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HERITAGE EXPLORER

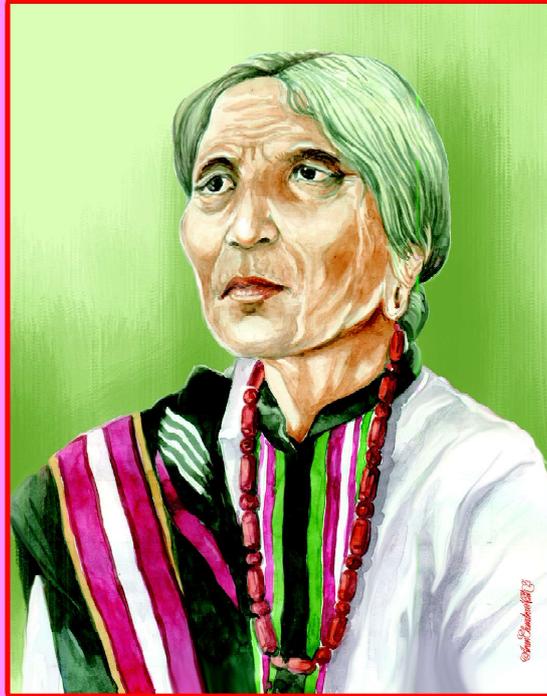
"LET KNOWLEDGE COME FROM ALL THE SIDES"

A Monthly News Bulletin

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India's Unsung Heroes



As other parts of the country were under british raj, Mizoram (the then Lushai Hills) was not an exception. Mizo rulers were subjugated and forced to sign treaties with the british. By that time Mizoram consisted of two regions : North and South. Ropuiliani's father was the ruler of North Mizoram. South Mizoram was under Shri Tlutpawrha's rule. His son Vandula was married to Ropuiliani. They gave birth to eight children. They ruled a village named Denlung and after the death of Vandula, his wife Ropuiliani became the ruler. Her soldiers fought bravely with British. Lt. J. F. Steward. On 8th August, 1893, Capt. J. Shakespeare, Capt. R.H.S. Hutchingson, Commandant Mr. Pugh and 80 soldiers attacked Denlung village. Ropuiliani and her soldiers fought bravely but were eventually defeated. After getting arrested, she was offered to continue as a ruler under the conditions in the treaty. However, she vehemently refused to remain as a slave ruler under the british. She says to the British that Mizoram is their motherland and that they have no moral right to interfere in the administration. She was sentenced to imprisonment and after nine months' torture in Chitagaon Prison, she breathed her last on 3rd January, 1895.

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Bhimbor Deuri – the forgotten hero

One does not become great simply because of his birth in a great family. Greatness cannot be claimed; it can only be earned through exemplary acts and deeds. There had been many such geniuses born amongst us but they seldom got the recognition and respect from our society and many of them died incognito. In our country, especially in Assam and the North East, a man of worth is never given the recognition he deserves until and unless people from foreign lands and other parts of our country bestow honour to him. Many greats of our country had to endure this trauma, but since they were true greats they were never disheartened and went ahead with their self appointed goal in life. As an example we can cite the case of Swami Vivekananda, who after becoming a *Sanyasi* (Monk) received only ridicule and neglect from the people of Kolkata. The same was the case of Nobel laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore. His poems were ridiculed and his usage of Bengali language was harshly contested. So called patrons of Bengali language accused Tagore of distortion of the language. Receipt of Nobel Prize saved him from further ignominy and ridicule. Same was the lot of Bhimbor Deuri, a great visionary and mass leader, a true lover of Assam and its inhabitants, but he never received the limelight he deserved.

Bhimbor Deuri was born in a family of so called backward community, but he showcased his academic excellence overcoming many hurdles in pre-Independent India. He was a born crusader and his fight for justice and equality started from his student days in Cotton College. His first brush with the establishment was over the system of different hostels for upper class caste Hindus and another for tribal and other fringe communities.. The second assault on his life and carrier came in the shape of debarment from appearing in Civil Service examination of Assam on the ground that

the Deuris are not an approved community. His heart ached at the backwardness, deprivation and sufferings of the tribal communities and motivated him to fight for their rights. He was up in arms against the British colonial regime and saw through their deceitful plans for disintegrating Assam and the north east, Bhimbor Deuri was instrumental in partially halting the unabated influx of Bengali Muslims into Assam under the deceitful scheme of “grow more food”. He forced the British to introduce ‘Line System’ as well as “Belt and Block” system to arrest the influx. Through his Assam Backward Plains Tribal League, Bhimbor Deuri succeeded in forcing the British regime to reserve four seats in Assam Assembly. When the British in collusion with Mohammad Ali Jinnah of Muslim League were planning to carve out parts of Assam and North East for inclusion in Pakistan, he fought like a tiger and compelled the British and Jinnah to abandon the idea. This was not only one of his greatest achievements but was also his greatest gift to the people of Assam. It is not for nothing that Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi, the Iron Man of Assam, conferred him the title of Jananeta.

It is sad that we know very little about Bhimbor Deuri because neither the Deuri community nor the scholars and historians of Assam ever chronicled the life and deeds of this visionary leader, an unparalleled patriot, a devoted academician and a true leader of the masses. None ever pleaded for conferring the Padma Award to this man with a capital M, although many with much lesser contribution to the society got anointed with this award. Not a single researcher or scholar of our state ever cared to delve deeper to unveil the unique deeds of this great son of mother Assam. We should perhaps correct our past mistake and try to rediscover Bhimbor Deuri for our next generation.

Romen Chakraborty
Chief Editor

The Eternal Religion in perspective of Malsom Janajati of Tripura

Chandra Krishna Malsom
(continued from november issue)

8. The concept of sin and bliss of God:

Belief in the concept of sin as deviation or violation of the religious, moral and social customs and norms and retribution by God for the same. Belief in the bliss (punya) for righteousness.

In theological reference to the soul, the terms “life” and “death” are viewed as emphatically more definitive than the common concepts of “biological life” and “biological death”. Because the soul is said to transcend the material existence, and is said to have (potentially) eternal life, the death of the soul is likewise said to be an eternal death. Thus, in the concept of divine judgement, God is commonly said to have options with regard to the dispensation of souls, ranging from Heaven (i.e. devtas) to hell (i.e. demons), with various concepts in between. Typically both Heaven and hell are said to be eternal, or at least far beyond a typical human concept of lifespan and time.

Religions which subscribe to non-monotheistic views, in particular Dharmic religions, may have differing concepts, such as reincarnation, nirvana, etc. The Ancient Greeks used the same word for ‘alive’ as for ‘ensouled’. So the earliest surviving western philosophical view might suggest that the terms soul and aliveness were synonymous - perhaps not that having life universally presupposed the possession of a soul as in Buddhism, but that full “aliveness” and the soul were conceptually linked.

Whatever the concept of sin(paap) and bliss(punya) of God analysed by various philosophers and theologians may be, the people belonging to Malsom Janajati of Tripura cherished that sin(paap) is nothing but violation of religