it does not mean that the whole Tangsa traditional and cultural system is harming or disturbing others.

So, I believe instead of manipulating people to convert and completely abandon their valuable traditional culture, any respectable religious group or person should encourage them to eradicate all those evil practices and to continue with their age-old indigenous faith. Conversion is not a necessary medium instead reformation by being in the same

traditional faith is a must. Because here in the case of Tangsa conversion means not only changing one's religious denomination but those who are converted find it meaningless in this type of traditional rituals and festivals. Also, after a large number of people converted after the 90s, society was socially and morally divided into two groups. The spirit of unity was broken in society. Those who were converted started obeying every command given to them by their religious institution and rarely participated in collective activities. For them celebrating their religious festivals became paramount and traditional festivals are no longer celebrated. Recounting the stories of their forefathers with pride is a matter of shame now. Instead telling the stories of their religious book is a matter of pride. Tangsa of the Changlang is now 59 % Christians according to 2011 religious' data. The Christians among the Tangsa have abnormally risen from 29 % in 1991 to 59 % in 2011 who were in indigenous faith and other religious groups earlier. The share of other religious groups had declined in the 2011 census. Among the sub-tribes of *Tangsa Mossang* sub-tribe is 93 % Christians. According to the Centre for Policy Studies, "Tangsa is perhaps the only community of Arunachal Pradesh that has converted from the Hindu religion at such an extensive level." (Here Hindu word can be taken as indigenous religion of Tangsa)

Traditions and customs that are in continuity for several centuries are not just a mere fancy but it is the accumulation of the social and cultural experiences of the people of the respective community. It is our identity and cultural symbol which reflects our understanding of nature around us like a mirror. People after changing their religion altogether forget their culture. It is another matter that these days the young and literate generation have started realizing this reality that a person's identity lies in his tradition and culture and therefore started performing cultural programs and festivals and also try to drape themselves proudly in traditional attire during festivals or any grand

cultural programs. *But only speaking Tangsa language and only wearing Tangsa attire and ornaments do not prove the identity that you belong to Tangsa tribe.* Anybody coming from another tribe or caste can also do the same if he/she is staying or has stayed several years in the Tangsa community. The soul of a person's culture lies in whatever rites of passage he performs and whatever rituals and customs he performs similarly as his community, what festivals he celebrates, what history and folklore he identifies with, etc.

Rangfraa Movement and its impact on Tangsa community

Therefore, during the early 90s, there was an emerging interest to promote and preserve the indigenous faith in the community. A group of educated elders and youth from different sub-tribes of Tangsa came together and started a religious reform movement in Changlang district called **Rangfraism**. *This religious reform movement tried to eradicate all the blind and superstitious beliefs practiced in the old traditional faith and promoted other cultural activities such as rites of passage of individual, festivals, folklore, and many other aspects of culture.* It gave a new outlook to the cultural and religious dimensions in society. It took several decades to eradicate the evils and superstition in the community. As eradication from the community means eradication from the minds of previous generations and for that, a huge vigor was required. Therefore, it is more of a social reform movement than a religious movement.

The preaching about the Rangfraa faith started in the 90s by the pioneers and founders of the faith but the exact date is not clear. The Mingkayechu *Mingyong Tangha* of Bubang 2 village recounts the year 1997 when the present Secretary-General of Rangfraa Faith Promotion Society, *Er L. Khimbun* used to visit his house while going for preaching religious lessons to remote villages of Changlang district. He said it was the time when only an abstract idea was formed of the Rangfraa Movement in the minds of some literate Tangsas. The concrete form of Rangfraism took its shape only after

preaching the people for several years. The pioneers of Rangfraism conducted an art competition where different artists from various parts of Arunachal Pradesh were invited to participate in the competition. The story was narrated to the artists in the competition and asked to create an image of *Chengwa* from their imagination based on the features depicted in the mythology. The best amongst all the images, made by *Chamin Rajkumari* was chosen for idolatry. The Mingkeychu Mingjong Tangha said that here sometimes people have doubt and up to the extent that some of them even said that the image was of *Er. L. Khimbun* (the present General Secretary of RFPS) but the question of bias should not come here because the artist herself belong to the other community .i.e. *Nocte* Community rather than from Tangsa community (L. Khimbun himself is Tangsa). Following this, they planned the architectural design and systems of the temple to be built for the worship and services of Rangfraa. Because they thought that a proper institution would help to intensify people's faith the first *Rangsombum* (temple) was built in New *Chingsa* village in the year 1998 followed by *Ngaichang* village. Slowly and steadily temples were built in different villages of Tangsa community. There are around 86 temples in total now including the Rangfraa temple of Kanubari in Tirap district. In the beginning, Rangfraites worshiped the image of the almighty Rangfraa but later changed to idol worship. The idol was completed and brought on 27th October 1998 from the sculptor but they decided to install it on the 4th of November 1998 as it was a full moon day which is believed to be an auspicious day by Tangsa. From that year onwards every year on the full moon day, in November, it is celebrated as Rangfraa day for consecutive 3 days with cultural programs like folk songs, dances, dramas and games, and sports. Rangfraites of different age groups both male and female participate in this celebration and on the last day a feast is organized. Sunday is fixed as the service day when people of the respective villages would come to their temple and worship and pray Rangfraa together. Every

year, 4th November is recognized as the day of Rangfraa's arrival to the society in the form of idol worship. Later in the year 2007, Wednesdays and Saturdays were added to the service of God when *Kayechu-Samaals* system was conceived in Rangfraism. For the service of Rangfraa in every temple, a team of Rangfraites was assigned to different types of duties. Caretaker/*Belwala*, *Tamwa* (the Priest), Preacher (*Kayechu*), Secretary, President, Preaching Secretary, and Women Secretary are the designations for which the Rangfraites are chosen both by God himself through *Kayechu-Samaals* or sometimes by the team members of the Rangfraa temple.

To abolish the superstitious practices in the Tangsa community first of all it was necessary to make the people believe that whatever they were



Idol of Rangfraa at the Rangshonm Him, New Chingsa Village

practicing was based on superstition and not on logic or reasoning. Therefore, awareness was created through debates, discussions, and lectures at various camps and even in Rangfraa temples also. Throughout this Rangfraa movement, the community analyzed the right and wrong practices of their faith. The pioneers of the movement study all these social practices deeply and made the people aware of such practices. *Er. L. Khimbun* during an interview said, "We conveyed the message that if Pangwa communities raised twin babies and they do not suffer any bad consequences due to this act then why would we?"

"On the contrary", he said "Pangwa communities were made to understand that if the Muklom community does not observe any taboos when stillborn babies are born and do not suffer any bad consequences due to this, why would you? If Muklom does not suffer despite not observing taboos when a stillborn baby is born then similarly you too would not suffer any misfortune or adversities." Regarding thunderbolt, he said that people were made aware by telling them that when other religious groups such as Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist, etc. eat the food harvested from a field struck by a thunderbolt but do not suffer as a consequence then why should Rangfraites fear to accept those properties struck by a thunderbolt? He told me that thunderbolt and lightning are natural phenomena just like rain, sunlight, and



Rangfraites(devotees) at Rangfraa temple on Sunday morning, New Chingsa Village

storm. So why should we think and fear and treat thunderbolt as something very different? Therefore, we should see it in the same way as we see rain and storm. In this way, logic and reasoning were used as a tool to make them understand the superstitious practices they observed, and eventually after the Rangfraa movement neither do they fear all these phenomena nor do they observe any taboos or perform any kind of superstitious practices.

The Mingkayechu of Bubang 1 said that as a social reform movement it took time to abolish the superstitious practices. It was not abandoned

immediately but was done gradually and slowly. It took time for the people to accept the change and the superstitious beliefs could only have been replaced by instilling religious thoughts in them. "Wherever the temples were built the Rangfraites stopped practicing superstitious practices including Tinghun at that village", says the *Caretaker/Bellwalla* (Bell Ringer). He said that the conceiving of the Kayechu-Samaals system marks the utter eradication of superstitious practices. He says that 'at present time the Kayechu-Samaals give medicines by the power acquired from Rangfraa to cure illness and diseases, so the temple must be kept pure and clean'. Purity in Rangfraism is measured by maintaining purity in both physical and mental levels. Physical purity means one should not eat any non-veg food, addictive drugs (opium, cocaine, heroin, etc.), intoxicants like alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, or any other tobacco-based chewing items or any other thing that harms the body. Whereas mental purity means one should not have any violence both in action as well as in thought, jealousy, and hatred against anyone. *Having the attributes of both physical and mental purity is the state of absolute purity.*

Regarding the eradication of *Tinghun* Khimhun argues that "the basic concept of Rangfraism is that God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. If God is omnipresent, then there is no space left for the evil spirits which mean there is no *jungban* (evil spirits), *bakebo* (evil spirits of a particular area), *souja/sowin* (evil spirits of people who died in an accident). If there are no evil spirits then to whom are we offering food, rice, rice beer, and animal's blood, and why are we offering?" According to him in Rangfraism, illness and suffering are caused by people's grudges and curses, not by the evil spirits. He states that fasting and prayer (*Romtani*) is the only way to nullify the curse and grudge. He says that grudge and curse turn into sin and sin can only be nullified by prayer because prayer means seeking blessings from God.

Samaal Vs Kayechu-Samaal and Rang Samaal

Samaal in Tangsa language is the term equivalent

to 'Shaman'. Shamanism was also a predominant part of the indigenous faith of the Tangsa community before the religious reformation began. In the Muklom community, there were four different types of Shaman. The first category was the most powerful of all three as they used to act as a conduit between the worlds of supernatural beings like the spirits and divine beings and ordinary human beings. They used to heal people by performing a ritual; not necessarily involving animal sacrifice. They would even perform miraculous acts like taking out a stone, impurities, and hair, etc. from the body of an ill person. In times if they will not follow the commands of their tutelary spirits, they would have to atone for their mistakes which sometimes would lead to physical damage of self like turning blind, dumb, deaf or crippled, and in some cases will even lead to their death. They were called *Rangtuun-Samaal*, meaning God-possessed Shaman. The second type of Shaman was used to perform sacrificial rituals to heal people. They were called *Tingwa/Tamwa/Talwa* who performed *Tinghun*; a sacrificial ritual involving animal sacrifice. They too performed divinations by telling which spirits have been disturbed by the patient and how the spirits should be appeased. They would sometimes perform divination for the whole village during festivals or while going for hunting. They act both as *haruspex* as well as a healer. The third type was those whose souls would traverse into the world of death. This Shaman used to travel to the world of death i.e. called '*Balim/Honglowlom*' while sleeping especially when a person dies and his/her funeral pyres are still in fumes. For entering the state of a trance, she should have to eat some food cooked in the deceased's house; a tradition called *Wal-Naam*, otherwise she would not be able to enter the state of trance. Her soul is believed to travel to the world of the death along with the deceased soul. While the Shaman and the deceased souls are together in the *Balim*, the deceased soul through the Shaman's body as she is in trance, would answer the questions asked by the bereaved family, where sometimes the dues and debt taken by the deceased

when alive, is also revealed to the bereaved family. This type of shaman still exists today but most of them avoid to go to the trance state due to their old age because when their soul travels to *Balim* they get extremely exhausted when they return to their original state. They are called *Limphysamaal*. The last category was *Topo Samal* who could neither heal nor could perform divinations but can only tell if an incident is going to happen in a person's life or the village just by referring to his/her dreams. They were good interpreters of a dream.

Shamanism has vanished two decades ago after Rangfraism evolved with new religious systems of worship and prayer. Now *Kayechu-Samaals* and *Rang-Samaals* are somewhat similar to shamans (*Samaal*) of the old indigenous faith but this system is purely based on *divine possession of the human body rather than involving any evil spirits or any other kind of forest, land, and river or mountain spirits*. They give oracles and also heal the ill and the diseased. Divine or spirit possession of the human body leading to the ecstatic state to convey any important messages and render service to mankind in the form of cure to both physical and mental illness and diseases is not uncommon in various communities of the world. The unique thing about these *Samaals* is that they perform miracles and also while healing a patient takes out impurities in the form of a live-moving worm and small tiny pebbles and impurities. All these impurities are taken out by sucking through their mouth. During my field visit, one of the Rang-Samaal, *Honnem Tangha* took out a small size black pebble from the right side of my belly. She sucked and bit the skin of my belly which gave me a slight pain. After some seconds she spat out the black tiny pebble. When the Rang-Samaals and Kayechu-Samaals are possessed by Rangfraa, there is a particular type of tremor in the whole body until God leaves the body. During the state of trance, they heal people and also give oracles. They also sometimes pluck medicinal herbs from the jungle which are used to cure the illness and disease of a patient who comes to them to seek cure for their illness. They identify the herbs

by the power of Rangfraa and could see those plants clearly with closed eyes when they pray. Some of the critical illness Rangfraa cured through Rang-Samaals and Keychu Samal are the case of HIV/AIDS of an Assamese couple from Mahadevpur, Changlang district, brain tumor of *Shumpong Tangha* of Saching village, Droopy eyelids due to suppression in the brain cells of *Linnem Tangha* of New Chingsa village, Cancer of three patients; one from Yungchim, another from Thamlom, and *Telang's* grandfather from Bubang village, drying of brain cells of *Swami Vishweshananda*, Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar and Apatani lady who came from Lungbusung village as her son was employed at RFGC in Lungbusung, and so on. There are many more light illnesses those have been cured through Rang-Samaals and Kayechu Samaals by the power directly acquired from Rangfraa but all of them are not recorded by the workers of Rangfraa temple. For that when the patients themselves will come out and shared their experiences in every temple then only it would be possible to witness. I have personally met and conducted interview with two of these patients who were completely cured of their illness that was suggested by doctors to be operated. The first patient is *Smt. Linnem Tangha* who belongs to my village, New Chingsa. Last December I asked her whether it was true or a rumor that people talked about the cure of her illness after visiting Rang Samaals and Kayechu-Samaals. She said she was cured by the medicines and healings given by the Rang Samals of Bubang village. In the beginning when she was told by the doctors in Vellore that her drooping eyes were caused by some problems in her brain cells. Therefore, they have to operate her. This worried her and her family as they feared it may lead to paralysis in future if in case even any tiny brain cells is cut by mistake. So, as the brain surgery was sensitive, they were not willing to do this. Instead they thought of other means such as medicine or any other healing process. Eventually, they went to Bubang village Rangfraa temple and got the cure from the Rang Samaals. She said it took 9 months

for her and her family to maintain purity at her house and the physical level. She told me that the patient has to completely avoid consuming addictive drugs and non-vegetarian food. He/she must regularly go to the Rangfraa temple on the service day. She went there to Bubang 2 village several times for healing and while healing her, Rangfraa through the Rangsamals took out the impurities by sucking on her eye and spit out impurities which look black and dirty. After continuous treatment and healing by Rang Samaals and maintaining purity by his family and herself for 9 months, along with fasting and regular temple visit for prayers, she is now completely cured of her drooping eyelids. She told me that “it was only due to Rangfraa's blessings; the endeavor of Rang Samaals and Kayechu Samaals and the support of my family members, that my illness was cured. Otherwise, one of my eyes was almost blinded by the droopy eyelids as I could not see anything with that eye.” Similarly, *Shumpong Tangha*, who is a resident of Saching village told me during my interview with him that there was no doubt that his brain tumor was cured by Rangfraa through Rang Samaals and Kayechu Samaals. He too went to a hospital in Vellore but he was told to return home as the doctors told him that his surgery would be possible only after six months. So, a poor village

man couldn't wait for six months in such a big city and again traveling twice was also difficult. After his return, he went to the Rangfraa temple in Bubang to seek cure for his tumor although he was not new as a devotee. He was healed and given some medicines which were acquired from nowhere on an empty hand by one of the Rang Samaal, Homnem angha on different days within a couple of months. He said he was given holy water, tablets acquired from God himself, and other herbal-based medicines too. He said his tumor was not new but he used to feel heavy pain on his head since his teenage. He left his studies (1st year of Graduation) only because of his tumor as he used to feel extreme pain and could not concentrate in his studies. But after the healing and medicines given by the Rang Samaals, he is now no more in pain and his tumor is gone. Even when he went for a diagnosis after Rang Samaal treatment his tumor was not more.

In this way, Rangfraism is a boon to the Tangsa people who are still practicing their traditional and indigenous faith proudly even today. Due to this the Tangsa community had undergone several changes in their daily life. The reformation brought light and annihilated the darkness that were practiced in the form of blind superstitious



Mingkayechus at Bubang II Rangshowm Him praying for the Rangfraiters'(devotees well-being)



From left: Hongam Rekhung, Mingyong Tangha, Teseng Tangha, Homnem Tangha, Reshma Rekhung(self) and Thungsam Tangha. Photo taken during the field visit at Bubang II Rangshowm Him.

practices. "Before we used to spend lots of money in buying piglets, cattle, fowls and making rice beer and in addition to give to the Tingwa (the priest/shaman who performs the ritual) to cure our illness, but now only 10-20 rupees is enough to buy a packet of incense stick. Only what we have to do is go to the temple on a service day and pray in front of the God Rangfraa and ask the devotees in the temple to pray together (*Romtam*) in the name of the sick person. If the sick person and his family have faith in Rangfraa and do not violate the guidelines which should be followed by a sick person, the sick person will be definitely cured by his blessings as said in two of the interviews- Rempak and Mandok. "After Rangfraism flourished in Tangsa Society, now people have become more united no matter to which sub-tribe or to which area they belonged to. Only the feeling that we are all children of Rangfraa has rendered the sense of oneness in Rangfraiters", says Mingjong Tangha. Even time to time, youth and religious conferences are usually organized specially to exchange ideas but in this way young generations interact with many people coming from different sub-tribes and different villages. There is also a time when a group of Rangfraiters from one village go to another village when they are invited to that village for Romtam (praying for the cure and wellbeing of a person or a family). Another advantage of the Rangfraa movement is that many people old as well as young, those who were drugs and opium addicts, regular smokers, and alcoholics before the movement are free from addiction now because Rangfraa strictly prohibits the consumption of addictive drugs. Specially those who came into service of God Rangfraa and those who regularly go to Rangfraa temple for prayer. Not only this but it also works as a platform to bring different sub-tribes of Tangsamore united. The remarkable thing it has given to the Tangsa society is that people no longer abandon their traditional faith, rather as a spiritual awakening they are preserving, promoting, and strengthening their culture more than before. ■

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Social Reformation Movement of Apatani

Rubu Buker

The Apatani 's believed themselves to be the descendents of Abo Tani , but when and how this tribe migrated to Ziro valley is not yet established due to lack of in-depth research and non availability of historical documents, but as per oral narratives the community might have migrated from Tibet as it is repeatedly used in the mythology by the Nyibu (Shaman) during the Myoko festival chantings and other traditional rituals of the community. The tribe might have migrated from Tibet via Kuru and Kimey rivers as per the mythology and oral history. The Apatani priests consistently use Ui, Upyo, Nyime and Mudo , the old settlements where their ancestors may have stayed before reaching this valley.

Social reformation is the universal rule and is dependent on the need of the period. The Apatanis, one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, living in Ziro, the headquarter of Lower Subansiri district, is a progressive and a most socialized community amongst the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. The DANYI PILO (SUN MOON) are believed as the supreme God. The Apatanis perform various rites and rituals to free themselves from ailments. The Apatanis perform certain common rituals in order to ward off natural calamities like fire, drought, flood, infection, pests in the paddy crops and spread of epidemics like dysentery, malaria, chickenpox, smallpox, and many others.

The society had its very strong and uniquely conventional unwritten rules of social custom and tradition. Traditionally they are governed by two village councils namely BULYANG and GORA, which plays an important role to regulate the

conventional laws of Apatani Tribe. The Bulyang and Gora are constituted by the prominent people of the village to lead the society in the right direction. The prominent and knowledgeable persons with sound knowledge of village laws and customs are inducted in the post of BULYANG and GORA. No major rituals and festivals can be performed without Bulyang and Gora, hence their post is very important. The Myoko, Dree, Yapung, Chandi-mate are performed with the help of the above two councils which are common rituals of the Apatani community.

The society cannot remain stagnant forever so social change is an inevitable rule and it was no different for the Apatani community. The older person of the Apatani community who possesses versatile knowledge of chanting of rituals hymns, the customary rules and regulation are decreasing day by day, so in order to catch the philosophy of DANYI PILOISM, the community started a movement in the name of DANYI PILO way back in the year 1973 to preserve and protect the indigenous faith, culture and their religious practices. However, the society remained dormant for many years without a proper visionary leader, but the movement again gained momentum in the nineties. In the year 1996 the Danyi Piilo faith was represented by Shri Hage Kojing at the 29th World Congress of International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in Iksan city, Korea, sponsored by Dany Piilo Mission authority.

In the year 1999 the first mass gathering (Rikung Nello) was held at the residence of Shri Rubu Tayu Tamin at Lempia village to popularize the traditional religious practices of the tribe and

to protect the indigenous practices. Subsequently the Danyi Pillo society started growing slowly. A few like minded indigenous believers are working silently as a result of which a word *Meder Nello* was coined by late Kago Sira a pioneer indigenous leader of Hija village, *the Meder Nello is combination of two words Meder means pure and Nello means holy house or temple of religious learning.* The first Meder Nello was constructed at Hari village in the year 2000 and was inaugurated on 28th March 2004 by Kaling Tayeng, the then Deputy Commissioner of Lower Subansiri District.

The Danyi piilo society was formed to counter the alien religions especially the Christian missionary movement in the valley. The Danyi Piilo society further decentralized its functional structure by establishing a MEDER NELLO. Thus a prayer hall or Nello Holy house was constructed in every village of Apatani Valley, where the religious practice of Apatani were organized to teach the philosophy and doctrines of Danyi Piilo. The Meder Nello committee is empowered to start the documentation of customary rites and rituals along with the prayer practices. The believers of Danyi Pillo took to attending the Meder Nello to offer their prayers to DANYI PILLO every week. A Nello POPI who had sound knowledge of Apatani rituals and rites led the prayer process in the Nello.

Social erosion was taking place in Apatani valley since 1995 due to a sense of fear caused by unethical behaviour of some people and their machinations to control the activities of the community. They succeeded in creating divisions among the Apatanis who were living together harmoniously since time immemorial. Taking advantage of this the alien religious groups especially the Christian had forcefully converted many innocent Apatanis alluring them of better fortune by denigrating indigenous culture, which badly hurt the integrity of the community.

The Christian society had tried to demean the

religion of the Apatanis by publishing religious articles ridiculing the indigenous culture which destabilised the sentiments of the indigenous people. They started distancing themselves from the mainstream and started denouncing their age old cultural practices such as myoko, murung, subu, miida, even Dree festival which had no relation to religion. Dree is celebrated for bumper harvest. Even the Christian followers stopped taking part in NIPO APING indigenous way of birthday party, MIIDA a traditional way of marriage custom of the Apatanis.

Therefore, taking into account the danger of social discontent within Apatani community many people felt the need of social reform to counter the alien religion and a strong step was taken to save the indigenous culture. Thus the DANYI PIILO society was formed. Late Nani Tachang of Nani Village, late Tage Dibo of Tajang village, Late Mihin Kanning, Ex-principal of Tajang Village, Late Kago Sira of Hija village, Shri Hage Kojing of Hari village Ex-commissioner of Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, Shri Takhe Kani of Hong Village, Shri Gyati Rana of Hari village, Shri Mudang Elyu of Hong Village, Dr Hage Tabio of Hari Village, Shri Rubu Tamin of Tajang village and many more started working vigorously to protect the indigenous culture of the Apatanis. Another NGO, Popi Sarmin Society of Apataniby name is also rendering exemplary service to protect the indigenous faith and culture.

The Arunachal Vikash Parishad is also doing yeoman service by instilling the ideas to remain indigenous with all possible support to the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Today with the help of the Arunachal Vikash Parisad the Ziro Valley has 15 Meder Nello. Thus Danyi Piilo prayer centre is available almost in every village in Apatani valley. Three more Meder Nello is constructed at other districts one at Tezu under Lohit district and two at Papum Pare.

Today the Danyi-piiloism is not limited to

Apatani valley only it has also spread to many other districts, in Papum Pare under the guidance of Late Nani Tachang of Reru village, late Tage Dibo and late Mihin Kanning constructed a Meder Nello at Naharlagun, the Apatanis residing in Itanagar had constructed a Meder Nello at E-sector and the land is donated by Shri Millo Tanyo of Tajang village. In Lohit district a Meder Nello was constructed under the guidance of Assistant professor Shri Hage Naku and Shri Nako Tadiie on 16th February 2019.

The Danyi pillo society has slowly changed the face of Apatani social structure by introducing the ritual practices. Sacrificing domestic animals to appease the God and goddess are decreasing to a great extent. The Meder Nello & Danyi Piilo committee perform rituals for individuals as and when requested. A Yasi (water), tipya (green thread), Yatan (local rice powder), Tajer (wild bamboo) are used in the rituals. The social taboo is decreasing due to Danyi piilo movement. In olden days if a person met with un-natural death

the people of the entire village had to stop going out for 5 days from the village, but now-a-days in many villages such taboos are not followed any more.

Today, the Danyi Piilo is a well established religion of Apatani community and the followers are increasing day by day. The forceful conversion by alien religion is controlled to a great extent. However, still more refinement and many more exercise are needed to be carried forward for better materialization of Danyi Piiloism. The irrelevant old social practices should be warded off through modification, so that the young generation may easily adopt the Danyi Piilo religion. For such a noble cause the services of enlightened elders are required so that they can offer moral guidance as well as codify the customary laws.

(The author of this article is serving as District Adult Education Officer under the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and is posted at Daporijo in Upper Subansiri District).

Traditional Faith of Dimasa Kachari

Dr Phirmi Bodo

Introduction:

No doubt India has a long tradition of wisdom and knowledge. However, since the age of medieval history all these were plundered by adopting various means for various reasons by the invaders and colonisers which led to the weakening of the root of the then existing knowledge and tradition of this land. In fact what we see now as Sri Aurobindo stated 'diminution of the power of thought, the spread of ignorance in the birthplace of knowledge'; the inability or unwillingness to think by using our own sensory experiences. It is worth mentioning here that after 1947, that is after Independence numerous western schools of thought were ferry into the sea of academic discourses to study the culture and society of India and the end result was distortion, misinterpretation and misrepresentation of facts about our culture and tradition. Therefore, re-conceptualization of Indian studies is becoming more important and relevant. Now, it is a challenge to have a clear understanding about India where most textual and theoretical studies are European produced and imported one.

North-East region always remain a part and parcel of the greater civilization of India. However, the colonial historian or their progenies born in India viewed North-Eastern region as an isolated part with no geographical and cultural continuum with regards to the rest of India. People of the region were branded as 'primitive', 'savages', 'animist', and 'god-less' or no religion by different colonial administrator and the same perspective were disseminated to the Indian Academicians too.

Therefore, the present paper tries to give briefly the understanding of the rich traditional belief of one of the significant community namely Dimasa Kachari, to establish the fact that the ethnic communities of North East has their own rich faiths and religious system which is reflective of the civilisational aspect of the community. 'Manner' is a human virtue inherent in man's psyche and it passes downwards from generation to generation, from father to son and mother to daughter. Respecting elders and seeking their blessings are part of their tradition which is also reflected in every festival and puja. Various communities of India have made enormous contribution to India's civilization; all major gods of the Indic tradition have links with the hill people.

The Dimasas:

Dimasa is one of the several groups which belong to 'Kacharis', a larger group of ethnic communities of Assam. The word 'Kachari' is a generic term used to denote certain groups by the Britishers considering the similarity of the language or dialect. B.H. Hodgson was the first one who made an assumption that a certain community of Assam descended from the same historical root. However, the origin of the word 'Kacharis' is still a disputed one because of the lack of available records. However, one can easily trace that the Kachari groups include the Dimasa, Boro, Garo, Mech, Tripuri, Barman, Sonowal, Doeri, Hajong, Lalung, and Rukini Barman. The Kacharis have been described as "the original autochthones of Assam"¹. Captain Fisher, the first Superintendent

¹*The Kacharis*, by Rev. Sidney Endle pp, 7-8

of Cachar viewed that the Kacharis established their kingdoms in the countries east of the line, including Assam, Sylhet, Tippera (Tripura), modern Cachar, Mymensing. It is evident that Kacharis was pre-existing in Assam in different ages, in different names and in different places.

The Dimasa Kacharis are the predominant populace living in Dima Hasao. Fringe groups of the community also live in Karbi Anglong, Cachar, Nagaon District of Assam and partly in Nagaland. Historically, the Kacharis ruled the Brahmaputra valley for approximately 1000 years (Uttam Chand Barman, 2017). Endle wrote that when crossing a large river a surge in the water carried away their bridge and those who made it across became the Dimasa. There is evidence that the Kachari people are among the earliest known people of Assam, who had established a capital in Kamrup (present day Guwahati) in the 6th century (Barpujari, 1979). Soppit asserts that Dimasa rule was long and widespread, based on the number of rivers throughout Assam with the name 'Dimasa' which stands for "children of the big river," referring to Brahmaputra river (known as Dilao in Dimasa). Barpujari (1979) states that Oral traditions recount nine flowering of muli bamboos during the time when Dimapur was the Capital, probably before 1200 C.E. The date is obtained by counting back in groups of 50 years, the flowering cycle of *muli* bamboo. With the passage of time the Dimasas dispersed throughout the region, as groups known by specific names. *Dijnasa* in Dimapur, *Dembrasa* also known as Hojai Kachari, Nagaon and Karbi Anglong, *Hawarsa* and Barmans in Cachar and *Hasaosa* in Dima Hasao District.

Dimasa is only one among the ethnic community of Assam who in spite of relentless effort by evangelist still retain their Dharmic tradition. According to 2001 Census, 99.7% comes under Hindus, only 0.3% belong to others. The Dimasa are the devout followers of Sanatani Dharma and their rituals and ceremonies are blended with

Sanatani tradition. Their belief is that they are the children of Bangla Raja and the divine bird Arkhidima. It is said that the 'six sons' of Bangla Raja and Aarkhidima, namely Sibarai, Doo Raja, Naikhu Raja, Waa Raja, Ganyung-Braiyung and Hamiadau are their ancestral gods and are still worshipped by them with great reverence.

An ancient Dimasa tradition believes that sixty thousand Moon months (Lunar Months) ago, they left their ancestral land when it suffered a severe drought. After long wandering, they settled at *Di-laobra*, the confluence of the Brahmaputra and *Sangi* or *Di-tsang*, where they held a great assembly. In Dimasa six benevolent ancestral gods who are called '*Madai*' have their own religious method of worshipping them where *Sibarai* (Lord Shiva) occupies the highest place and his name is to be uttered first in every form of worship in Dimasa society. The Dimasa people are devotees of 'Shiva'. In Dimasa language Shiva is known as "*Sibarai*". For them, the world is created by Lord Shiva. According to their customary law, the Dimasas, while worshipping, would never worship any god or goddess unless and until Shiva is worshipped first.

For religious purposes the whole Dimasa society is divided into 12 religious areas, which are known as '*Daikho*' which means the abode of gods and goddesses or deities. They do not have any image or idol representing the deity, but denote an earthen mound as the deity at the time of worship (Bordoloi 1984). There are twelve priests for twelve *Daikhos*. Each '*Daikho*' has separate gods and goddesses, a separate priest and a separate position. The priest of a '*Daikho*' is called '*Jonthai*'. He has supreme authority in matters of deities and religion and above *Zonthai* is called *Zonthaima Hojai* performs the rituals over the twelve *Zonthais* of twelve *Daikhos* who with the help of 12 *Jonthais* perform the main puja for the welfare of the society. There is a principal priest or chief priest called *Gisya*. The selected person will get the *Zonthaiship*

only when *Gisya* offers him Holy water called *Dithar*.

Dimasa perform pujas before initiation of any new and noble work. It is known as '*Madai Huba*'. This method of worship is performed by any priest irrespective of clan. One of the distinguished features of Dimasa society is the presence of both male and female clan. The Dimasa people generally worship gods and goddess that belong to their respective clan. It is called '*madai kbilimba*'. This method of worshipping is performed by the priest of the same clan in praise and remembrance of the gods of forefathers once in a year before sowing the next paddy. Dimasa have their belief of heaven called *Firinghi* and *Damra* is the land for the dead where dead person retain their original form. The Dimasa have a cremation ground called *Magkblong*. Dimasa cremates the body after death.

The *Padri* plays a significant role in the Dimasa society. This person has to be wise and well versed in performing the religious rites. If there are any natural calamities, or epidemic breaks out or in case of any ailments the service of *Padri* is called forth and the *Padri* can foretell many solutions through oracles. Even today one can observe the relevance of '*Padri*' in Dimasa society. It is also very astonishing to experience that the role of '*Padri*' is very significant in this present age of rapid change. The position of *Padri* is still very sacrament for the Dimasa people.

The root connecting Sanatani culture was also discovered during the reign of Dimasa King Raja Krishna Chandra Narayan in Khaspur where he solemnized the famous Hiranya Garbha Sacrificial Ritual (Yagna) in 1790 A.D. He even established the historic Dakshinpat Kachari Satra at Baligaon near Nagaon. Ranachandi Temple, Maibang, was built in 1761 during the reign of Raja Harichandra, the then Dimasa King. The temple is dedicated to goddess Ranachandi, the warrior incarnation of goddess Durga.

Historically, it has been found out that Dimasa tend to live and establish their kingdoms on river banks and next to streams. River plays a significant role in Dimasa society. It is regarded as sacred to them. For Dimasa, rivers, trees, animals, mountains always remain sacred as it is visible in their customs and rituals.

Kapili River is one of the holy rivers of the Dimasa Community. It is situated in Panimoor of Dima Hasao District. Kapili River is known as '*Langkhlang*' in Dimasa Language. According to Hindu belief it is one of the 51 places of India where some pieces of the body of goddess '*Sati*' (Parvati) fell and was converted to a religious shrine. Every year on Magh Purnima, Dimasa people come to this place to take a holy dip and worship the Kapili, the water Goddess. It is part of their traditional custom and belief. The Dimasa tribe observe the '*Holy Bath*' day as one of the greatest religious festival to worship Mother Nature. According to late K. C. Bodo, a renowned Dimasa writer, "*Dimasa King, Damrodos of Maibang was the last king who visited this holy shrine where large people gathering there. There is a very elaborate history about the Grand Holy bath of Dimasa King Damrodos.*"

The Dimasa, one of the oldest inhabitants of the North Eastern part of India always believe in a spiritual life. They believe traditionally the rebirth of soul after death. It has its own conception of philosophy to life and death. The Dimasa mostly practices the Hinduism way of worshipping. They are the followers of Lord Shiva, apart from their traditional clan, god and goddesses. However, in spite of being rich in culture and history, the think tank of Dimasa community feel the need of unification when it comes to Dharmic culture and tradition among the Dimasa people.

Conclusion:

The Dimasa, (Son of Great River) profoundly followed and preserved their traditional culture

from time immemorial. At the same time we cannot ignore the growing movement of separatism in this ancient land. We should remember that in the existing time there is a need to build a strong discourse on the integration approach without diluting the long tradition and ethos of the community. Influence of Western thought, since Colonial rulers, the philosophy and dharma were sidelined and ignored to give a false conception about the existing faiths of the community. History has proved how the ancient traditions of this

civilization were plundered and looted a number of times. In this age of Information and Knowledge, there is a great necessity to have Dimasa style of structures and buildings so that the coming generation can look at them and know how their forefathers lived.

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The New Dawn of Heraka Religion

Dr. Widonlule Newme

The indigenous Heraka religion is a faith practiced by the Zeliangrong Naga people inhabiting the states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. The genesis of Heraka religion is mythical like the epic of Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is an ancient religion that finds its existence in the four Yugas cycle and is popularly known by the name Kechingse/Paupaise. The word 'Paupaise' means "Ancient Custom". However, Paupaise is not the name of any religion but it's a way of life practiced by our forefathers and it is used to refer to those communities who practice the indigenous Zeliangrong faith before recognizing 'Heraka' as a creed. The 'Heraka' religion was strongly brought into light in the year 1931 by Haipau Jadonang and Haipui Gaidinliu from the holy Bhubon shrine. Thus, for better understanding of the Heraka faith and culture, one must have a good knowledge about the history of Zeliangrong Naga.

The Heraka religion can be studied and divided into four epochs viz,

1. The era of Banglawang (Satya Yuga)
2. The era of Amang (Treta Yuga)
3. The era of Herakandingpeu (Dwapara Yuga and
4. The prophetic era (Kali Yuga)

The history of Zeliangrong Naga has been passed down in folklores and songs but no written record could be found. It was said that during the era of Lord Banglawang and Amang all life forms spoke one dialect to communicate with God. Mankind believed in Almighty Tingwang and chanted His holy incantations for gratifying one's aspiration. Furthermore, sacrificial offerings to eight

different deities, brought forth by Hejale, were prevalent. It was said that Hejale, sister of Banglawang, laid eight eggs at the mountain cliff of river Barak and from there eight sons were born viz.,

1. Gechingpeu- God who judged evil doers
2. Lhu- God of Farm
3. Heransia- God of War
4. Nrak- God who troubled the wicked
5. Mekang- God of Fire
6. Chuprai- God of Wealth
7. Mishnu- God of Good, and
8. Hechawang- God of Water

However, the aforesaid practices were revolutionized in the epoch of Herakandingpeu. During the third era, restrictions and limitations were imposed upon every living being by virtue of which human beings began to fear God. In that period, it was Herakandingpeu, the Supreme umpire, who had enlightened mankind about the Almighty Tingwang and taught them all His holy incantations through which their pain and miseries would heal and also stringently prohibited sacrificial offerings as a result of which Beelzebub and the other different deities became crestfallen. Alteration in Zeliangrong faith arose with the demise of Herakandingpeu as clairvoyant and soothsayer started to enthrall the human race that led a way toward prophecies.

The prophetic era of the Zeliangrong Naga can be divided into two categories-

1. Pre-Renaissance Heraka
2. Post-Renaissance Heraka

❖ The pre-Renaissance Heraka:

During this period, superstition played a pivotal role and once again sacrificial offerings and worship were practiced widely in order to free man from evil spirits. The religious rites and rituals were very stiff, restrictive and intricate at that time. It was said that throughout this period, mankind had suffered a lot of hardship and oppression in the hands of the prophets resulting in many people to apostate the indigenous Zeliangrong faith.

Therefore, in order to overcome superstitious beliefs, Almighty God sent Haipau Jadonang and Haipui Gaidinliu to guide the Zeliangrong society. Haipau Jadonang was born in 1905 at Puiluan, Manipur, to Thiudai and Chunlungliu and Haipui Gaidinliu in 1915 at Lungkao, Manipur, to Luathuanang and Keluatlinliu.

Almighty God also sent angels named Kangrelung and Namginai to teach and guide them. It was said that Namginai, the angel, once came to meet Haipui Gaidinliu at her birth place by riding on a lion. They were the angels who enlightened Haipau Jadonang and Haipui Gaidinliu about the Holy Bhubon and took them to the abode of Lord Mishnu where they meditated and conversed with the Almighty and were taught all the fundamental laws, the scriptures of God as well as the holy psalms and mantras. Haipau Jadonang visited Holy Bhubon Cave for the first time in 1927 and Haipui Gaidinliu in 1928.

❖ Post-Renaissance Heraka:

The revitalized indigenous Zeliangrong religion was brought forward from the Holy Bhubon shrine and was finally given the name 'Heraka' by replacing 'Paupaise' in the year 1931. This year marked the final visit to Holy Bhubon Cave by Haipau Jadonang and Haipui Gaidinliu and on their last visit to Bhubon the Almighty gifted them the optimal tenet for the Zeliangrong people.

The term 'Heraka' is derived from the Zeme word 'HERA' and 'KA'. 'Hera' means "deities" and

'Ka' means "to dispose off". Thus, Heraka literally means "a bulwark made of the Divine Law that disposes off different Beelzebub and evil spirits". In simple language it means "verity and pureness.

The contemporary Heraka religion does not utterly forsake the Paupaise practices rather it developed its principles. The key transitions that were made in the reformed religion are as under-

1. It abolished the sacrificial practices and worshiped only the Supreme Lord Tingwang.
2. Incantation and Psalms became God's own words and benediction.
3. Building of Temple was one of the most significant ideologies of the revived Heraka religion. The first Heraka temple was built at Pulton, Manipur, in 1928 followed by Lungkao, Manipur and Binakandi, Cachar, Assam in 1930.

Some important works that were implemented in presence of Haipui Gaidinliu to uphold the Heraka faith are as follows-

1. 1974 - Zeliangrong Heraka Association was formed under the presidentship of N.C. Zeliang at Ntangkam, Nagaland, with its objective being to protect, preserve and promote Heraka faith and culture.
2. 1976 - Heraka Hingde was procured from Haipui Gaidinliu in Kohima.
3. 1976 - Regional Zeliangrong Heraka Association, Assam, was formed under the chairmanship of Haibobuing Newme and religious preachers were also appointed to propagate Heraka Hingde.
4. 1979 - Heraka emblem was adopted. The emblem contained four elements viz.,- Plaintain tree, Mountains, Ocean and Sun symbolising verity, mother, unity and strength respectively. It was designed by Shri. Ramkuiwangbe Newme, founder general secretary of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, and approved by Haipui Rani Gaidinliu.

5. 1983 - First Heraka Temple was built in the same manner as directed by Almighty Tingwang to Haipui Gaidinliu, in N. Songkai followed by Mpuilo in 1986.

6. 1991 - Heraka Hingde was texted into written record by Shri. Ramkuiwangbe Newme in Zeme vernacular.

The Heraka religion is the simplest and easiest way to worship the Almighty and to attain salvation in comparison to diverse religious practices. Heraka do not believe in conversion hence never induced people for it. But, whoever by his own will forsakes his religion and wishes to accept Heraka after evaluating the religion properly shall be allowed to do so without any discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste or place of birth because Heraka religion is not meant exclusively for the Zeliangrong people.

However, religious conversion has sparked a lot of attention and caused hostilities in Naga society. Many Heraka families became the victim of conversion and they were forced to convert either due to threat or taking advantage of their

vulnerability or were lured to convert which is totally unacceptable. Thus, in order to stop the forcible act of conversion, the Regional Heraka Association, Assam, passed a resolution prohibiting non-Heraka religious preaching in any Heraka village and ordered strict action against those who failed to abide. Subsequently, mass preaching was stopped and people who got converted into other religion came back to accept the Heraka religion. Nevertheless abetting and inducing for conversion by relatives, friends and the neighbours still take place which is the greatest challenge faced by the Heraka people in the present scenario.

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Role of Prof. Gangmumei Kamei in Revitalising the Indigenous Faith of the Zeliangrong

Dr. Lamalu Thamei

Abstract: This paper is a humble attempt to highlight the contribution made by Professor Gangmumei Kamei in revitalising the religion of *Tingkao Ragnang Chapriak* (TRC) of the Zeliangrong in North East India. To throw more light on this particular area of studies and also dissect commendable contributions made by Prof. Kamei, a more comprehensive and detailed outline on the revival movement of the Zeliangrong people under Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu, as also the revitalization movement of *Tingkao Ragnang Chapriak* has been attempted.

Introduction :

Zeliangrong is one of the indigenous ethnic groups and constitute one of the sizeable communities among the North Eastern part of India. Zeliangrong is the acronym of Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei who live mostly in the state of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. It may also be pointed out that the name of the tribe Kabui which has been used in all colonial writings, government records and known by other community is to be identified with the Rongmei because the name of the tribe Kabui and Rongmei are different ethnonyms of the same people having same origin, language and culture.

Zeliangrong do have a long history as well as rich socio-cultural heritage of their own handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition like myths, legends, folklores, folk songs etc.

The Zeliangrong are God fearing people and religious. They have been able to preserve and

protect their indigenous faith and have deeply rooted in their cultural heritage by way of celebrating festivals, feasts of merit, religious diviners, prophets and so on. The old ages indigenous faith had no common religious as it was managed by the *Pei* (village authority). Despite many criticism, threats and onslaught of the alien religion and external forces, the traditional religion still survive with committed followers, because of the strong teachings of the forefathers handed down from generation to generation.

Revival of Traditional Religion

The existence of the traditional religion was threatened with rapid spread of Christianity beginning from the first part of the 20th century. Haipou Jadonang took up the cause of reviving and reforming the traditional religion by abolishing number of taboos and gennas and many of the unnecessary and less important rituals and sacrifices. Constructions of Kalum Kai (temple) were first introduced during his time. Following his footsteps, Rani Gaidinliu continued to fight for the cause and founded “Heraka” cult which means pure in Zemei dialect. However, the leaders of the Naga National Council (NNC) took critical view or stand of Rani Gaidinliu movement for integration of Zeliangrong Nagas under one administrative unit, revival movement of traditional religion and the works for the developments was criticised and condemned tooth and nail. Though the indigenous faith survived, there was no common and collective religious authority to continue the legacy of Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu.

The existence of the indigenous religion of the Zeliangrong without specific name of the religion for centuries had undergone series of threat in the hands of the external forces. Absence of common and collective religious authority and disunity among Zeliangrong in religious matter paved way for the alien religion and organisation to take advantages of it.

The indigenous faith followers were termed as pagans, animist, Joujangmei Chap means culture of consuming wine etc. The unrecognised and uncommon religious name was another problem faced by the common people, students, employees while filling up forms, applications or any others official documents where the columns for religion was required.

Notwithstanding the difficulties faced by the people, there remained a number of active followers to preserve and protect their religion with immense efforts and sacrifices. As a result it is still exciting unlike, many other tribes in Manipur where almost all the people converted to Christianity and endorsed Christianity as their religion.

Contribution of Prof. Gangmumei Kamei

Prof. Gangmumei was truly a benevolent, sensible, man of justice, emotionally stable, intelligent and religiously knowledgeable. His religious activities in his day to day life and belief was noticed while working with him since my youth from 1991 when I was a class XI student. I used to stay at his home more than a months during my sister maternity period. On one occasion of *Ginki Ngai* (Festival) I was busy preparing to help in the kitchen for the offerings as per our custom, and I still remember how he appeared and explained to me the significances behind the offerings to God and Goddess at the altar and the practices performed by every household. He used to be ever ready to offer his prayer till his family members go to bed. From my personal experience and observation it may be pointed out that he was true

believer of God, and his deep involvement and initiative in religious affairs in time of need depicts his qualities towards his religious life. Prof. Gangmumei Kamei's deep sense and concern for his community and traditional faith of the Zeliangrong spurred him to revitalise the ageold religion by forming Religious Protection Council and giving a new shape to the existing system which provides a ray of hope for all.

The vacuum after the demise of Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu, however with the divine blessing of *Tingkao Ragnang*, Gangmumei Kamei appeared on the scene as a guiding light to protect and preserve the religion. He geared up the public support and elicited cooperation to reorganise the religious movements once again in a conventional form. An unfortunate and a tragic incident occurred in Manipur in the early 1990s when some valley based underground extremists killed two innocent persons of indigenous faith followers namely Shri Engenchao Kamei, *Khullakpa* (Village Chief) of Uchiwa village and Shri Amu Gangmei of Moirangkhom in the name of prohibition. In such critical juncture none of the Zeliangrong social organisations condemned or raised their voice against such killings. Due to the absence of religion based common platform, nothing could be done or say anything against that kinds of atrocities.

It was none other than Prof. Gangmumei who suggested the Zeliangrong leaders to convene a public meeting and spelt out the need to form religious organisation in order to protect and promote the Zeliangrong religion. The formation of Zeliangrong Custom and Religion Protection Committee on 7-4-1991 was the outcome of this meeting.

When there was a time of great danger to the Zeliangrong people and their religion, he played an important role and was instrumental in formulating the name of the religion as *Tingkao Ragnang Chapriak* (TRC). The initiative to revitalise the ageold religion under his leadership gained

momentum with support from all people including youths, women, village authorities, intellectual groups, religious diviners, common masses and village elders. The formation of Zeliangrong custom and religion protection committee was a stepping stone for all the indigenous faith followers to come together and work unitedly for protection and propagation of their faith under one banner and common authority with proper constitution.

Thereafter a series of meeting, seminars, conferences, public discussion and dialogue were organised in all the three states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland to discuss the philosophy and theological aspects of the Zeliangrong traditional religion. Building of a strong, committed religious authority was the need of that hour in order to protect, promote the ageold religion from Alien religion and disturbances.

Further the historic conference on the Zeliangrong Religion was held from 14th -16th April, 1994 at G.M. Hall, Imphal, in which a long awaited desire and dream to have a specific name of the religion was adopted in this conference. After threadbare discussion the following resolutions were adopted with one accord in this conference. It was resolved to constitute a religious authority called Zeliangrong Rachapriak Phom (The Zeliangrong Religious Council) Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

1. The conference resolved to constitute the Zeliangrong Religious Council, the draft of which was prepared by Prof. Gangmumei Kamei himself. Office bearers and members of the executive council were elected for a period of five years term. Establishment of Ecclesiastical Council with its members comprised of Women and Youth fellowships. The conference also named of the religion as "*Tingkao Ragwang Chapraiak* (TRC)". The conference further resolved that every Zeliangrong village should have *Kalum Kai* (temple) or a place of worship dedicated to *Tingkao Ragwang* and related gods and goddess of the

Zeliangrong. It was also resolved that either individual or group of families or mass prayer should be done on every full Moon day and Sunday.

2. Announcement of the aforesaid by every *Pei* (Village Court) to implement the same.

The primordial religion of the Zeliangrong without a name for centuries were now named as "*Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak*" which means supreme God or Almighty God are now continuing to flourish in the states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland in a well defined and established manner. The organisation with fully committed and devoted members continue to work for the growth and maintain healthy environment in every aspect of religious and cultural life. The most remarkable step of the Zeliangrong Religious Council was the abolition of the taboo on the unnatural deaths of the community. Every death of man is a natural phenomena and every dead person should be treated with dignity and provided with the usual rites and passage to the land of the dead.

From the above discussion, it may be pointed out that Prof. Gangmumei was the Chief architect, ideologue, torchbearer of the then "*Tingkao Ragwang Chapraik*", who initiated to revitalising the old ages traditional religion in a proper form for the future generation. His vision and wisdom accomplished the tasked of naming the traditional religion in a well defined and organised form. The movement for religious reorganisation under his initiative and leadership was indeed a very constructive role. His continuous efforts and supportive role for the cause of indigenous tribal rights and religion led him to Geneva, Switzerland, for attending the United Nations Working Group Conference on Indigenous population in June 1994 in which he articulately defended against the threat posed by Western proselytizing religious groups, but also debunked the animist theory of tribal religion and term them

as primordial and pure religion. He draws the attention of all the academia from all over the world through his writings on this particular topic. The Zeliangrong Religious Council and *Tingkao Ragnwang Chapriak* is now a member of the International United Religious Initiative based at San Francisco through the Manipur Co-operation Circle. His notable work on "*Tingkao Ragnwang Chapriak: The Zeliangrong Primordial Religion*" 2005 stressed a very clear concept of the religion in a written form in which the philosophy and teachings of a profound religious tradition, preserved and practised by the ancient Zeliangrong community were highlighted and brought into a new height. Undoubtedly, it was Prof. Gangmumei Kamei who was also a Cabinet Minister convinced the Government of Manipur to declared the greatest indigenous festival of Zeliangrong "*Chakan Gaan-Ngai*" as general holiday. Accordingly from 10th January 1998 the festival was officially declared as a general holiday. He left no stone

untorn to rebuild the old ages traditional religion from unorganised form to a systematic and well define form. Several numbers of taboos and gennas were abolished from the rigidity of the old ages tradition and culture with a changing time to refrain from conversion to other religion.

Prof. Gangmumei Kamei was a multi-dimensional personality, prominent in the fields of education, socio-cultural, politics, religion and above all a good human being. Lastly but not the least, I quote the famous statement made by Benjamin Disraeli "*The legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name and the inheritance of a great example*". These invaluable statement aptly apply to Prof. Gangmumei Kamei. Indeed, he left us a great name, worthy to honour and follow. He also left us an inheritance of great example and precept. □

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Seng Khasi - An Oath to the Truth

Hammarsing L Kharhmar

The **Khasi-Pnar** people call the central and eastern part of Meghalaya in North East India as their home and they are known to be one of the oldest inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. The language and dialects spoken by the Khasi-Pnar people belong to the Austroasiatic family of languages (Mon-Khmer) at their root, but words are derived from the Sanskrit language family and are found to be in common usage too. Anthropologists and scholars have offer many theories as to the origin of the Khasi-Pnar people but not one theory has been accepted conclusively. According to Khasi-Pnar mythology the race is believed to be of celestial origin. The foundations of the indigenous faith known as '**Niam Khasi Niamtre**' are lodged deep in the story about their origin. The faithful believe that their unique way of worship was given to them by the Almighty at the beginning of time and it survives till today in their hearts and ways of life. The spiritual truth of the faith shines within the inner meaning of the legend of 'Ka Jingkieng Ksiar ha U Lum Sohpetbneng' (The Golden Ladder at the Navel of the Universe).

*'All religions of this world convey their meanings through parables and so too does our religion.'*¹

- H.O. Mawrie

The legend begins at the dawn of creation when the Sun and Moon were young children of Mother Earth (Ka Mei Ramew) and her husband, the guardian spirit of the world (U Basa). In the celestial realm, beyond the visible sky, sixteen families of Man (Khathynriew Trep) lived with the Divine Creator (U Blei) in harmony. Mother Earth was blessed with three more children - Water, Air and Fire - and as time passed and life

began to grow, she pleaded with the Divine Creator to help bring order to a world fast expanding. A great assembly was called in the heavens to address these pleas. After careful deliberation it was decreed that Man would be sent down to cultivate and take care of Mother Earth and everything on her. U Blei showered the world with blessings, and before Man assumed his earthly duties, U Blei bound him in a Covenant (Ka Jutang) centered around Truth and Righteousness (Ka Hok).

A giant tree, resembling a golden ladder (Ka Jingkieng Ksiar), rising to the heavens, wrapped in sacred vines (Tangnub Tangjri), stood at the top of the sacred hill '**U Lum Sohpetbneng**'. It is believed that it was through this umbilical cord, connecting Mother Earth to the Cosmos and Man to his Creator, that the first families of man travelled back and forth daily to complete their duties. They would descend at the break of dawn and return before the fall of dusk, the legend says. This period of oneness between Man, his Creator and Mother Earth is known in Khasi mythology as "Ka Sotti Juk" (The Age of Purity) or "Ka Aiom Ksiar" (The Golden Age). The Seven families who subsequently remained on Earth are known as 'Ki Hynñiewtrep Hynñiewskum' (The Seven huts) and they are believed to be the first ancestors of the Khasi-Pnar people. Today, the sacred hill, U Lum Sohpetbneng, stands witness to the spiritual truth of this land. It is the unshakable foundation of the indigenous faith, **Niam Khasi Niamtre**.

The Covenant (Ka Jutang) of Niam Khasi Niamtre speaks of three divine orders (Lai hukum U Blei) and they inform the way of life and worship

of the people with great beauty:

- ❖ Kamai ia ka Hok
- ❖ Tip Briew Tip Blei
- ❖ Tip Kur Tip Kha

Kamai ia ka Hok means to earn righteousness. If man lived a righteous life and followed a path of truth he would be rewarded with Divine Blessings. It is stressed in the teachings that righteousness can not be given or taken, *it must be earned.*

'As nothing material can be carried to the House of God, the emphasis is on earning righteousness, which is the only thing that can be associated with one forever. Hence living on Earth is a blessing as it offers greater opportunity to earn righteousness'.²

- Sib Charan Roy

Tip Briew Tip Blei literally translates as 'Know Man Know God' but there are an infinite number of interpretations. However, they all converge into the wisdom that in order to reach the Divine, one must first search **within oneself** and strive to understand our fellow man. An understanding of one without the other is to fail at **self-realisation**. The Khasis believe each soul is Divine and that Divinity rests within. The soul is born in **Truth** and it always returns to the abode of the Divine Creator (Dwar U Blei).

Tip Kur Tip Kha stresses the importance of knowing both Matrilineal (Cognates) and Patrilineal (Agnates) lines. The religion is practiced based on knowledge of these relationships. The descent system is matrilineal but knowing and understanding both lines are crucial, particularly in the affairs of marriage. Graceful manners are imbibed as one follows this system of respect.

The three tenets are associated with important rituals and ceremonies: **Naming Ceremony** of a child (Ka Jer Ka Thoh), **Marriage** (Ka Poikha Poiman) and **Demise** of a person (Ka Īap Ka Duh). The Khasi identity is tightly bound to the

traditional faith and the social systems, traditional forms of governance, custodianship and kinship all sprout from its foundations. The faith teaches that Truth no matter how small it may appear in the face of gigantic adversity will always stand strong (Ka Hok ka Ieng Rasong). One word of Truth (Ka Hok ka Shi Kyntien) is greater than all untruths put together. Niam Khasi Niamtre is a spirituality, philosophy, a way of life, guided by **Truth**. It leads, and it stands above all.

"To revive the true faith of our forefathers; to understand the true meaning of conscience and truth as handed down by them, which were being neglected, misled and blinded by the teachings of foreigners".³

The need to protect and preserve the age old wisdom and knowledge of the land led to the formation of **Seng Khasi**, a Socio-Religious Organisation, on November 23rd, 1899 by sixteen young Khasi men under the guidance and patronage of U Jeebon Roy Mairom, known to many as the "Father of Modern Khasis". The founders wished to instill a true sense of pride in the Khasis, for their unique way of life and worship. They foresaw that this would bring confidence, clarity and strength to the lives of the future generations. It is said that a divine thread connects the culture, traditions and values that have developed over centuries. The sixteen Khasi men understood that for the religion to survive and for peaceful and positive growth to be achieved, this thread must be kept intact. The strength and resilience of Seng Khasi is drawn from this belief.

The last century saw a large decline in the population of Niam Khasi Niamtre faithful. The most significant factor contributing to this fall is the proselytisation that occurred with the advent of Christianity in these hills. It began in the mid 19th century, when the British colonists ruled India and it flourished under their aegis. It continues to be seen in present times. High rates of conversion were achieved using this method in conjunction with a control over education. Education is the

path to material betterment in any society and in this field there was a clear monopoly. Not only was there a monopoly, a cap was kept on the level of education given. The motive for imparting education, in the early years, was to teach the natives how to read the holy book of the colonial masters.

Efforts by Seng Khasi to establish schools of their own met several hurdles. Funding was often denied unless their curriculum conformed to the ideology of the mission schools. A circular written by the first Seng Khasi Chairman, U Rash Mohon Roy Nongrum, decrying the bias in allocation of funds even reached the hands of Mahatma Gandhi, who published the circular in his magazine 'Harijan' and concluded with this statement:

"If what is stated here is true, it enforces the argument often advanced by me that Christian missionary effort has been favoured by the ruling power. But I advertise the circular not for the sake of emphasising my argument. I do so in order to ventilate the grievance of the Secretary of the school. Surely he has every right to object to teaching proselytising literature prepared by the missionaries. It should be remembered that the School has been in receipt of a grant from the Government. It is not clear why the question of the missionary books has now cropped up. It is hoped that the school will not be deprived of the grant of the Secretary's very reasonable objection".⁴

- Mahatma Gandhi,
Harijan Magazine,
9th March, 1940.

As proselytisation through education progressed swiftly, the aspirations of those who had converted also began to change quickly. Khasi beliefs were deemed backward and a harsh rejection of the traditional culture and its values set in. This seed planted in the days of divide and rule has not fully withered, but the work of Seng Khasi and its sister organisations has awakened younger generations to the beauty of their ancestral faith and its universal wisdom. Self discovery through the prism of ones

own culture has magnified the uniqueness as well as revealed similarities with other cultures in the subcontinent, diminishing significantly the sense of alienation and distance from fellow countrymen.

Abandonment of the traditional faith was also caused by the de-stabilisation of the unique traditional family structure, with the arrival of external forces of change and the onset of urbanisation. In the traditional set up, the eldest uncle (U Kñi Rangbah), is the caretaker, the mediator of the family, and the youngest daughter (Ka Khatduh) is the custodian of family property. The ancestral home is a place that upholds the sanctity of the lineage. It is in this home that all important family matters are discussed and religious ceremonies performed. As families relocated, maintaining this system posed many challenges, subsequently leading to a breakdown in the completion of important rites, rituals and ceremonies. This caused a withering in spirituality and in the understanding of the deeper meanings within the teachings of the religion.

By the late 1960's, as call for statehood gained momentum, so too did a non-secular political ideology. A Christian state was envisioned by some in the chambers of power. A political wave energised by religious fervour disregarded the sentiments of the population who still belonged to the original faith of the land. Even today, it is not uncommon to find articles and letters in local newspapers projecting and claiming Meghalaya as a Christian state, while simultaneously defending the need to keep India secular and decrying anyone or anything that may suggest otherwise. The existence and growth of Seng Khasi always serves as a gentle reminder that there is a religion born of this land that carries a universal ethos and fosters co-existence. This was eloquently described by an outstanding leader of Seng Khasi, U Hipshon Roy Kharshiing: *"The world of religions is a garden of flowers and each religion with all its settings blooms with all its beauty and fragrance and each*

adds to the beauty and glory of the whole garden. Theirs is to supplement and theirs is not to supplant”.

The last 121 years have seen active steps taken by the Seng Khasi to address these issues. A body of unanimously selected representatives run and manage the day to day affairs of Seng Khasi. Operating from the central headquarters in Shillong, there is a core group that specifically addresses issues of utmost importance - ‘Jylli Pyrkhat Kam’ (JPK). Other working bodies include a Womens Wing (Seng Kynthei), Childrens Wing (Seng Khynnah), Youth Wing (Seng Samla), Performing Arts Schools (Snap Paka, Ka Tbian Ki Sur Hara). There are also various committees that oversee important duties: Lum Jingthang Committee (Performance of Last Rites), Lum Sohpetbneng Committee (Preservation of Sanctum Sanctorum of the most sacred Niam Khasi Niamtre site), Ka Sengbah Nongshat Nongkhein, Seng Khihlang and Ka Lympung ki Khynnah. Since its inception the organisation has grown steadily and now there are more than three hundred branches across the Khasi Hills. The working bodies of the Seng Khasi, armed with greater spiritual understanding and organisational power, have been able to revive ancient rituals and mass movements.

The most successful and powerful of revivals is the annual pilgrimage to the sanctum sanctorum of Lum Sohpetbneng (Kiew Pynch Rngiew), held on every first Sunday of February. On June 18th, 1989, U H. Onderson. Mawrie, who was the president of Seng Khihlang at the time, wrote a letter urging U Dipshon L. Nongbri to conduct a survey of the summit of Lum Sohpetbneng, for the purpose of holding a gathering there for the Niam Khasi Niamtre faithful. Thus began the process of securing the sacred hill. Respected Seng Khasi elder, U Sumar Sing Sawian, one of the greatest Khasi minds, through his writings, brought great clarity to the origins of the faith which are found in the legend of this sacred hill.

With the combined efforts of these individuals in particular and countless others, who can't all be named here, the first revival was held on 20th February, 2000. A small handful ascended to the top of Lum Sohpetbneng on that day but now tens of thousands of devotees participate annually. The pilgrimage has created an awakening that has strengthened the spirituality of the followers of Niam Khasi Niamtre. With Lum Sohpetbneng secure under the guardianship of Seng Khasi, the religion, it can be safely said, will never be lost.

The Seng Khasi and its sister organisations follow a philosophy of preservation through practice, the fruits of which are showing in the growing participation in religious festivals. **‘Shad Suk Mynsiem’** (Dance of the Joyful Hearts), a spring dance festival held across the Khasi hills, is witnessing increasing numbers of participants on the grassy fields. The dance is a form of public worship where peaceful souls exhibit love for their culture and offer gratitude to the Almighty. **Behdeiñkhlam** and **Chad Sukra**, organised by **Seiñ Rajj** (a socio-religious organisation focussed on the spiritual awakening and preservation of the traditional faith in the Jaintia Hills) are celebrated by thousands. Indigenous festivals banned by the British and kept suppressed after they departed are steadily being revived.

Beginning in the late 70's, a mass contact programme was initiated by Seng Khasi. Dynamic and fearless leaders such as Hipshon Roy Kharshiing, H.O. Mawrie, and R.T. Rymbai, toured all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, lecturing about the ideology of Seng Khasi and the philosophy of the traditional faith. They wanted to instill a sense of pride in religious identity by awakening the spiritual truth of the ancestral faith. In 1981, they founded **Seng Khihlang** (The United Endeavour Society), a branch of Seng Khasi which comprises of members of Seiñ Rajj too. Two invaluable pieces of literature on Khasi religion, traditions and the history of Seng Khasi were commissioned

by its Executive Committee: *Where Lies the Soul of our Race* and *The Essence of Khasi Religion*. Another congregation aimed at inspiring and educating the future generations is **Ka Lympung ki Khynnah** (a gathering of Seng Khasi and Sein Raji youth). The social and spiritual aspects of the ancestral faith, deeply entrenched in the teachings of its forebears, have stayed relevant to each generation due to such congregations. All these branches stem from mother, **Seng Khasi Kmie**, and each one strives towards the same goal, encapsulated in the slogan **“Im Ka Niam, Im Ka Jaitbynriew”**, which carries the message that if the religion survives, so too will the Khasi.

*“The founders of the Seng Khasi, however were firm in their resolution and steadfast in their aims and objectives. So also, in their thoughts, words and deeds. They took up the leadership with an amazing unique statesmanship to establish the organisation in a humble way. They had in their simplicity, a deep concern for the future of the Khasi race - its traditional faith, its social structure, its moral ethics; its cultural heritage and highest of all ‘Human Right’ as a Khasi”*⁵

-Sweetymon Rynjah

Inspired and guided by the great works laid down by those who have come before, the revival grows energised by a positive philosophy directed at awakening the spiritual truth of the land. The internal strength drawn from this has brought spiritual upliftment and community progress. Niam Khasi Niamtre, will continue to bloom in a harmonious garden of flowers, growing in strength with the spirit of Mother India. Khasi spiritual knowledge is gaining recognition as a treasure of humanity. The Seng Khasi momentum set into motion on November 23rd, 1899 is

destined to grow stronger in the coming days.

Always take heed

O ye elders, you the youths,

All around keep vigil,

The wisdom of forebears,

Remain visible like the Sun

For Truth to ever prevail;

Cling to the Roots

Blessings from Divine Creator would shower

- Sumar Sing Sawian

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(This article has been authored by Hammarsing L. Kharhmar, President of ‘Ka Tbian Ki Sur Hara’, a Performing Arts School of Seng Khasi (Kmie) in consultation with: Sumar Sing Sawian (Author and Scholar on Khasi Paia B. Synrem (Secretary, Seng Khasi Literary Committee) and elders of Seng Khasi (Kmie).)

The Culture / Lifestyle and Worship System of the Jamatia Tribe

Dr. Milan Rani Jamatia

Among the various states of India, Tripura region stands apart for its geographical location and cultural heritage. The region is surrounded by Assam in the north, Komilla and Nowakhali districts of Bangladesh in the west, Chittagong and Nowakhali in the south and the hills of Mizoram in the south. A total of 19 scheduled tribes inhabit this area, such as Tripuri, Jamatia, Reang, Murasingh, Rupini, Kalai, Uchoi, Garo, Chakma, Khasi, Bhutia and Noatia etc. One of the prominent amongst these 19 tribes is the famous “Jamantias” who are well known for their unique customs, traditions, religious beliefs, rituals, language, identity, etc. In terms of population, they are ranked third after Tripuri and Reang.

They are mainly dispersed across the districts of Udaipur, Amarpur, Sonamura, Belonia, Teliamura, Sabrum, Khowai, Jampui Jala and Sadar areas of Tripura. The Jamantias are extremely conscious and aware about their religion, traditions, rules and laws. Their dialect is called ‘Jamatia-Kok’ which falls under the ‘Kok-Borok’ Language. It is the language of the Bodo sub dialect originated from the ‘Tibeto-Burmese’ language tree.

There are differences of opinion among scholars regarding the origin of the term ‘Jamatia’. According to Kaliprasann Sen, author of ‘Sri Rajmala’, ‘The Jamatia tribe was famous as the heroic warriors among the tribes residing in the hilly region of the state of Tripura during the monarchical period’¹. Earlier this tribe used to work in the army of the kings, the military organization

formed by them was called Jamat. Later, this military class was called ‘Jamatia’. The word ‘Jamatia’ originated from ‘Jamat’. The Jamaat is a sign of a party or group of people². Some scholars also associate the origin of the word ‘Jamatia’ with ‘Goria’ worship. Mr. Lalit Mohan Jamatiya considers Jamatia is a conjugation of two Kokborok words: *jama* means ‘tax’ and *twia* means ‘no need to pay’³.

According to Mr. Birendra Kishore Jamatia, Jamatia is derived from the word ‘Jamasia’, which means - one who is not liable or subject to the tax burden⁴. Although, there is no historical authenticity of these claims, because during the monarchical period, the Jamatiya tribe also had to pay the same tax as other tribes. For example, the British Pacific Report of 1872 states that the families of the Jamatia and Tripuri tribes (Debbarma) had to pay five to seven rupees and other tribes such as Reang, Noatia etc. eight to twelve rupees as tax to the kings each year. If we pay dwell on the social and cultural organizational structure of the Jamatiya tribe, then the origin of the word ‘Jamatiya’ from ‘Jamat’ might be true.

Since ancient times, people of this tribe believed in community worship/collectively praying to their deity ‘Goria’ (Nature Worship) under a common social organization. They do not usually live away or outside of their community. The people of this clan live in unity and concentrated in any particular place even today. Even if for some reason to stay away from the society, they strictly adhere to the rules of their tribe. They strictly follows the rules

of their society, for these reasons they must have been called 'Jamatia', who proved their loyalty and valor by serving in the king's army during the monarchical period. The Jamatias are physically very strong, stout, and courageous, muscular as a whole. Jamatias were the major strength of Royal Army of Tripura kingdom for which they were exempted from the house taxes during Kings Rule.⁵

"Hoda Akra" is their supreme traditional Social Institute (Community Panchayat), which has the power to look after to preserve and promote their social taboos, customs & religion. All sort of social and criminal disputes in between the community members are also sorted by the "Hoda". All the customs, traditions and rules from birth to death in Jamatia tribe are followed according to 'Hoda'.

The organization of Jamatia-Hoda is as follows-

Hoda Akra -

Social Order	Worship System
Mayal Panchai	Kherphang
Luku Chakidiri	Achai, Daria, Mwtai Balnai Bagla Bagla Mahanto, Bagla Raja Bagla Chokdiri

There are usually two leaders of the Hoda, who are elected democratically by the villagers for a tenure of three to five years at the annual conference. They are called 'Hoda Akras'. One of them leads the Akra Khama Zone, which covers the areas of Paschimanchal, Sonamura, Jampui Jala and Bilonia etc. of Udaipur and the second leads the Akra Saka Zone, under which Purvanchal of Udaipur, Amarpur and Kalyanpur/Teliamura. In the Jamatia tribe, both Akras are considered supreme leaders of the community. All sorts of dispute resolutions are handled by them and their decision is respected by all. There are provisions

for punishments (monetary fines, Cane-lashings or societal boycott) by Hoda Akra for the crimes committed by anyone in the Jamatia society.

There are two systems under Hoda Akra - Social Order and Worship System. In the Social system, the Panchait and Chakdiri come under Akra, and in the Worship system, the various forms are Kherphang, Achai, Daria, Mwtai Balnai and Bagla. Bagla is further divided into Bagla Mahanto, Bagla Raja and Bagla Chokdiri.

The village-panchayat in the Jamatia tribe is called 'Luku'. One person is chosen in each Luku, called 'Luku Chokdiri', who is responsible to maintain order in the village. At present there are 329 (three hundred twenty nine) Lukus (Village Panchayats) of this tribe. Similarly an organization consisting of five to fifteen or more villages is formed, which is called 'Moyal'. Two persons are also selected for each Moyal, which is then called a 'Moyal Panchai', who is responsible for the smooth functioning of the Moyal. At present there are 18 (eighteen) Moyals under Jamatia Hoda. Earlier in the past decisions related to marital discords, separation, etc. and stick lashings were only taken by Akra, but today, even the Luku Chokdiri and Moyal Panchai can decide on these matters. However, punishment for stick lashings is decided only by the Hoda Akra. The tenure of Hoda Akra and Moyal Panchai is for three to five years. This period may also be extended under special circumstances. At the end of the period, the same person is often not selected again. Luku Chokdiri is also elected for three to five years. The duration of their tenure is not extended. The criteria to be eligible for any of these three bodies is to be successfully married. Only those people who had taken their marital vows in front of the 14 deities are eligible to stand for the post in any of these bodies. Anyone married against the wishes of their parents or having married after eloping is disqualified to stand for any of these posts. The people of this tribe even till date follow these

traditions and adhere to the rules and societal laws.

On the basis of worship system, the following are the Hoda-administrators of this tribe-

(A) Kherphang-

The person in whose house the Baba Goria's Pratima is installed. He is called 'Kherphang' in Jamatia society. Their task is to serve the deity according to the rules. In this society, there are two Kherphaangs, one for 'Bia Kwrwi Goria Mwtai' and the other from Bia Gwnang Goria Mwtai.

(B) Achai (Pujari) -

The descendants of Achai Dungdungkhai are chosen as Achai (priest) of Baba Goria. Their job is to worship Baba according to the law. Two Goria Achais are elected. One is 'Bia Kwrwi Goria Mwtai' and the other is 'Bia Gwnang Goria Mwtai'. Worship of the Goddess Goria is often impossible without them, so they have special importance in society. These people are called 'Pure Jamatias' and are responsible for keeping the sanctity of the deity and the prayers. They maintain the highest form of cleanliness and do not accept any food or even water from places which are unhygienic. Neither do they stay in such places which do not maintain the highest standards of cleanliness.

(C) Daria-

Those who play the drums during Baba Goria Puja are called 'Daria'. The prayer starts and ends by playing the 'Daria' instrument. Anyone in the society can play the Daria and usually it is played by two people. One is called 'Bia Kwrwi Goria Mwtai' and the other is called 'Bia Gwnang Goria Mwtai'.

(D) Mwtai Balnai -

After Baba Goria's Pran Pratishtha (installation) is done, the first person to carry the deity on his shoulder and do a Gram-Parikrama, he is called Mwtai Balnai. This is also done by two people; one is 'Bia Kwrwi Goria Mwtai' and the other is 'Bia Gwnang Goria Mwtai'.

(4) Bagla / Special devotees of Baba

Bagla has special respect in this society. They are addressed by many names such as Baba's Sakhi, Sakha, Bhakta, Sena etc. during the days of worship of Baba Goria. The title is both permanent and temporary. Temporary Bagla are those who come to Baba's shelter to overcome their grief, suffering etc. and return to worldly life after fulfillment of their wishes. In a way, they are volunteers of Baba Goria. A temporary committee is formed by the Hoda for the Baglas to run the worship of Baba Goria for seven days, in which Bagla Mahanto, Bagla Raja and Bagla Chokdiri have important roles.

Bagla Mahanto:

The Bagla Mahanto is appointed amongst the the Baglas. Earlier it was selected by the Baglas, and currently Hoda Akras do the selection. In the Jamatia tribe, only Bagla, those considered as traditionally of pure blood, can be selected as Mahanto. The Mahanto's responsibility is to serve Baba Goria as per law and to conduct seven days of worship from Bwisu to the Sena (One week long) smoothly.

Bagla King:

They are also appointed by Hoda Akra on the basis of seniority among the Baglas. Their responsibility is to guard the Baba Goria through the Bagla-security personnel starting from the day of the scarifying ritual which is also known as Hoda Mwi Tanmani, which is held in Tripureshwari Mandir, Udaipur till 21st April.

Bagla Chokdiri:

The appointment is made from amongst the Baglas. The Bagla Chokdiri controls and directs the Baglas and takes care of their safety.

So this is the structure of the Jamatia Hoda system. They are the care-taker of the Social Order and Worship System of the Jamatia Tribe. Now we will understand the lifestyle of the Jamatia tribe

and their method of worship There are many such commonalities in the in the year-round pujas performed by the Jamatia community, which are similar to the ancient and present traditional worship practices across India. The objective of the research presented is to explain the socio-cultural features of all the main pujas performed by this society. This society mainly worships Yatha-Lampra, Mwi Tanmani, Baba Gorla, Ker Puja, Bolong Suwama, Mai Khuluma, Thunairog-Banerog, Nakri, Haichukma, Hojaigirii, etc.

1. Lampra:

Lampra has an important place of worship for the people of Jamatia community. It is of two types - Kwthar Lampra (Sanctimonious/pure) and Kusum Lampra (Impure or inauspicious) i.e. from birth to death and after death the same worship is done for purification of the deceased family. We can understand Lampra Puja in the society as follows:

(A) Lampra puja is first performed when the woman conceives, wishing the health of mother and baby and their auspiciousness. After the birth of the mother, Lampra Puja is again done for the health and safety of the mother as soon as she is healthy and pure, and to expose the child in front of the Sun God as a form of blessing by the God.

(B) The search for bride and groom is also done after performing the Lampra Puja in the community. Even the preparations for the wedding are commenced after completing the Lampra Puja. On the auspicious day of the marriage, the bride and groom complete the marriage formalities only after doing the Lampra Puja. Even post the wedding ceremony, the Puja is done after which the bride and groom take the blessings of their elders.

(C) On the death of someone in the family, the daughters do the Lumpra Puja on the third day, while the sons do it on the thirteenth day. This ritual is performed for the purification of the house after the Shraddha, before the bone immersion of the deceased and before going on

a pilgrimage for Pindadan.

(D) Before taking part in the Gorla Puja, on the day of 'Bwisu' after returning home or before taking part in any community Puja or any auspicious event, the Lampra Puja is considered mandatory before attending any community mass puja.

(4) Before building a new house and before the Bhoomi Puja, on the day of Griha-Pravesh or after the construction of the house, before starting a on a long journey, before a pilgrimage, before going on a hunt, etc., the 'Lampra Puja' is considered essential. Apart from this, if a family considers it necessary, then once a month this worship is done to maintain family safety and purity.

This puja is performed by the Achai of the village. It is worshiped mainly by remembering the six Gods and Goddesses, such as Yatha-Akatha, Bikatha, Twibukma, Sangotran, Sukundrai and Mukundrai. The materials required for the Puja is- banana leaves, bananas, rice, sugar, sweets (Mithai) and some flowers etc.

2. Mwi Tanmani (Sacrifice Ritual)

'Mwi Tanmani' is one of the main religious rituals of the Jamatia community. This puja is performed once a year in the month of Chaitra before the Garia Puja. This puja is started by worshipping Ma-Bari and Shivbari. After the worship of Maa Tripureshwari and Mahadev, three rivers namely- Toyama (Gomati River, Gomati District), Burima Twima (Bijay River, Bishalgarh District) and Kosoma (Khowai River, Dhalai District) are worshiped. This is done for the well-being, safety, happiness and prosperity of the entire Jamatia community, followed by the offerings to 'Hoda Mwi Tanmani' which is then followed by 'Moyal Mwi Tanmani' ritual by Moyal Panchai, wishing the villagers that fall under his jurisdiction. All these rituals are conducted under the supervision of Hoda Akra. These prayers are done at the village level by the Luku Chokdiri for the well-being of the villagers. This Puja is also done at the

family level which is called 'Luku Samwng Roma'. The sacrifice (offerings to God) of an animals such as a goat, buffalo, pigeon, etc. are made. All these Pujas such as Moyal, 'Hoda Mwi Tanmani', 'Moyal Mwi Tanmani' and 'Luku Samwng Roma' are conducted by the Luku Achais. Simultaneously, before every Puja, the Lampra Puja is performed. All the members of the Jamatia community can take part in this ritual.

3. Gorja Puja

After completing all the above pujas, then the Gorja Puja is performed. In fact, Gorja Puja is the spiritual and cultural focal point of the Jamatia tribe. The Baba Gorja has been worshipped as a folk deity for nearly four hundred and twenty years. During this puja i.e. from the last day of Chaitra to the sixth day of Vaishakh, the worship of other deities is forbidden for this society. In Tripura, Gorja Puja is celebrated at two places under the direction of both the Akras of this community. The two Gorja deities have different names – 'Bia Gwnang' and 'Bia Kwrwi'. Both are worshiped together, but in different places (in the courtyard of Kherphang), but the village Parikrama is done only of 'Bia Gwnang Baba Gorja'. Let us understand how Jamatia Hoda worships Baba Gorja:

(A) Chukbar

Chukbar means country liquor. Lampra puja is performed at the house of Kherphang, just seven days before the commencement of Gorja Puja. After the puja, women make a stove in the courtyard of Kherphang's house. After Chulha Puja by Achai, 'Chukbar' is made for Baba Gorja with complete rituals. It is believed that Baba Gorja loves 'Chukbar', so after installing the Pratima of Baba in Bangchai on the day of main worship, according to the rules, 'Chukbar' is offered first as an offering. Even when the deity is taken around for the village Parikrama, the 'Chukbar' is put in 'Langkha', the houses in the village where Baba is installed. At the same time, 'Langkha' is

also placed in front of Baba's feet. After one or two parikrams of the village, Baba Gorja is offered Chukbar kept in the 'Langkha' in between.

(B) Raidang:

It is very important to know 'Raidang' to understand the Gorja worship and Jamatia social system. In this society, 'Raidang' is a symbol of devotion, power and governance. Which only Hoda Akra and Kherphaang have the right to wear. From the day one becomes entitled to wear 'Raidang'. From that day onwards, he is considered a fatherly figure in Jamatia society. Raidang's responsibility is to run the social system smoothly and show the right path to anyone going against the laws of the society. They are respected and revered by the people as much as their devotion, faith and belief towards Baba Gorja.

(C) Hari Bwisu

Early in the morning on the day of Hari Bwisu, some people in the village take away things related to the worship of Baba in the house of Kherphang such as Baba's Mukhauta, Trishul, Dao, Nakri, Drums, Utensils, Clothes that were received as offerings in the previous year, etc. All these items are then washed in the river and dried on the Bangchai. On the same day some people go to the nearby designated forest along with Garia Achai and Barua (Assistant Achai) to worship the bamboo tree, after which three selected bamboos are cut and brought to the bangchai in Kherphang's courtyard. After this, both the bangchai on the banks of the river and the bachai made in the courtyard of Kherphang are worshiped in the evening. Kirtan takes place overnight at Kherphang. Kirtan is performed every night from Hari Bwisu to Sena in the courtyard of Kherphang, in the house of Akra, Panchai and Chakadiri, in which songs of the glory of Baba Gorja are sung. During the Kirtan, the dancing Jamatia devotees also dance as a mark of respect for the Baba.

(D) Maha Bwisu

On the second day i.e. on the day of Maha bwisu, these three bamboos are taken out of the courtyard of Kherphang's house and washed in the river, then taken to the river-side Bangchai and cut and peeled and made into an idol of Baba Goria. Fresh white cotton cloth is wrapped on this statue, after which the clothes received as offerings are tied along. A gold mask symbolizing the face of Baba Goria is placed on the upper end of the bamboo. After this, Baba Goria is worshiped and brought to the Kherphang Bangchai, and is installed on the pedestal. Trishuls are also installed on both sides of Baba Goria. After this, Baba Goria is worshiped with full rituals. During this puja, duck eggs, paddy, khanchoi (Rice Kheel), banana leaves, cotton, chini-batasha etc. are used. This puja goes on throughout the day. During this time, pigeons, goats and buffalo are sacrificed. Sacrifice of other animals is prohibited in this puja.

(4) Baba's village parikrama:

The next day of Maha bwisu, Baba Goria's Puja takes place in the Kherphang's Bangchai. Then Baba Goria is taken out of Bangchai and taken for a village parikrama as per the instructions of Achai. It includes Achai, Bagla, Panchai, Chokdiri, people who make the sacrifice, Daria, Kirtan-group of Baba Goria, Harsini-Tongnairog (volunteers), other devotees etc. This parikrama runs till day and night in the villages selected by the Hoda Akra. In each village, this group first reaches the house of Chokdiri, there Baba Goria's idol is installed, worshiped and sacrifice is made on the pre-built pedestal. Later, they go to every Hindu Jamatia house in that village and worship it. It is important to note that this group is prohibited from visiting any other religious pilgrimage other than Hindu Jamatia houses. If a newborn is born in a house, or has recently died, that is Ashoucha (impurity), this group will not go to that particular house as well. To signal that a particular house is prohibited, a bamboo post is put in place to indicate that a

particular house is prohibited. After performing the puja, the group departs for the next house. Soon after, a group of Baglas arrive in that house, they sit in front of all the members of that house and drink country liquor and wish for their well-being. This process continues till (Sena) the sixth day of Baisakh month.

(F) Sena

By the sixth day of the Sena, Vaishakh, this group, which has come out for village Parikrama, has to reach the house of Kherphang by noon. After coming there, Baba is installed on the pedestal made in the Bangchai. Baba is worshiped with full customs like the first day. Those who are unable to sacrifice in Baba's name on the Maha Bwisu or during the village parikrama, then these people make a sacrifice on the day of Sena. After the sacrifice, the last worship of Baba is done, he is prayed and requested to come again next year. After this, after taking them out of the Bangchai made in the courtyard of Kherphang, three parikramas are taken out while playing drums, etc. Then everyone arrives at the bangchai near by the river. There again, three parikramas of the Bangchai is done. After this, all of Baba's clothes, his mask, etc. are taken out, then Mwtai Balnai descends into the middle river by placing him on his shoulder and immerses him and leaves with folded hands. After this, all the people bathe in the river. Along with this, the bamboos etc. used in both the gardens are also immersed.

4. Mailuma-Khuluma (Goddess of Cotton and Food)

This worship is done twice a year at the family level in the Jamatia community. After the immersion of Baba Goria on Sena day, Mailuma and Khuluma are worshiped by all Jamatia families. It is believed that Baba goes to the Mailuma and Khuluma Goddesses and hands over the responsibilities to these two Goddesses for a year. The deities are expected to take care of the health, happiness and prosperity of the Jamatia

community for a year till Baba Goriya arrives again. Secondly when new crops are harvested and brought home from Jhoom cultivation for the first time. Two urns filled with new rice are decorated with cotton beads and flowers to symbolize the Mailuma-Khuluma Goddesses. It is also called Randak (Kalash filled with rice) Puja in the local language. This puja is performed by the Achai of the village or one of the members of the family for the family's welfare. Worship materials: banana leaves, ripe bananas, rice, sugar, Batashe, Anwa (sweets made from new rice) etc.

5. Ker Puja (Prayers for the safety and purity of the village)

According to the instructions of Hoda Akra, this Puja is performed every year by Luku Chokdiri on different dates as per the convenience. Through 'Ker Pooja', people of this community symbolically travel to heaven from this world. This worship is associated with every aspect of their life. This puja is performed in rites from birth to death and beyond. In which 'Khong' has an important role. When this puja is to be performed in one of the villages, Luku Achai (the village priest) first inspects the village with his colleagues and buries fresh bamboo sticks on every path that connects the village's main road that is called 'khong'. These are symbols of prohibition of movement. During the puja the villagers cannot go out of the house and outsiders cannot enter the village. Apart from this, while the Puja is being conducted, the villagers are not allowed to go to the forests for river-ghats, farm lands (jhoom cultivation lands), fields and hunting etc. Both the birth of a child or the death of someone in the village during worship are considered inauspicious. Earlier, before the commencement of worship, pregnant women and people who were seriously ill and struggling with life were instructed to take them out of the village limits, because laughing, crying, singing, even speaking a word is forbidden at the time of worship. After the Puja is over, they can all return

to the village. If during this time a person dies outside the village, then that person is cremated outside. The belief behind this is that both birth and death did not occur at the beginning of the creation, so that tradition was followed. It is believed that in violation of this rule, the villagers fall ill throughout the year and they have a bad fortune during the year. During this period, the decision and direction of Achai is important in this regard.

Generally this puja is performed from morning to evening. Kirtan is performed at Chokdiri's house all night, one day before the puja. After the Puja, Achai, along with his colleagues, does a parikrama of the village and ties 'Mudra' (small chunga of chanted bamboo) in each house. The knot of currency is tied in one breath. All these operations are conducted through Luku Chokdiri. In the local language it is also called 'Kami Mudra Khama'.

On this day many deities are worshiped together in the village, such as Lampra, Burasa, Nakri (village Gram Devta), Akatha, Bikatha, Chaitra Sangrong, Ker, Twi Swkal (water Goddess) etc. It is noted that these tribes do not worship the idol but rather they make fresh Watho/bamboo, which is called Watho in the local language, or the emblem of these deities with clay pots (kalash). Goats are sacrificed during the Puja. This puja is done for the protection of the villagers, their happiness, prosperity, peace and good wishes from major diseases, epidemics (diseases like cholera, malaria etc.), natural famines, etc. Rice, sugar, banana, batasha and red vermilion etc. are used for conducting the Puja.

On the day of Ker Puja, Nakri/Duwari phomani or Kwthar Puja is done in the village during evenings. Here Nakri is the symbol of the village-protection deity (village Gram Devta). This method of worship is done by following several rules. The life story of two persons named 'Katuwa-Sala' and 'Nazi-Sala' are narrated in this puja. It is prohibited to narrate this story in any other place

and time. Main Puja starts when Achai is about to finish narrating this story. Talking, laughing, joking, etc. are forbidden during worship. It is believed that doing this may be inauspicious for the villagers. During this Puja, three pigeons are sacrificed. After the sacrifice, the colleague of Achai chokes its breath and buries the nakris and pigeons in the ground. After that Achai announces the end of Puja and all the people take a bath in the nearby river-ghat etc. and come to Chokdiri's house. They all go to the Chokdiri's house to know about their fortunes as told to them by the Chokdiri to all the villagers.

6. Bolong Suwama (Nature Worship)

Like all other the tribal communities, the Jamatia tribe also worships nature. Bolong Suwama is worshiped every year under the supervision of Hoda Akra. On this day, the nature-god is prayed for the happiness, peace, prosperity, protection of their land and forest and their happy life. Also, the children of Hoda are told that nature is their father, their first responsibility is to respect and honor them. Do not cut or burn unnecessary forest. Use the forest as much as is needed. In the forest bordering the village of Hoda Akra, this puja is performed in his name. On this day, many deities like Yatha-Thunairog, Bonirog, Burasa, Jampira and Haichukma etc. are worshiped simultaneously. Two goats are sacrificed for the Puja of the Thunairog-Bonirig deities, one goat is sacrificed in for the deity Burasa. A duck is sacrificed for Jadpira and two ducks for Haichuama Devi. Apart from this, khanchwi (Kheel), rice, bananas, batashe, country liquor, new clothes etc. are offered as an offering. Prasad offered in enjoyment is not allowed to be taken to any family in the village. Therefore, food is arranged in the place of worship. The Pratima/symbols of all the deities are made from fresh Watho bamboo. Earlier this puja was done in the month of Aghaan, now in the month of Ashadh. This puja is performed by Hoda Achai. This puja consists of members of the puja

committee formed by Hoda, men and women from the village of Hoda Akra and select men and women from other Jamatia villages. As Lampra is performed before every Puja, similarly Lampra is offered in the courtyard of Accra even before 'Bolong Suwama' Puja. The list of material used in Bolong Suwama (i.e. Prakriti Puja) are as follows

- (A) Nakri Kongska (A nakri is made of fresh Wathwi bamboo)
- (B) Tharuksa kongska (a large spoon made of fresh Wathwi bamboo)
- (C) Dik Kongska (a saddle of fresh Wathwi bamboo adorned with cotton garland.)
- (D) Langkha kongska (a brew of fresh Wathwi bamboo filled with country liquor)
- (E) khanchwi kisa (handful of kheel)
- (F) Two banana leaves
- (G) Pasa Khalaisa (sugar, betashe, banana, rice etc.)
- (H) A goat
- (I) Bwtwk Twksa (a small vase filled with fermented rice prepared for making native liquor)
- (J) Chak Batalnwi (Two country liquor bottles)
- (K) Haiching Chongpreng (ginger made vegetable)
- (L) Khoronsa Khungsa (a small basket made of bets)
- (E) Thalwi Kamo Thaisa (a ripe banana)

7. Mai Khuluma

On the day of 'Bolong Suwama' puja, 'Mai Khuluma' Puja is done in the house of Hoda Akra. On this day, Mai Kuluma and Lampra Puja are performed together by the whole community. This puja is performed for the prosperity of wealth and wealth in the Jamatia community. It is mentioned that Lampra Puja is done on this day only inside the house of Hoda Akra. On other days, this puja is performed in the courtyard.

Worship material-

- A. Watho kongsa (a piece of fresh Wathwi bamboo, folded part)
- B. Tharuksa kongsa (a large spoon made of fresh Wathwi bamboo)
- C. How to (a saddle of fresh Wathwi bamboo adorned with a cotton garland.)
- D. Langkha Kongbrwi (Fresh bamboo stuffed with country liquor)
- E. Risa kangwii (Two Risa / Traditional Clothing)
- F. Khuturung tangtham (Three cotton beads)
- G. Pat Zarbrwi (Eight leaves of jackfruit)
- H. Faruk Mabrwii (Four Pigeons)
- I. Pure thread

In the worship, every Jamatia family wishes for peace, prosperity, increase in crops. A swing is made inside the house to worship the Khuluma Devi. An 'Anwa Bwthai' is placed on the swing and caressed while lying on the swing. The women sing Lori and put her to sleep. This puja is performed by Hoda Achai.

8. Kwthar Chibrwi Mwtai (Fourteen Gods)

The worship of Kwthar Chibrwi Mwtai (fourteen gods) is also considered to be extremely important in the Jamatia tribe. In this society, fourteen deities are worshiped mainly during the child's annaprasan and marriage. It is established in front of the main house gate. Fourteen small bamboo (Watho) small pieces of bamboo (Watho) are symbolically buried in front of the gate. The whole place is purified before installing of the fourteen deities. After purifying the place, it is secured by a raft of Wathwi bamboo and two entrances are made. Worship materials: cotton, pure thread, rice, batashe, sugar, banana, banana leaves etc.

9. Songotran Ma:

This puja is done for family happiness, peace, prosperity and progress. Apart from this, Goddess

Maa is remembered on missing any priceless item of the house and after receiving the item, Goddess Songotran Ma is worshiped when a member of the house progresses or any other auspicious news. The story of Kamalapati is recited during the puja. This puja is performed in the evening. A goat is sacrificed in the middle of the story post which the story is completed. It is not necessary for only the Achai to recite the story, it can even be told by any elder of the household. Apart from this puja, it is forbidden to recite this story on any ritual or on normal days.

10. Hajaigiri:

This worship is done once a year in the Jamatia society, on the seventh day of Durga Puja i.e. after Dussehra. A rice-filled handi is made to symbolize the Mother Goddess. This puja is done for family peace, prosperity, growth and increase in crops. In this society, lying and stealing is not considered wrong on the day of Hajaigiri, but stealing priceless or expensive items is forbidden. On this day many dishes and sweets are made in the house, which are kept for the children of the village. Between fun, people of all ages of the village form a group / group to steal a lot of fresh green vegetables, fruits (coconut, papaya, sitaphal, sugarcane etc.), fishes, chickens, chickens, ducks etc., which they all eat together on the next day. This festival is celebrated with great pomp and show. Many cultural rituals, storytelling, song-dance etc. are organized on this day. Sacrifice is not offered in this puja. Puja Stuff - Banana leaves, ripe bananas, rice, sugar, batashe and new crop / paddy straws.

11. Hangrai

The Jamatia community observes Paush-Sankranti with great enthusiasm and joy. In the local dialect, it is called Hangrai. It is believed that on the day of Hangrai, if a person takes a bath and wakes up at dawn before the animals and birds get up, then the suffering of his body is removed. He gets relief from major diseases, he gets welfare. On this day, the homeowner and his wife first

pay homage to Randak (Rice Bowl) after bathing. They then take the blessings of the elders and the learned people in the of the village. Children bathe first and then seek the blessings of their parents and elders. Youths and girls together arrange special food on this day. It is customary to call the newly married couple of the village home and provide food on this day. This keeps the sweetness in the relationship. Along with this, there is a tradition of immersing the bones of the dead on this day and providing food to the elders of the village.

12. Burasa Mwtai

This puja is done to get freedom from the evil eyes of the deities. Often, children are subjected to bad omen from the Burasa Mwtai. If a child plays alone in the forest or a deserted place in the afternoon or wanders alone in the darkness of night, he gets the bad omen of Burasa Mwtai. In the local language it is called 'Burasa Sili Nangma'. If the baby remains healthy during the day, but soon after dusk, he starts to tremble with fear, weeps loudly, starts crying from sleep again and again, he has fever, etc., sudden has pain in the hands and feet, then it is assumed that the child has been cursed by Burasa Mwtai. Then people go to the village Achai and narrate their problems. Achai, then looks at the starts to predict the auspicious time for the Puja. This puja is performed at various times, such as in the afternoon, late afternoon, evening or late evenings. The Puja is also done during night time. Goats or hens are sacrificed in Burasa Puja. The Puja of the Lord Burasa is done in a secluded place away from the home. It is prohibited to take Prasad home, so food is arranged in the place of worship. Puja Samagri - Fresh Wathwi Bamboo joint, called Watho, rice, bananas, kheel, sugar, batashe, raw turmeric etc.

13. Naksu Mwtai (Three Goddesses named, Shanti, Kunti and Vishweshwari Devi)

Worship of Naksu Mwtai (Shanti, Kunti and Vishweshwari Devi) is also prevalent in Jamatia

society. The idols of these Goddesses are installed in the absence of other family members or society. If a person vomits after returning from someone's home, he feels dizzy, or starts having headaches, then people go to Achai for diagnosis. Achai meditates and tells him that he has got a bad omen of Naksu Mwtai. In the local language it is called 'Thikana Naimwng'. After reciting the mantras, the Achai sprinkles holy water over the sick person, from which he recovers. Or Posa Khalaisa i.e. banana, batashe, sugar, a little rice is offered to the three goddesses by remembering them. It is a kind of family Puja.

14. Nowari Khor

A large tunnel or pit below the ground is called Nowari Khor in the local dialect. It is popularly believed that if an old and big tunnel or the roots of a big tree come around the house, it is inauspicious. This causes the people of the house to fall ill. In such a situation, some people either change their place of residence as per the instructions of Achai, or they worship the Nowari Khor by calling Achai for the protection and health benefits of the family by praying to the deity. During this puja, duck or chicken is sacrificed. This puja is performed in the afternoon.

15. Bwrwirog

In Jamatia society, if a member of the family is sick for a long time, then the practice of calling Achai and offering worship called Bwrwirog is prevalent. In this puja seven goddesses are offered together. These goddesses are considered sisters. Due to which the person becomes ill/unwell. The Puja is done by making a Machan from a fresh bamboo and keeping various items on top it. The offerings include cooked rice, Anwa (sweet made of rice), kheel etc. on it. In this puja, ducks, chickens, pigeons, goats, turtles etc. are also sacrificed.

16. Ami Kwthwi and Mwkhra Kwthwi

In Jamatia society, cremation ghats are built not only for humans but also for animals and birds,

especially cats and monkeys. This cremation ground is built far away from the village. It is popularly believed that if a person comes in contact with a cat and a monkey in the cremation ground, or if children play games at such a places, then they fall ill. From which the cremation ghat is worshiped by the Achai by sacrificing the chicken for salvation or protection. This puja is performed only in the afternoon or evening.

Apart from all the above pujas, all Hindu deities like Holi, Diwali, Durga puja etc. are worshiped by this tribe.

Presently, it has changed a lot gradually due to the influence of education, modernism, urbanization, globalization and external culture All these rituals give the identity of ethnic and sociality to the Jamatia tribe. Whose compliance makes the society more organized and all individuals are vigilant towards their duties and duties.

During the preparation of the article, help from the following scholars was taken :

1. Sri. Kirit Kishore Jamatia (Former Hoda Akra), Age-75, Pitra Kami, Gomati District, Tripura
2. Sri Nab kumar Jamatia (Former Hoda Akra), Age-72, Gomati District, Tripura

3. Smt. Nalini Kanya Jamatia, Age-74, Khump-wilwng Kami, Gomati District, Tripura

4. Smt. Karnirani Jamatia, Age-80, Ryo Kami, Gomati District, Tripura

5. Smt. Malti Kanya, Age-77, Hodrai Kami, Gomati District, Tripura

6. Sri Padmalochan Jamatia, Age-58, Agartala, West Tripura District, Tripura

7. Sri Subarna Jamatia (Hoda Staff), Age-56, Atharabula, Gomati District, Tripura

8. Smt. Jyotsna Rani Jamatia, Age-57, Khump-wilowng, Gomati District, Tripura

9. Sri Rampad Jamatia (Former Hoda Secretary), Age-65, Atharabula, Gomati District,

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¹Modernity in Tradition: A Historical Study of The Jamatia Tribe of Tripura: Dr. Ke. B. Jamatia, pg. 32, Akshar Publication, Agartala, Tripura, 2007

²Ibid, pg. 33

³Ibid, pg. 33

⁴Ibid, pg. 34

⁵Modernity in Tradition: A Historical Study of The Jamatia Tribe of Tripura: Dr. Ke. B. Jamatia, pg. 32, Akshar Publication, Agartala, Tripura, 2007

Religious tradition of the Tripuri community

Dr Sourish Deb Barma

Tripura has a rich and glorious tradition and culture since ages. Tripura has been mentioned as a powerful state of North Eastern India along with Pragjyotishpur and Mekala (Manipur) in Mahabharata. A list of various tribes from the eastern and north-eastern India has been mentioned in the Bhishma parva where we can see Tripura along with other countries standing in the warfield of Kurukshetra under the leadership of Bhagadatta, the King of Pragjyotishpur-*“Dronantaram Yatto Bhagadatta Pratapban, Magadhaischa Kalingaischa Pishachaischa Bisampatey, Pragjyotishbadanu Nripa, Koshalayaha, Brihadvala, Mekaley Karubindeschya Traipureschya Samanvita”* (Chapter -87, Verse 8-9)¹. So it is evident that the people of Tripura has also participated in the epic war with their King. Apart from Mahabharata, Tripura has been mentioned clearly in many Hindu scriptures like Pithmala Tantra (5th century), Tantra Chudamani, Bhavisya Puran, Guyya Tantra (8th century) and Kamakhya Tantra (11th century)². So from all these accounts it is clear that the people of Tripura are the torch bearers of Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma and traditions since time immemorial.

Tripuris in ancient Bharat – Tripuris, the son of the soil, ethnically has been identified with an ancient Indian tribe called Kirata.³ Kiratas were prevalent side by side with vedic people in ancient India. In Atharvaveda there is mention of a Kirata damsel “Kairitika” digging medicinal roots and herbs for the Vedic Rishis.⁴ According to Vishnu Puran and Markandeya Puran, the homeland of Kiratas are to the east of Lohita-Sagara that is present north-east India.⁵ Once upon a time the whole of Bangladesh was under water and the feet

of Khasi Hills and Garo Hills was bathed with the water of the Lohita-sagara.⁶ The following verses from Sabhaparva of Mahabharata (as quoted by Sri K.P Sen, Vidyabhushan in his edition of the Rajmala, Tripura royal chronicle) are clear about the location of Kiratas –

“ye parardhe ca Himavatah suryodaya girau nripah,

Karuse Ca samudrante Lauhityam abhitasca ye II

phala mulasana ye ca Kiratas carma vasasah, Kura sastrah Krura krityas tamsca pasyamyaham prabho II

Candanaguru Kasthanam bharan Kaliyakasya ca.

carma-ratna-suvarnanam gandhanan caiva rasayah II”

From the translation of the above verse by Dr S. K. Chatterji in his famed “Kirata-jana-kriti” which tells us many things about Kiratas thus. “Those Kings who are on the other half of the Himalayas and in the mountain of the east (Sunrise mountain) in Karusha by the end (edge) of the sea and beside the Lauhitya (Brahmaputra river), those who are moreover Kiratas living on fruits and roots, clad in skins, fierce with their weapons, cruel in their deeds, them I saw, O lord : and loads of sandal and agallochum wood and of black pepper and masses of skins and gems and gold and of aromatic shrubs”.⁷

In “Manava Dharma Shastra” of Manu, Kiratas has been mentioned as degraded Kshatriya race.⁸ The eminent historian, Romila Thapar who based

her conclusion on the Manava-dharmasastra and the Mahabharata has maintained that the indigenous mlechhas were originally of the Kshatriya varna and their degradation was due to the non observances of the religious duties.⁹ In the Sabhaparva of Mahabharata Kiratas along with Yavanas, Gandharas, Cinas, Sabaras, Barbaras, Sakas, Pahlavas, Odras, Pulindas are described as descendants of Brahmanas and Kshatriyas in one hand and as Vaishyas and Sudras, on the other.¹⁰ The Sabhaparva of Mahabharata mentioned that Bhagadatta the King of Pragjyotish who participated in the great battle was surrounded by Kiratas, Cinas and with many other warriors dwelling by the coast of the sea in the Kurukshetra battle field.¹¹ In ancient India – “both Varna and Karma were the determining factors in awarding the ranks to the tribes and castes in the social hierarchy in the Smriti age”.¹² The royal chronicle of Tripura “Rajmala”, a literary work of the early 15th century identified the previous name of the then Tripura as Kiratadesha. According to J.W Mc Crindle who translated the account of Greek traveler Ptolemy called “Periplus of the Erythrean Sea” has mentioned Kiratas under the name “Cirrhadæ” and has stated that – “The country of the Kirata, however, is placed in the great Indian epic, further, north in the neighbourhood of the Brahmaputra.”¹³ According to Rajmala, King Trilochan has been invited by Emperor Yudhisthir to participate in the Rajsuya Yagna and has been bestowed with a Sinhasan and a White Umbrella or “Svet Chhatri” which is still a royal insignia of Tripura till date. Depending exclusively on the classical texts as well as corroborated by the experts like K.L Barua, R.M Nath, S.K Chatterjee, B.C Law, E.T Atkinson and many others the Khasis, Jaintias, Garos, Kacharis, Akas, Mishmi, Nagas, Chutiyas and Tipperahs (Tripuris) have been identified as Kiratas.¹⁴ So from all these we can opine that Tripuris were very much present since the vedic period and well aware about the Sanatan culture and religion of the time.

Tripuri Hindu religion: From the above discussion it is clear that Tripuris were following the same Sanatan dharma similar to other Indians since the epic age. Almost all religious ideas and practices as found in the general Hindu society are also present in the tribal people. The Tripuri tribe is akin to traditional Hinduism in their beliefs and practices. According to D.P. Deb Barma, a Tripuri scholar, says –“Practically the Tripuri relation is based on Hinduism. Many of the Gods and Goddesses are akin to Hindu Gods and Goddesses, particularly in the nature of belief”.¹⁵ The idea of a great God has evolved among the Tripuris since the dawn of civilisation. They refer the great God as Matai Kotor (Matai = God, Kotor = Great). But they also admit a consort to this God who is called Matai Katar Ma (The great Mother God). This is similar to the Hindu tradition of Shiva-Shakti. An unique observation has been noted about the belief system of Tripuris –“The idea of one God, however, is not noted in any tribe other than the Tripuris, for none except the Tripuris have a name for the Supreme God in their own tribal pantheon.”¹⁶ Another striking feature of the Tripuris is that they never refer to the supernatural beings of their belief as spirits as some think, all are mostly deities or Gods and Goddess.¹⁷ The Kula Devata of Tripura Royal family who claims to be the descendent of mythological ruler Yayati’s son Druhyu and belonging to the Lunar dynasty (Chandra vamsha) are “Caturdasha Devatas or Chibrwi Matai”. The literal translation of Caturdasha is the Fourteen Gods and Goddess. This fourteen gods are the traditional pantheon – Matai Katar, Matai Katarma, Akhatra, Bikhitra, Twima, Sangrongma, Mailuma, Khuluma, Banirok, Burasa, Haichukma, Siri Jamdu etc. In the Rajmala, the oldest chronicle of Tripura, it is said that the tyrannical King Tripur has been killed by Lord Shiva at the prayer of people of Tripura and Tripur’s son Trilochana (three eyed) has been born by the grace of Shiva. He was named Trilochan because he is believed to be like Shiva with a third eye in

the forehead. King Trilochan is popularly known as Subrai Raja among Tripuris and regarded as a man of knowledge and piety. King Trilochan of puranic age established the fourteen gods at the order of Lord Shiva. The same original Tripuri fourteen gods has been identified with a Sanskrit name in Rajmala – Hara (Shiva or Matai Katar), Uma (Matai Katarma), Hari, Ma (Lakshmi), Vani (Saraswati), Kumara (Kartik), Ganesha, Brahma, Prithvi, Ganga, Abdhi (Samudra), Agni, Kamdev, Himalaya.¹⁸ It is to be noted here that four of these deities (Prithvi, Samudra, Himalaya and Kama) are no traditional deities of the Hindu Pantheon.¹⁸ These Gods have been compared with the 14 deities of Greek Pantheon as given on the Pantheon frieze – Zeus, Hero, Iris, Ares, Demeter, Dionosus, Hermes, Athene, Hephaistos, Poseidon, Apollon, Artemis, Aphrodite, and Eros.¹⁹ These deities has only heads as idol and worshipped annually in the month of Asadha during Shuklapaksha. Only three (Hara, Uma, Hari) deities are worshipped daily and rest of the idols are worshipped during the above mentioned date only for a week. This week long puja and ritual of Caturdasha Devata is known as Kharchi Puja.

Till date the rituals are performed by a hierarchy of Tripuri priests and the head priest being referred to as “Chontai”. They chant Mantra’s in Tripuri language and wear the sacred thread or Janeu. The highly revered Chontai comes out during the Kharchi Puja wearing the golden Janeu and dressed like a king. Pecularity of the symbolism and practice during this puja is apart from idols they also use structures made of decorated Bamboo poles. Other than this idol Tripuris in their indigenous system of worship use Bamboo poles decorated differently for different gods. For example the most common God they worship which is performed as an auspicious ritual is “Lampra Wathop.” In preparing the deity two sets of bamboo poles are joined at a right angle so that there will be one horizontal bar and another vertical bar.

This has distinct iconography. The horizontal

bar symbolizes the female or “Prakriti” and the vertical bar symbolizes the male or “Purusha” aspect of the cosmos like in every ancient civilisation.²⁰ Most of the worship or rituals are performed by a village priest called Ochai and outside the house with this Lampra Wathop. This system of worship without a temple and without images reminds us of the early vedic system of worship. This observation leads us to opine that –“The vedic Aryans worshipped their numerous Gods and Goddesses with simple rituals in most cases without the help of a temple or an image, probably this situation is preserved in the tribal society till today. This is practically nirakara upasana.”²¹ Other than the fourteen Gods, Tripuris celebrate and worship Garia at the beginning of the New Year and Ker puja, while the previous one is of enjoyment and the later one is of great purity, continence, discipline and self restraint. Since ancient time Ker Puja has been given a great importance by the royal family of Tripura as it is performed annually at the palace by the royal priest called Chontai after a fortnight from Karchi puja on any Tuesday or Saturday whichever comes first during Krishnapaksha or the fortnight of the decaying of the full moon in the month of Asadha. Many scholar has found similarity of vedic deity Ka in Ker puja.²² Ker puja is the reminiscence of Nagarakirtan as it is done for the welfare of the whole country²³. Both Kharchi and Ker puja is now included in every regional Hindu calendar or Panchang. But Tripuris also practice other mainstream Hindu festivals like observing Durga puja, Mahashivaratri, Kali puja, Shani puja, Doljatra (Holi of Radha Krishna) and Rathayatra apart from the above indigenous religious practices. So for the Tripuris and other tribes of Tripura, Hinduism means inclusive of all the practices indigenous as well as of general Hinduism.

Metaphysical and spiritual tradition

Prof. S.K Chatterji has said –“The Kiratas..... contributed a great deal in the evolution of Hindu history and culture in North east and

Eastern India.”²⁴ According to many scholars vedantic philosophy has arised from the assimilation of many tribes and their belief in prehistoric India. Prof S.K Chatterji has also drawn the plausible conclusion that –“The ideas of Karma and transmigration, the practice of Yoga, the religious and philosophical idea centering round the conception of the Divinity as Siva and Devi and as Vishnu, the Hindu ritual of Homa – all these and much more in Hindu religion and thought would appear to be non-Aryan in origin.”²⁵ The Tripuris like other Hindus believe in soul or atman in

human body. In Tripuri language soul is called “Fala”. So far the origin of this word Fala has not been traced and “a deeper probe into the origin of this Tripuri term is highly essential and it is expected to bring light to such interesting religio-philosophical data about the Tripuri tribe...”²⁶ The Tripuris believe soul exists even after death and can appear before mortals may be in a visible form for man to see. They also believe soul lives human body temporarily during sleep. Interestingly this belief is also noted in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.²⁷ When a man dies the soul lives his body to enter heaven



Caturdasba Devata and Ker Puja

or hell depending upon the quality of his action in this life and rebirth shall take place and the quality of life in next birth will be determined by the action in the previous life. So practically there is no difference in the conception of soul with other Sanatani Hindus. In the ancient Tripuri folk songs also we can see the same concept of soul and destiny seen.²⁸ In a folk song the theme of dream was seen and these are not idle dreams but reflections of reality beyond. In Indian philosophy the dream state of the soul has also been admitted. Even in Tripuri folk tales we can see the concept of Gods, spirits and deities where we see that an animal also has a soul and has the power of destruction post life.²⁹ Tripuris are God believers. They study ancient Indian texts like Mahabharata, Ramayana and Gita with firm belief and devotion. Hence their views on metaphysical and spiritual questions are not different from those of the general Hindus. But it is also almost similar to the fact that like most Hindus, the majority section of the Tripuri tribe worship various deities not for spiritual gain like attainment of “Moksha” but for worldly matters.

Efforts of Revival of the original faith

Until the merger of Tripura princely state to the Indian Union on 15th of October 1949, western religion missionaries could not find a foothold in the state as their activities has been strictly prohibited by the Kings of Tripura. Since merger Tripura has seen many ups and down as the Tripuris became minority in their homeland within a year after partition of India and a major shift in patronage of their traditions from a protecting Monarchy to tactical majoritarian democracy, leaves the Tripuri religion and traditions into oblivion. Final blow came during the ethnic clash of 1980 riots in Tripura which shattered the Tripuris. The situation was exploited by the western religious missionaries to convert a big section of the society. To counter the religious conversion many indigenous body stood up to keep the society

faithful. Largely to mention is Jamatia Hoda and Tripur Kshatriya Samaj. The Jamatia Hoda is an organisation and head of Jamatia samaj which is a more than four century old organisation. Recently Jamatia Hoda was successful to legalise their customary laws in Tripura State Assembly via a long struggle. On the other hand Tripur Kshatriya Samaj is an organisation created for Tripuris by Legendary Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur of Tripura in 1930, was active until merger and has been a defunct organisation in post democratic Tripura due to lack of patronage. The head of the Tripur Kshatriya Samaj by law should be the ruling King of Tripuri dynasty. Recently this organisation got a new lease of life since 2008 by the hard work of a few dedicated and educated members of the society. Tripur Kshatriya Samaj now successfully could bring some unity among the Tripuri tribe in matter of faith and conversion as evident by the recognition of stietyate govt. as a premier body of Tripuri society. The aim of the Tripur Kshatriya Samaj can only be attained by legalising their customary rights which still seems to be far from reality. Another organisation which is working among all the society of Tripura especially among the poor tribals is Shantikali mission established by Gurudev Shantikali. Despite the assassination of Shantikali Maharaj in 2000 and the massacring of his Ashrams by militants, their works continued and now it has blossomed into an organisation of importance for the Hindu Tripuris and other tribes too.

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In quest of history of the Tripuri People of Tripura -An Overview

Naresh Ch. Dev Varma

Generally, history means recorded past events, specially the events of political, social and economic development of a country, a continent or the world. But the true history of a land should not merely be a chronological catalogue of events related to kings and queens, years of their reign, territorial expansions, victory and defeat in battles or traditional court intrigues engineered by self-seekers for political power or throne. The real history should focus on the evolution of civilization built up by the common people as a result of collective endeavours over the ages such as how they lived and what their living conditions were, their vocations and productive activities, their trade and commerce, religion and culture, music and architecture.

There are two books of chronicle of the Tripura royal dynasty available which are the only basis for looking back on the past history of Tripura. The first is "Rajamala ba Tripurar Itihash" (Rajamala or history of Tripura) authored by Kailash Chandra Singha and published in 1897 A.D. The other one is "Shri Rajamala" edited by Kaliprasanna Sen which was published in four series (Lahar). The first series of the same was published in 1926 A.D. and the other three series were published in the subsequent years. "Shri Rajamala" was composed under the royal patronage and most of the events were recorded at the will and pleasure of the kings based on legends, traditions and imaginations. Therefore, "Shri Rajamala" cannot be considered as the real history of Tripura. In comparison, Kailash Chandra Singha, however, made every effort to make his Rajamala more

reliably composed based on recorded and unrecorded materials.

Even though the ruling dynasty of Tripura has been pretty old, it cannot be said on the basis of records when it was actually founded and by whom or when the State became a powerful political entity in the east and north-east of our country. There are legendary tales purporting the ruling dynasty of Tripura descended from the lunar dynasty of Druhya, youngest son of Yayati. According to the "Shri Rajmala" edited by Kaliprasanna Sen, Druhya is said to have ruled over India from his capital of "Pratisthapura" situated at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna in the vicinity of modern Allahabad. One of his descendants travelled to Assam and set up a kingdom at Tribeg on the bank of the river "Kapil" (Brahmaputra) in the present Nagaon district. Thereafter, King Pratita, one of the descendants in the line, moved further south and reached Dharmanagar on the river Juri to set up the seat of administration there. After several generations another king in the line Yujarpha occupied Bishalgarh that might be a place in what is now Bangladesh. Ratna Manikya-1 who ruled Tripura in the later half of the 15th century is identified as the 25th descendant of Yujarpha. Thus according to "Shri Rajmala", Tripura's former ruling dynasty originated from somewhere near modern Allahabad in the heartland of India.

The account of Hiuen Tsang's travels in India in the seventh century throws some light on the subject. Hiuen Tsang recorded in his travelogue Si-u-ki that to the north-east of the country of

Samatata (corresponding to the East Bengal districts Comilla, Noakhali and Chittagong) on the border of the sea, among mountains and valleys one comes upon the kingdom of Chi-li-teha-le (srikshetra) and beyond that on the bay to the south-east, one finds a realm of Kia-no-lane-kia (Kamalanka), and farther still to the south is a kingdom of To-lo-po-ti (Darapati). The belief is that Kamalanka is the ancient name of Comilla while To-lo-po-ti may signify Tripura, for it may be possible that Tripura at that time lay to the south and east of Comilla.

The Burmese chronicle of “Maharajoang” indicates that in the middle of the 11th century a prince from Patikara (near by the present-day Comilla) entered into matrimonial relations with the royal family of Burma and his successors ruled in Burma for more than 200 years. Kamalanka, Patikara and other places were ruled by king’s descending from the family of one Ranavankamalla, and in the “Maharajoang” too one finds mention of this Ranavankamalla. All these suggest that strong links were forged between Burma and the adjoining areas of Tripura.

But Kailash Chandra Singha in his “Rajmala ba Tripurar Itihash” (Rajmala or history of Tripura) expressed a different view. He stated that the Aryans of the old days named the land between Kamrup and Rakshiang “Summa”. Its other name was Kirata land. There is a record in the “Bishnu-Purana” that the home of the Kiratas was the eastern region of India. Then it is found that the Aryan saints called the people of Louhityo-bongsiyo (red colour race) by the name of “Kirata”. Thereafter, in course of time the Kirata land was known as “Tripura”. Kailash Ch. Singha also explained in his book about the origin of the word “Tripura”, which may be considered more acceptable than those of other views expressed in this respect. At the end, he said that the non-Aryan Kirata people who were known as “Tipra” (Tripura), called the water in their language “Tui”, and they called “Pra” for the word confluence. Being compounded these two words “Tui and Pra” stood

the word “Tuipra”, and in course of time this “Tuipra”, was transformed to “Tripura”.

Kailash Ch. Singha stated in his “Rajamala ba Tripurar Itihash” (Rajamala or History of Tripura) that in ancient times there was a powerful dynasty of the Shan race in northern Burma. The kingdom was known as Poang and its capital was at Maguang. A clan of this Shan dynasty is said to have set up a kingdom in the eastern part of Kamrup (Assam). The rulers of the kingdom used the title “Pha” after their name. Once the local tribal inhabitants rose against this king in rebellion and made him flee the country. While the elder son of the deposed king founded a kingdom in the Naga Hills (ancient Hiramba), the younger son is said to have set up another kingdom in northern Cachar. The notion is that this second kingdom has come to be known as Tripura. Quite possibly that initially this kingdom was contiguous with Hiramba, but gradually extended to the south and west. From these accounts and particularly the cognomen “Pha” used by the rulers of Tripura prior to Ratna Pha (15th century), when “Pha” was replaced by “Manikya”, it seems probable that the ruling family of Tripura descended from the Shan dynasty of northern Burma. This opinion is further reinforced by the fact that the early settlers of Tripura were of Indo-Mongoloid origin.

From the epics and the “Puras” it could not yet be established as to when and how the land came to be known as Tripura. This may be said that the Bengali “Shri Rajamala”, in its present form, which is believed to be one of the source materials of the former royal dynasty of Tripura, is not actually a product of the 15th century. The language in which the latest editions have been published leads one to infer that the works are definitely of a later date when Bengali verse had already attained a marked stage of development. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee was of the opinion that the real historical account of Tripura dates back from the 15th century, when the first version of the Rajamala was composed by the royal priest Durlabendra and the two brahmin scholars,-

Sukreswara and Barneswara. But in regard to the period prior to the 15th century– “The historical value of the chronicle is worthless” as commented by Dr. Chatterjee. Dr. Dinesh Ch. Sircar said, - “both the first and second parts of the present Rajamala were compiled in the early 19th century.” He further added, “The accounts of the Rajamala have a historical basis and are fairly reliable in regard to the period witnessed by the compilers. In regard to the earlier periods, however, the compilers must have relied on traditions, recorded or unrecorded and their own imaginations. It, therefore, seems to us that the details furnished by the earlier part of the present Rajamala regarding history of the Tripura royal family down to the 18th century require verification from other sources.”

In this context, the sequence of the succession of Dharma Manikya and Ratna Manikya-1 may be cited as an instance in point. According to the Rajamala, Ratna Manikya-1 was the first prominent king of Tripura who used the title of “Manikya” and he is said to have ruled much earlier than Dharma Manikya. It is further said that after Ratna Manikya there had been three kings, - Pratap Manikya, Mukut Manikya, Maha Manikya and Dharma Manikya is said to have been the son of Maha Manikya. This account of succession is erroneous, which has now been established beyond doubt on the basis of numismatic evidences. That Dharma Manikya ruled earlier than Ratna Manikya-1 is now clear from the copper-plate inscription of Dharma Manikya issued in 1380 Saka (1458 AD) and the coin of Ratna Manikya-1 minted in 1386 Saka (1464 AD) and thereafter. So, the account of the Rajamala cannot be accepted as authentic in every case. Thus, for the purpose of our present discussion it is not considered relevant to delve deep into the unknown pages of Tripura's ancient history. This task may be taken up by researchers purely from the historical point of view, and in this task additional epigraphic or numismatic materials pertaining to the pre-Manikya period, if available, will be of considerable value to them. This relates particularly to the pre-Manikya

dynasties of Khadga, Chandra and Deva in and around Lalmai-Mainamati (modern Comilla region of Bangladesh) of which Pilak in Belonia Sub-Division of Tripura might be one of the major administrative and cultural centers.

Now, still the questions are, who were the early people of Tripura and where did they come from? The scholars are of the view that the Tripuris as also the Cacharis and other tribes of the eastern India are of Mongoloid origin. They are Tibeto-Burmans and believed to have followed the river courses of the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irawadi to come to India from eastern Tibet and northern Burma. Possibly one of these groups came to Tripura through Assam and via Garu Hills to live here as early settlers.

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee is of the opinion that the tribes of the Indo-Mongoloid and in respect of language who belong to the Bodo Group descended from the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, got scattered over the entire Brahamaputra valley and also north and east Bengal, thus constituting a major block in north-east India. They were the most important Indo-Mongoloid group in north-eastern India and according to Dr. Chatterjee, they formed one of the main bases of the population in this region. From an analysis of the wide range of extension of their language, Dr. Chatterjee has further concluded that from Cachar and Sylhet, the Bodos had moved to Tripura where the Bodo-speaking group in the shape of the Tipra tribe founded the State. Thereafter, it was believed that they spread further to Comilla and Noakhali districts to occupy the mouth of the Ganga by the eastern sea.

It may be noted here that there are somehow and somewhat cohesive historical facts in the views expressed by Kailash Ch. Singha and Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee regarding arrival of the early settlers to Tripura. But yet it is not possible to ascertain the exact time of their arrival to this land of Tripura.

Now answer to this question of the arrival

time of the early settlers may be searched in the light of linguistics. The views of Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattarjee has already been mentioned here that the Kacharis, also known as Dimasa, Tripuris and other tribes of the north-east region belong to the Bodo Group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Kailash Ch. Singha in his book “Rajamala ba Tripurar Itihash” (Rajamala or history of Tripura) stated that the younger son of the deposed king of Kamrup established another Kingdom in the northern Cachar which was known as Tripura in the olden days. Subsequently that Kingdom was gradually extended towards south up to the land of the present day Tripura, and then beyond Tripura up to Sylhet, Dacca, Faridpur, Chittagong and even Aracan.

Renowned linguist H.A. Gleason Jr. stated in his book,- An introduction to Descriptive Linguistics that, “if 66 percent of the basic morpheme stock seems to be cognate in two languages, we may assume that they have been separate for 1000 years. If 44 percent is cognate, 2000 years is the most probable period of separation.”

As at present, 55-60 percent of the basic morpheme is cognate between Kokborok (Tripuri Language) and the Dimasa. Therefore, in the light of glottochronology of linguistics the period of separation between the Kokborok (Tripuri language) and the Dimasa is 1200-1400 years. That is to say, the time of staying of the Dimasa kings and people in north Cachar is at least 1200 years back, and they came to Tripura from Cachar before 1200-1400 years. After their settling down in the land of Tripura, their language became a separate language known as Tripuri language, presently known as Kokborok. It has almost been a historically agreed fact that the royal dynasty of Tripura belonged to the Tipra (Tripuri) people. Keeping aside the legendary and misty events, history of Tripura royal dynasty and the Tripuri people may be taken as reliable from the time of establishment of their kingdom in eastern Kamrup when the kings are said to have used the title

“Pha” as mentioned by Kailash Chandra Singha in his “Rajamala ba Tripura Itihash” (Rajmala or history of Tripura).

In his aforesaid book, Kailash Chandra Singha showed genealogy of the Tripura royal dynasty from Tripur to Birchandra Manikya numbering 140 kings, and it is found that Iswar Pha was the first King with the title “Pha” who was the twenty-eight descendant from Tripur.

After reviewing carefully, the time of Manikyas’ reign has been re-ascertained based on the coins, inscriptions and other factual materials discovered in Tripura and nearby areas. It has been enumerated that thirty-nine kings from Dharma Manikya to Birbikram Kishore Manikya ruled Tripura for a long spell of 489 years (from 1458 to 1947 AD). Taking into consideration of this account, it is estimated roughly that the period of reign of 116 kings from Iswar Pha to Birbikram Kishore Manikya stood at least 1450 years. Therefore, probable history of the Tripuri people dates back to 1450 years at least. And in the light of the glottochronology of linguistics and keeping the kingdom of the Tripura royal dynasty in north Cachar in view, this history stood at least 1200 years. Yet, I reiterate that the history of the Tripura royal dynasty and the Tripuri people prior to the Manikya era is still shrouded in mystery than reality. □

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The Golden lessons of Aachu Sibrai

Pancharam Riang

“Sibrai bu chongnang mi,
Hangrai bu wainang mi”_

Is a root hymns retold by Bru Aukchais which means “**The Supreme God Aachu Sibrai**, the planner of the universe and **Aachu Hangrai** the executor of the plans that are chalked out by Him (Sibrai) in the universe.

The above lines are recited first by the Aukchai (traditional priest) before chanting Kau-mahthai (hymn) to solemnise a newly married couple. It has been a tradition of ours that the Aukchais have to spell the above two lines first before execution / performance of any major puja of the community. Why are these two lines first chanted by the Aukchais? Yes, it has been done as a tradition to recollect and pay a due courtesy to our Supreme God Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai who taught our first male ancestor named Debtoroni and female ancestor Deblokhi the lesson to form a society what we all are enjoying today. The Bru people believe that the Supreme God Aachu Sibrai has created this mundane world, sky, human beings, animals, plants and other beautiful creatures on the universe and gave us the power of super intelligence to build a bond of society. The Aukchais of our Bru community try to remind the society about the blessings and lesson we had received through our first ancestors from Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai.

The Bru people believe that there is a soul in each object present on the surface of earth. They regard the Sun, the Moon, the earth, the fire, the water and other deities like Soinairao, Bonirao, Toibuma, Songgrongma, Mainouhma, Khunouhma,

Maikchamma, Thuhnairao, Broirao etc. The above deities have their own specific field of action. The twin-brother -Soinairao deities have been believed to be the record keeper or registrar of the universe. They keep record of every birth and death of human beings. They keep record of the assignments and tasks given to a human being for the entire span of his/her life. It is like a minute to minute schedule of a programme. The twin-brother –Bonirao are regarded as the escort or body guard of each member of Bru community. The Toibuma is regarded as Goddess of water, Mainouhma as goddess of grain, Khunouhma as Goddess of cotton, Maikchamma as Goddess of seeds, Songgrongma as Goddess of security, Thuhnairao as husband of Goddess of grain. Our ancestors had learnt this philosophy from the Almighty Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai. After having created the universe and other creatures, they felt the need to create a soul having resemblance to them and will have enough intelligence to serve and offer obeisance to the Almighty. They termed the soul as human being (brouh).

But how to create the human being? At once Aamong Toibuma with her divine power gave two stone eggs to Aachu Sibrai to turn it into human being. Aachu Sibrai in turn gave it to hermit Vyasmoni, then he gave it to Kasyapa Moni and then to the Biyanggoma-Biyangopha. They hatched out the two stone eggs and their own two eggs. Debtoroni and Deblokhi born out of the stone eggs and deity Bonirao brothers born out of her (Biyangoma) own eggs.

As per legend, Debtoroni and Deblokhi were the first human being in this universe. The supreme

God Aachu Sibrai turned himself an octogenarian old man having grey hair and called himself Bura-khongtrong. He brought up the Bru's first ancestors baby Debtoroni and baby Deblokhi. The siblings were born out of stone eggs. Along with them, the twin-brother Bonirao were also brought up by Bura-khingtrong. Slowly and steadily they grew up and they were taught different games, and other human knowledge. As a boy child Debtoroni and twin-brother Bonirao were taught games such as spinning top and suoi. It is a kind of large size wild seeds collected from a ziantbean that usually creeps up above the tree. The colour of the seeds is dark-tan and size 2.5 inch raddi and .5 inch height like a small discus. Human being Debtoroni and twin-brother Bonirao played the above mentioned games during their childhood. Competitions were held between the Debtoroni and Bonirao. Most of the competitions were won by Debtoroni and the Bonirao had to face defeat. Debtoroni was so strong that deities could not face him. The spinning of top was so fast and forceful that they got injuries on their body most of the time.

The female children of the Bru community used to play Suoi in their childhood as that was taught to our female ancestor (Deblokhi) who played in her childhood when she was living with grandpa Bura-khongtrong. With the passage of time, they (Debtoroni & Deblokhi) grew up and attained the age of puberty then they were given to play DULEM, a game where the players have to lie-down intimately covered by a Boki (a traditional bed sheet) for at least 15-20 minutes. The items required in the games are- a house where all the elder members have gone for jhum cultivation or other score of work, some amount of ashes, some piece of broom, traditional woven piece having 2-2.5 sq. Ft flat area with mud plaster where the Dulem deity will sow the piece of broom on the ashes. It is believed that in the DULEM game the spirit of Dulem deity appeared himself before the players when the rhyme of Dulem is recited in a melodious tune by the joyful children players. As

per rules of the game, the players have to lie down closely with a partner irrespective of sex, especially with the opposite sex. A boy may have to lie down/sleep in pair with a girl and have to remain covered in a Boki for at least 15 to 20 minute till the Dulem rhyme is recited completely in its specific pause. There may be many pairs of players in a game.

The Dulem rhyme runs as under-

“ Dulem....Dulem.....
Doiya....paiya.....nouhkha ... grong
Kormo- wouhsamoni....
..... Ho....ha.....”

The rhymes required to be chanted for seven times in a chorus with a certain style of pause. It is believed that the Dulem God would come himself in the house where the game is being played. The Dulem god is invoked by the children to appear before them. The Dulem God appear in the house if he is pleased with the rhymes recited by the children players. Each time of recitation of Dulem rhyme is treated as an equal time span of a night. The Dulem god come before the players and planted the small piece of broom in a specific row on the ashes kept earlier by the players. When the players complete their recitation of the rhyme for seven times all the players with a chorus sound- “Hoi.” remove the Boki by which they cover themselves. Happily all the players get up and approach towards the THAUHPHA (a traditional fire place) to see whether the Dulem god is satisfied with the invocation rhyme they had recited .If he is satisfied with them the piece of broom could be seen planted over the ashes in a specific row. Having completed the rhymes the players get up to see result ,if the players see that the ingredients of the game is lying as it is then it is considered that the Dulem god did not hear the players. Once again the players have to continue the game. In one sense, the game is very enjoyable to the children but on the other side, the libido of the players become aroused due to

intimate closeness to opposite sex for 15-20 minute. As told by our ancestors, the game was taught to our first male ancestor Debtoroni and female ancestors Deblokhi by Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai with a mission to arouse their libido for creation of human being in this mundane world.

Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai chalked out another plan to get them married. The plan was so forceful and unique that the Bru civilisation till today abide by the rules of marriage that was followed when our first ancestors Debtoroni-Deblokhi were bound for a wedlock. In our customs, solemnisation of marriage ceremony, holy water is poured by the Aukchai (priest) on the forehead of the groom by chanting the Kau-mahthai (hymn). It is interesting to note that in the marriage ceremony of Bru community, bride is not required to sit on the haya (pandel) with the groom and no holy water is poured on her forehead, instead of her, Rsha, a breast cover cloth of the bride is compulsorily required and is laid on the floor where the groom has to sit before being poured holy water. As Hindu marriage is solemnised in presence of fire god whereas our marriage is solemnised in presence of Aamong Toibuma (Goddess of Water). Aamong Toibuma in disguise of a "Taocingchong" bird made Debtoroni to accept to marry his sister Deblokhi for some amount of water. This is the reason why the holy water is poured on the forehead of the groom. An interesting myth prevalent in the Bru society was that once Aachu Sibrai asked Debtoroni and Deblokhi to get married so that a good family may be formed and flourished by being blessed with children. They both felt ashamed to the proposal of Supreme God Aachu Sibrai. Finding no other way, Aachu Sibrai pretended that he was suffering from severe fever with high temperature shivering like a small chick shivers when gotten wet by rain water. He immediately ordered Debtoroni to get some water for him. Debtoroni went to bring water from the nearby stream with a "Toi-wasung" (a bamboo

tube). He reached the stream and as he was about to dip the bamboo tube to draw water then a Taoching-chongma (a small bird) who had her nest on a tree nearby the stream forbade him saying "Hi.....boy, the amount of water of the stream is not sufficient enough for my chicks and mine, so I can not allow you to draw water from it". Debtoroni tried to draw water defying the bird, the stream dried up on its own. He rushed to another stream to draw a tube of water for his grandfather and again found the bird sticking around it. When the boy tried to draw water from the stream, the bird again prohibited him from doing so. Being in the utmost urgency, he tried to draw water from the stream defying the birds prohibition, astonishingly, it became dried up. Likewise, Debtoroni had to roam many streams in vain in search of some water for his ailing grandfather Aachu Sibrai alias Burakhong-trong. Being tired he asked the bird, "on what conditions will you allow me to draw water from your stream?" The bird replied, "You must get married to your sister Deblokhi". Being ashamed he at once hesitated to accept the proposal of the bird. After having much thought, he accepted the proposal and the bird allowed the boy to draw some water from the stream. In reality, the bird is not merely a bird, it is the Goddess of water in disguise i.e Ganga. The boy was allowed to draw water and told by the bird that the "Toi-wasung" (a bamboo tube used for carrying water) should be carried on the head till he reached their place. The bamboo tube had been prepared intentionally by Aachu Sibrai which had a crack in the joint in the lower side so that water in it may ooze out from the point of crack when carried. As instructed by the bird, the boy carried water placing the tube over his head. As the tube had a crack, water content in it slowly came out from the point of crack and he got drenched when reaching their place. For reasons of many obstructions created by the bird (Goddess of water in disguise), the boy reached lately to their place. When he reached their place, he was asked by

Aachu Sibrai why he was so late to return with water. The boy felt ashamed and did not reply as to why he was late as it was related to getting married to his sister Delokhi. Grandfather Aachu Sibrai got annoyed and denied to drink water and told them that he would prefer to die rather than get better by drinking water. The boy had to narrate the whole incident that he faced while trying to draw water from the stream and the boy added that unless he conceded to the proposal of Taoching-chong bird to marry his sister Deblokhi he would have to return empty handed. Hearing the statement of grandson Debtoroni, Aachu Sibrai @ Bura khongtrong happily took the bamboo tube from him and had a sip of water from it that cured his illness. Aachu Sibrai was very happy having heard the proposal of Taoching-chong-ma bird and told Debtoroni to keep the promise he had made to the bird. Then Debtoroni was told to sit upon a Lairdom leaf and he (Aachu Sibrai) poured the holy water to his forehead and blessed him by chanting KAU-MAHTHAI(hymn) that the marriage system of your generations to come will follow as thus. The Lairdom leaf here represents the breast cover clothe of Deblokhi.

The system of marriage ceremony as performed by Aachu Sibrai in the marriage ceremony of our first male ancestor and female ancestor, is still invogue today in the Bru Community. Till today we maintain our glorious past with good faith on Aachu Sibrai, Aachu Hangrai and the rules or systems they had framed and taught to our ancestors. Our faith on the creation of universe as believed by our ancestors still stand strong today. I retold the myth that has been in prevalence in our society in written form for information of all our brothers and sisters who have a very little knowledge or little interest on the matter. There is also enough reason as to why our educated and young generations did pay less interest on our culture. There is no any book written by members of our community on our cultures, rites and rituals,

and many other conventional rules by which the real Bru culture has been run by Council of Kaskau & Rai of the Riangs headed by 27 Councillors under the strong guidance of KASKAU, RAI, HOULOI-CHUDRY and AUKCHAI-KTOR.

Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai taught our ancestors the rites and rituals to be observed/performed at the time of pregnancy of a female member of the family, delivery time, post-delivery time, baby care, marriage ceremony, death of a man or woman, cremation of a dead person, post-cremation rituals, ritual purification of the family of the deceased etc. All the above rituals have a background which were taught by the Supreme God Aachu Sibrai and Aachu Hangrai like in the case of marriage ceremony of our first ancestor Debtoroni and Deblokhi.

The important rituals are –

1. Gbeing Bumo
2. Kati toi Chaomo
3. Abu sumo
4. Bachauh Kamo
5. Khum-khouh kamo
6. Bolam rimo
7. Mai Khlung mo
8. Haa Moi Taing Mo
9. Baroi Taing mo
10. Hangrai Tito
11. Goroiya-Kalaiya
12. Hathai Kchu

Various ceremonies or pujas are performed by the members of Bru Community round the year round to ensure safeguard and well being of the family members as well as the society. The above list of ceremonies starting from 1-5 is related to pre-delivery to post-delivery of baby where the deities Bonirao, Broirao and Buraha are offered some sacrifices like chicken, egg and sometimes piglet. It is necessary to mention here that the deities of indigenous faiths of Bru Community are

formless and no idols or image are used for the purpose of puja rituals. Instead, a symbol carved on a piece of bamboo with a specific design for each indigenous deity known as “WAA-THOWH” is used to symbolise that particular deity.

Bolam rimo Puja (Mentioned at Serial No. 6) is performed by the villagers every year individually or collectively. The deities attached to it are Soinairao, Bonirao, Songrongma and Buraha. Mai Khlung mo Puja (Serial No. 7) is also performed every year specifically in the month of October when all the harvest of the “HUKBA” (Jhoom cultivation) has been collected completely from the field of cultivation by the farmers to their “MAI-NOUH” (Granary). During the long process of cultivation the crops especially the paddy, cotton and all sorts of vegetables are sometimes harmed or destroyed by insects and wild animals. Sometimes these defective crops are brought to their homes by the farmers stealthily without anybody’s knowledge. The Bru people consider such an action as a non-pious act and an insult to the “Mai-Nouh-Ma” (Goddess of grains), the “Khu-nouh-ma” (Goddess of Cotton), and the “Mai-kcham-ma” (Goddess of Seeds). In such an event the Head of the Bru community known as KASKAU are required to perform the ceremony MAI-KHLUNG-MO. Other than the above cited deities, seven more deities are also required to offered puja. These Pujas continue throughout the day and in the evening three traditional lamps are lit at a time – one in the front door, second in the middle of the house where the Goddess Mainouhma is usually worshipped by the household and the other third one in the back side of the host’s house. The lighted lamps are keenly observed to know which lamp has got extinguished first. The lamp lit in the front door is meant for the villagers, the middle one is meant for the goddess Mainouhma and the backside lamp is meant for the host. If the lamp of the host gets extinguished first, he may be troubled by health related problems or the progress of the harvest of the host may suffer

badly, if the lamp meant for the villagers get extinguished first then the prosperity of the host will be on the move and if the lamp for the goddess of grain gets extinguished first then harvest of the host will be poor in comparison to the labour exerted by the host.

The process of puja is very lengthy and when offerings to the deities are complete, then the Aukchai is given a ceremonial seat to be seated. The Baruwas (assistant to the priest) respectfully offers Arraq (fine traditional malt whisky) to the Aukchai and touches his feet by bowing down his head before the Aukchai. Later the host greets the Aukchai by offering special Arraq and touch his feet by bowing down his head before him and ask the Aukchai about the omen (result) of the pujas offered. The Aukchai gives a briefing to the host in presence of the assembled villagers that it is good or may foretell the future. Amid the process the assembled guests or participants are divided into two groups- one is senior group comprised of the priest, the host and elderly people of the village. The other group is comprised of young boys and girls. Both the groups enjoy the Arraq and Chowh (rice-beer) as prasad of the puja. When the young group become more or less intoxicated they expose their talent of dance by using plates in their hand and dancing to the rhythm of drum beat. Gradually they stand up on the pitcher and dance simultaneously moving their waists and hands with plate. Later they try to balance on bottle with a burning lamp over their heads. This dance is known as HODAIGRI DANCE which is one of the most famous dance form in India and abroad. In the evening goddess Mainouhma is given a farewell by performing another dance known as “KHUM BAILI”. All the performers are adult female members having a child of their own. They perform the dance decorating themselves with KHUM-CHAUH flowers fixed on their head gears. Haa Moi Taing Mo Puja (Serial No.8) is treated as a community puja when obeisance is offered to all the rivers located nearby the

inhabited area and used by the community in the past and present. The rivers kangsari, nakati, bangbari, hambari, ama somtoi, ama chomtoi, etc. are also paid obeisance in the form of hymns. Baroi Taing mo puja (Serial No.9) is performed to offer the Goddess Tripureswari and Aapa Mahadev by the pilgrims who are unable to come to Udaipur for the same. They perform it in their own area in a secret location usually used reserved for the purpose. It is to be mentioned here that the Tripureswari Goddess of Udaipur in Tripura state was first worshipped by Bru Aukchais (priest) when the Manikya dynasty was in full glory. Mother Tripureswari's beloved servant-friend was Moisoti better known as Jolai Moisoti. She belonged to Bru community and her descendents are performing her duty towards Goddess Tripureswari of Udaipur till today. Before coming back to Udaipur from Chhatagram, Goddess Tripureswari and Moisoti used to speak to each other like a friend talks to his/her friend. When goddess Tripureswari was installed at Udaipur, her beloved servant-friend used to bring flowers and fruits of Her choice and served the Goddess till she breathed her last. With the passage of time, everything is gone but one thing still remains alive is the very presence of Moisoti's descendents, which is compulsorily required during the Depawali. Before the sacrifice of buffalo on Depawali day, the descendents of Moisoti would stand guard at the temple with Holy Moshal (torch) in their hands. symbolising holiness. It is sad to mention that a riot took place in Tripura in 1980. The time of Deepawali arrived in its own way in that year too. Tensions of insecurity prevailed everywhere in the state. Therefore the descendents of Moisoti could not be present on the Deepawali day. The authority also took decision to perform the puja without their presence and proceeded for the same. When the time for buffalo sacrifice came the Tolua (cutter) attempted to cut the neck of the animal by a Khorgo (a big & heavy knife for beheading the sacrificial animal) but surprisingly

the forceful hit of Khorgo could not cut even a hair of the animal. Lakhs of pilgrims were astonished to see the mishap. Amid tight security, the descendents of Moisoti were later brought to the temple by the District Administration and the puja was solemnised without any further hiccup.

Hangrai Tito (Serial no.10) relates to offering pujas to 5 (five) Gods and goddesses at the Holy pilgrimage site at Dungur Tito is located under Amarpur Sub-Division, Gomati District of Tripura State. In the recent administrative bifurcation, the pilgrimage site now falls under Karbook Sub-Division. The five deities are- (1) Aapani Mondir (2) Aamongni Modir (3) Aamongni Gbong (4) Bishnu Yapai (5) Under Nouh and (6) Bhandari Bokhouh. All the priests of these pilgrimage sites belong to Bru and the hymn chanted here are in our mother tongue Kaubru. The Hangrai Tito falls usually on 14th /15th January every year. People of all walks of life irrespective of caste, creed, sex etc come to the site to execute their promise of offerings to the deities of this holy place. Some pilgrims come to this holy site to immerse the bones of their deceased relatives and some others come to pray for a good match for their dependents, some for offspring and other sundry purposes. They come to the site and take a deep in the river Gomati and offer prayer to the deities. Lion share of the pilgrims are from Bru tribe and Molsom Tribe. Goroiya-Kalaiya (Serial No.11) relates to Boisu festival which falls usually on April 14th/15th every year. The deity Goroiya and Kalaiya emerged in this mundane world to meet His subjects only for a short span of 7 days. During this period, the activities related to offerings to all other deities are suspended. Whatever matter may come up in this period, all must go to the shelter of Aapa Goroiya and Kalaiya. Aapa Goroiya is to be offered in an pious manner. The symbol of Aapa Goroiya maintained by the Bru tribe is an iron spear fitted at the upside end of a bamboo pole measuring 5 feet in length and a red colour traditional breast cover garment woven by a young girl whose

mensuration cycle has not yet started. The garment has to be tied upon the symbol of Goroiya along with a Georgian 1 rupee coin and fried paddy equal to the number of participants. Maintaining sanctity and purity, proper offerings to the deities are made and thereafter the idol of Aapa Goroiya is taken in a procession around the village. During the procession, the participants belonging to Goroiya-Seingsa-rao exhibit their talents of Goroiya dance in the courtyard of every household of the area. The procession may continue for 7 days and all the house hold of the village would entertain them gladly offering them food and drinks. The children of the village form a group which has been known as Tao-toi-khang-nai-rao to collect eggs and cake and take the blessing of the elders by performing dance in every household of the village. The children beat the drum rhythmically, play the flute, sing traditional songs amidst clappings. Large number of children participate in the proicession. Thus the Boisu festival is enjoyed by the Bru tribe with full fervour and gaiety. Hathai Kchu (Serial No.12) relates to an indigenous temple usually seen to be maintained at the entry point of most of the Bru village where following three stone symbols are installed – (1) Lungdrai (2) Sungkho-tarini-ma (3) Kala-Jiban. The stone depicts the representation of these deities. Way back in 1970s this temple was a symbol of culture of the Bru tribe and along side the temples the sijou plants and china-rose thrived beautifully, matching with the nature of Tripura state. Legend has it that they were human being like any other. Being pious devotee of Lord Siva, they had been blessed to become deities.

The story of the Bru culture has been beautifully preserved by our illiterate ancestors by orally transferring the knowledge about the culture and traditions of the tribe from one generations to another. Generally, all the elder members of every Bru village more or less know their culture, rites and rituals and many other conventional rules of the society. But most of them are not having in depth knowledge about the rituals and rites. Those

who have good command over these knowledges keep themselves aloof from others out of fear of harm that may be caused by the montra. They do not like to share their knowledge with others and remain as introvert. They do not share their knowledge in a proper manner when they are asked about it. During my expedition for gathering information about our culture for the last 35 years, occasionally, I had to share Arraq (traditional fine malt whisky) with them in order to build their confidence and make them feel free to open up before me. When they become more or less intoxicated they begin to share their knowledge with me. Special thanks are due to those who had helped me in my journey to Know My Culture (KMC) or to Know Your Culture (KYC). They are Shri Khotiram Reang (Molikampha) of Luh-Khu-Toisa, the renowned priest among the Bru, Late Krishna Chandra Reang (Sigolmbchu), the descendent of holy devotee Jolai Moisoti of goddess Tripureswari, Shri Rabidhan Reang (Tikenbchu) of Toisarangjauh, an expert about our culture and rituals, Shri Bitta Rai Reang (Gosipha) of Adivasi village, the renowned historian among the Bru Shri Chouhboiha Reang (Monaibchu) of Toisarangjauh, renowned traditional jurist among the Bru Late Buduram Reang of Kalma, a well known traditional priest, Late Joyadhan Reang (Lobenmpha) of Toisarangjauh, a traditional priest and many others.

The Bru tribe has its own traditional administration run by the Council of KASKAU & RAI of the Riangs which has been in vogue for long years before the establishment of Manikya Dynasty of Tripura State. The council is known as BRU MTHOH. The steps for Revitalisation of indigenous Faith of ours has begun from 2009 by performing HAA-MOI-TAING-MO puja, at Chlakaham, the river basin of Gomati under Gomati District of Tripura State, where all the deities of the Brus are revered by then and where all the rivers flow by the habitats of the Brus. They worship the rivers by offering pujas with sacrifice of animals. We have started recording the collected knowledge about

our culture and traditions in the form of books, magazines and journals, scripted by our own community members. Our aim is to disseminate our myths, stories, songs and poems for our new generations who have become admirers of English literature as they were brought up under the culture of convent education.

It is for information of our Bru brothers and sisters that on October 18th & 19th , 2018 we had organized a State Level –KASKAU-MAI-KHLUNG-MO programme at Karbook Panjiam H.S.School, under Gomati District of Tripura State where Rajmata Bibhu Kumari Devi, Ex-MP (Loksabha) had added glory to the programme as Inaugurator. Shri Mever Kr. Jamatia, Minister for the Deptt. of Tribal Welfare & Forest etc., Govt. of Tripura has graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Shri Ranjit Das, MLA, Tripura and Shri B Tripura, MLA, Tripura graced the ceremony as Guests of Honour. That was the first ever step taken in the state to appease the goddess of Lakshmi and other deities with sacrifice of pig, hens, eggs etc in collaboration with the Government of Tripura. The 2019 AD has been a historic year for the Bru tribe because this year the BRU MTHOH could successfully organise the programme of KASKAU-MAI-KHLUNG-MO HODAIGRI FESTIVAL in the premises of Malanchabas, Agartala, the royal private residence

of Manikya dynasty of Tripura on 13th & 14th October. The role of hosts and patrons was carried out by the Royal Family of Tripura and provided all sorts of help generously. Shri Biplab Kr. Deb, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tripura had graced the programme as Inaugurator on the inaugural day and Shri Jishnu Deb Barman, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Govt. of Tripura glorified the second day of the festival and the guests and other dignitaries present in the programme were- Rajmata Bhibu Kumari Devi (Ex-MP), Bara Kumari Pragya Deb Barman, Mr. Pramode Reang, Hon'ble MLA, Tripura Legislative Assembly, Mr. U. Venkatesworolu, Hon'ble Chief Secretary, Govt. of Tripura, Mr. A Rastogi, P.C.C.F , Mr. M.L.Dey, Secretary, I.C.A and Mrs. Niti Deb wife of the Tripura C.M, Rai of Molsom Community and all councillors and all Choudhuries of different tiers of traditional administrations were present in the august Kaskau Mai Khlungmo Festival, held for the first time in the state capital after the demise of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur. The educated younger generation of the Bru community has already started their journey in search the roots of their culture and beliefs leaving behind their ignorance about their traditional religion and anglicised politics beliefs. □

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Introduction of “Bru” (Reang/Riang) community of Tripura

Braja roy Reang
Jatindra Reang
Ratanjoy Reang

The state of Tripura is a small state of Indian dominion. This state is located in the northeastern part of India. Tripura covers an area of 10477 sq km. There are total of eight states in North-East India. The state of Tripura is one of them. The total population of the state of Tripura is presently over 37 lakhs. Topography of the state is a mix of mountains and plains. There are 19 tribal groups in the state of Tripura. Tribal populace of the state is 11,66,413 according to the 2011 census. Of these 19 tribes, one of the officially recognized aboriginal tribes is 'Bru' and belongs to Rieng community. Their number is more than 1,88,220 as per the census of 2011 AD.

(1) National Community Identity: - The primitive identity was, “Bru” Tribe. 'Riang, is actually a name of the sub-community of the “Bru” tribe, which in our own language is called Panji. In our tribe there are total of 13 Panji or sub-communities known as (1) Malsai, (2) Meska, (3) Chorkhi, (4) Apetah, (5) Chongpreng, (6) Wirem, (6) Naukham, (6) Toimoi, (9) Yakstam, (10) Yakch, (11) Mssa, (12) Raikchak (13) Rieng/Reang Etc. These 13 sub-communities are known as ‘Bru, Janajati.’

(2) Linguistic identity: - The mother tongue ‘Bru’ community is called Kau Bru. Kau means language and 'Bru, means the name of a nation. Kao Bru language is named after the mother tongue of this “Bru” community. What is now known as the language of the Rieng community is not an Aryan language but the Bru language, and it is their true identity. It is felt that instead

of the “Bru”, (Riang) community name, our real identity should be “Bru” tribe.

(3) Clothing Council and Professional Identity: - We have “Bru, Tribal Specific Clothing Council” like other tribes. Cloth used for the lower of the body is called Rinai, for the middle part of the body is called “Risha” and the “Lokayak” (necklace) is used in the neck, and the cloth used on the head is called “Kamsayak”. These are the clothing of the Bru women. These are skillfully made by the Bru, women themselves by making yarn from the jumbed cotton. From primitive times, the community practised jum farming as a national profession. The only way in those days was to provide for food and economic self-sufficiency. Currently many families have come out of this profession, because these tribes now prefer to go for education. Awareness has now increased by overcoming primitive style of living. They are now abundoing old practices of jhum cultivation and vegetable gardening.

(4) Characteristic traits: - Characteristically the Bru tribes are very simple. They trust people very easily. As a result, they was cheated by others in olden days. They are also very hospitable. The Bru Tribal society considers respecting the elderly is a moral obligation. No man or his wife could be called by name if they have become parents. Their tradition demands that the parents are to be identified by the names of their children. They consider it a sin to call elder people by their names. The society is following these traditions since ancient times.

(5) Social Characteristics: - From time immemorial, the Bru community has devised customs and laws for the purpose of carrying out their social activities. In the social system of that time, there were two persons in each locality or village as the director of that particular society. These two people used to do the work of managing different aspects of the society. They were called Chowdhury and Karbari. They were the ones who took care of the affairs of the locality or village. Those who were at a higher level were called Mayal Chowdhury and Mayal Karbari. They had the power to take care of everything from the block level to higher level. Those who look after the subdivisional level were called Houkloi Chowdhury and Doloï karbari. They had the power to look after from the subdivision level and above. Kaskau and Yaksong were at a higher level than them. They looked after the entire district. And those who looked after the state were called Rai and Chapiya. Their responsibility was to oversee various activities at the state level. There were also kings and ministers in the kingdom when the kings used to rule the Bru tribe.

(6) Culture of primitive Bru (Riang) tribes: From ancient times, Bru, tribes have their own culture. The culture of these tribes is different from other tribes. These tribes are very good at dancing and singing. These tribes also used various musical instruments ranging from flute to drums. There are different types of dance and songs for different occasions. Dance songs are different in wedding ceremonies. The dance songs of the puja-parvan ceremony are different. Dance songs are different at festivals or big events. Medal dances are performed to win the hearts of the audience at Hajagiri youth festivals and big events. It is not possible for everyone to perform this dance. He needs to be trained in advance. Today, many people from different states of India marvel at their dancing skills. At present in the places where there are Ram temples under Sanatan Dharma

Mandali or Sanatan Ram Mandali, bhajans of God are sung in the temples according to their own culture. Their traditional dress also fascinates the spectators. The culture of the Bru tribe is preserved under this Ram Mandali. Bhajan kirtan is held at temples every Wednesday morning and evening. Bhajan kirtan is also performed in the Ram temples on Tuesdays and Saturday evenings. Thus the religious culture of the Bru tribes has been well preserved.

(7) The Primitive Bru, Tribal Cultivation Method: Bru, or Riang tribes have been making a living from time immemorial by relying on jum cultivation and song called 'Dawa' in our language. Since the tribe practised traditional jhum cultivation they had to migrate from one place to another and have lost their stability in the state. It is very painful to hear these words. Because these tribes today, millions of people, thousands of families have been expelled from different countries, they have lost their possessions and have been deprived of their rights. These tribes are the indigenous people of the state of Tripura as per recorded history. It is therefore pertinent to demand restoration of the just rights of the Bru tribe, who are the aboriginal tribes.

(A) Abandonment of primitive religious beliefs: - Bru tribes were very religious since ancient times. In the olden times these tribes were followers of traditional religion of their own. This religion is very unique and incomparable. The 'Bru' tribes were devotees of the traditional God, the creator of the universe. These tribes also worshipped other gods by offering nabadi i.e. prasad. These people are the ones who revered the primordial word of God "Ong" The meaning of this sentence is, to accept it, in our language. That is to say, if one agrees to do any work or if he is given the responsibility of doing a work, then he must do the work. He cannot ignore it under any circumstance. In this way, in ancient times, the people devotedly used to follow the truth. But at

present some of these issues are being ignored and in some cases it is also being flouted. Because no one is willing to keep the truth alive today. Thus the Bru identify and their religious traditions of Surya bong's Maladhara sanantan religion is at peril. In the olden days men of the tribe used to wear traditional necklaces but now they seldom use it. From the time of creation the traditional histories of the tribe used to be told in the form of stories by the elders for the benefit of their young progenies as a bed side story. No one or any individual has ever tried to write down those stories and save them in print. Thus the ancient histories were lost and with them all those religious beliefs practiced by the society became extinct. This is the main reason why the elders can now only state the geneology of the tribe orally but cannot show any written proof. Thus today we have lost the religious beliefs that we had in the beginning.

(B) Historical explanation: - According to the legends propagated by our ancestors, it is known that the Bru tribes came to Tripura as kings. Ratanfa is mentioned as the first king of the state of Tripura. He was a 'Bru' in origin. The Tripura 'Rajmala' offers further details on the issue. As per the oral history of the tribe the borders of Tripura state were said to have been extended up to Rangamati, in present day Bangladesh. It is still known as Riang Desh in the Dighinala area of present day Bangladesh. The stories of our ancestors, Galku Ram, Nasmati, Sareti, are known to have been used as bathing ghats in the Karnafuli river in present-day Bangladesh. At that time KasKau Raja was the king of the state of Tripura. He was the king of the 'Bru', or Riang community. But these are many years before independence. The word of mouth was so true reflection of history in those days. In those days Jhum cultivation was widely practised by the tribe. and they had the skill to do it perfectly. It goes without saying that they had no interest in education. As a result, there was a big shortage of

educated persons in the society. In those days the tribe practiced pictorial style calligraphy to record their thoughts and events. But in course of time the art was lost because nobody was interested to take care of the script. Thus slowly but steadily the 'bru' community, in the absence of educated people amongst them, fell prey to various deceptions and lost their stature in the kingdom. They forgot their traditional Chants to pray to god of their own religious, forgot their rituals and succumbed to alien culture to get converted to different religions. Many people took to eating unhealthy foods that were prohibited as per social norms. Though many tried to restore the rules of conduct of their ancestors, but they could not succeed. However, at present the Sanatan Dharma Mandali/Sanatan Ram Mandali is relentlessly struggling to protect the social norms and rules prescribed by their forefathers.

(C) Current situation: - In modern times, education is spreading and consequently awareness is growing amongst the tribe. However, many of them are not able to come out of the great religious deception by the missionaries for various reasons. They are still forgetful about their historical identity, their religious norms, their tradition and culture. Consequently, they are easily allured by the skilful poachers of other religious groups.

(D) Current Efforts: - In the year 1990, the Traditional Religious Protection Committee was formed under the leadership of Sri Sri Manuram Malsai Bru, (Moni). The name given to the committee was Satya Sanatan.

The letter of recognition was received in the year 2001 by the Sanatan Mandali Committee. A total of 19 Ram temples were built by the Sanatan Mandal in the state of Tripura, Assam. Many elderly people of Riang community were thrilled to have their traditional religious customs and practices back in place. Hopefully in the coming days everyone will be able to understand their own

traditions and try to protect their own existence.

The committee will continue to fight for the survival of the Bru/Reang tribes throughout the state of Tripura and is committed to work tirelessly to advance the religion of their forefathers. A

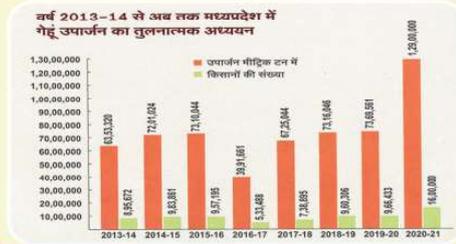
committee has been formed in each of the temples in different districts and sub-divisions of the state of Tripura to keep this ongoing effort. Time is not far when everyone will understand the need for reverting back to their roots and their indigenous identity.



Hojagiri Dance of Bru Community



ऐतिहासिक उपलब्धि की ओर अग्रसर मध्यप्रदेश



सेवा, समर्पण और विश्वास

अब तक का देश में सर्वाधिक गेहूँ उपार्जन का कीर्तिमान

- मध्यप्रदेश ने देश भर में सर्वाधिक गेहूँ उपार्जन का ऐतिहासिक रिकॉर्ड कायम किया। समर्पण मूल्य पर गेहूँ उपार्जन में मध्यप्रदेश देश में प्रथम स्थान पर।
- कोरोना से उत्पन्न कठिनाईयों के बावजूद अप्रैल 2020 से उपार्जन कार्य प्रारंभ।
- किसान को तीन प्रकार से फसल बेचने की सुविधा दी गयी- उपार्जन केंद्र पर मंडी द्वारा अधिकृत प्राइवेट खरीद केन्द्रों पर और मंडी में पंजीकृत व्यापारी को सौदा पत्रक के माध्यम से।
- गत वर्ष कुल 3545 उपार्जन केंद्र।
- इस वर्ष 4 हजार 500 से अधिक उपार्जन केंद्र।
- उपार्जन केन्द्रों पर सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग, सेनेटाइजेशन, हाथ धुनाई और स्वास्थ्य परीक्षण की व्यवस्था।
- प्रदेश में 19 लाख 46 हजार किसानों द्वारा पंजीयन।
- देश के सभी राज्यों द्वारा कुल उपार्जित गेहूँ का 33 प्रतिशत उपार्जन सिर्फ मध्यप्रदेश में।
- गत वर्ष की तुलना में प्रदेश में गेहूँ उपार्जन में 74 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि।
- राज्य सरकार द्वारा गेहूँ उपार्जन की राशि सीधे किसानों के खातों में हस्तांतरित।
- 15 लाख 93 हजार किसानों के खातों में 24 हजार करोड़ की राशि का प्रवाह।
- उपार्जित गेहूँ का 2500 से अधिक गोदामों में सुरक्षित भंडारण।



जबलपुर, मध्यप्रदेश के एक बाजार में फसल विक्रय के लिए गये किसानों के ट्रैक्टरों की कतारें



- कुल उपार्जित गेहूँ का परिवहन कर सुरक्षित भंडारण किया जा चुका है।
- इस बार जितने किसानों में पंजीयत कराया था, उनमें से लगभग 82 प्रतिशत गेहूँ बेचने के लिए उपार्जन केन्द्रों पर आए, जो अपने आप में एक रिकॉर्ड है। पिछले वर्ष किसानों का टर्न आउट 48.36 प्रतिशत था।
- पिछले वर्ष लघु एवं सीमांत किसानों का उपार्जन में भाग लेने का प्रतिशत केवल 40 प्रतिशत था, जो बढ़कर इस बार 84 प्रतिशत हो गया है। इसमें स्पष्ट है कि इस बार लघु और सीमांत किसानों का समर्थन मूल्य पर गेहूँ बेचने पर अधिक लाभ हुआ है।
- शासन ने 130 लाख मीट्रिक टन भंडारण की क्षमता विकसित कर ली है।
- गेहूँ के परिवहन में 10 हजार से अधिक ट्रकों का उपयोग किया गया है।
- सरकार ने 135 लाख मीट्रिक टन खरीदी के लिए बारदानों की भी व्यवस्था की है।
- उपार्जन की पूरी प्रक्रिया के दौरान एक भी कोरोना संक्रमित केस नहीं।

एक करोड़ 29 लाख 28 हजार मीट्रिक टन गेहूँ उपार्जन।

देश के कुल उपार्जन का एक तिहाई मध्यप्रदेश में।

पिछले वर्ष की तुलना में 74 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि।

किसानों के खातों में 24 हजार करोड़ रुपये सीधे जमा।

किसानों के हित में लिए गए निर्णय

- पिछली सरकार ने फसल बीमा की राशि जमा नहीं की थी। वर्तमान सरकार द्वारा मार्च में ही वर्ष 2018-19 के खरीफ एवं रबी फसलों के लिए फसल बीमा राशि के रूप में 2200 करोड़ रुपये का भुगतान कर प्रदेश के किसानों को 2900 करोड़ रुपये की फसल बीमा राशि के भुगतान का निर्णय लिया गया। इसके अतिरिक्त पिगत वर्ष 2019-20 की बीमा राशि का प्रीमियम भी भुगतान किये जाने का निर्णय लिये जाने के फलस्वरूप किसानों को अब 04 हजार करोड़ रुपये से अधिक का भुगतान किया जायेगा।
- फसल कटाई के लिये श्रमिक, हार्वैस्टर, शेयर, ट्रैक्टर आदि के आवागमन पर सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग के मापदंडों का पालन करते हुए फूट प्रदान की गयी, जिससे फसल कटाई का कार्य निरंतर संपन्न हो गया है। फसल कटाई के लिए पंजाब से हार्वैस्टर बुलाने के लिए राज्य सरकार द्वारा पंजाब में विज्ञापन प्रकाशित कराये गए।
- सरकार द्वारा शून्य ब्याज दर पर किसानों को ऋण दिए जाने की योजना का वर्ष 2019-20 के लिए क्रियान्वयन सुनिश्चित करने के साथ ही वित्तीय वर्ष 2020-21 में भी प्रदेश के किसानों को शून्य ब्याज दर पर ऋण दिये जाने का निर्णय लिया गया है। इसके लिए शासन ने 55 करोड़ का वित्तीय भार वहन किया।
- किसानों को प्राथमिक कृषि सहकारी साख समितियों के माध्यम से शून्य प्रतिशत ब्याज दर पर जो फसल ऋण वर्ष 2019-20 में दिया गया था, उसके भुगतान की अंतिम तिथि 28 मार्च, 2020 थी, जिसे बढ़ाकर 30 जून, 2020 कर दिया गया है। इसके लिए राज्य द्वारा लगभग 55 करोड़ रुपये का वित्तीय भार वहन किया गया है।
- प्रदेश में 17 लाख से अधिक बांस के पीपे लगाने का निर्णय। चार हजार हेक्टर क्षेत्र में बांस रोपण होगा। इससे बांस उत्पादन लाभान्वित होगा।
- चने में 02 प्रतिशत तक तिवड़ा होने पर उसकी समर्थन मूल्य पर खरीदी की जा सकेगी।
- प्रदेश में ग्रीष्मकालीन फसलों में एड्ड कर वित्तों के लिये ई-उपार्जन पोर्टल पर पंजीयन कार्य प्रारंभ करने का निर्णय लिया गया।

- महिला सशक्तिकरण की दिशा में कदम बढ़ाते हुए प्रदेश के 6 जिलों में 16 गेहूँ उपार्जन केन्द्रों पर गेहूँ खरीदी का कार्य महिला स्व-सहायता समूहों द्वारा।
- 10 लाख मीट्रिक टन के लिये भंडारण की अतिरिक्त व्यवस्था।
- सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करते हुए किसानों को एसएमएस भेजने की व्यवस्था सुनिश्चित की गई ताकि एसएमएस प्राप्त किसान ही खरीदी केन्द्र पहुंचे।
- सही समय पर खरीदी पूर्ण करने की चुनौती को देखते हुए पहली बार यह सुविधा दी गई कि क्लैकटर स्वयं एक-एक केन्द्र पर एसएमएस संख्या निर्धारित कर सकें।
- किसानों को कोरोना के प्रति सजग रहने और अन्य जानकारी देने के लिए 75 लाख एसएमएस भेजे गए।
- राज्य सरकार द्वारा गेहूँ उपार्जन की राशि सीधे किसानों के खातों में औसतन 7 दिवस में अंतरित की गई।



Implementing projects for Railways on fast track basis. In the service of Northeast Region, Railway Electrification between Raninagar Jalpaiguri to Guwahati is being implemented by RVNL which will result in a modern, environment friendly and efficient train service.



Total Route KM – 382 KM
Work started from – Jan-2017
Completion date – March-2021
Total Project Cost – 836 Cr. (Approx.)

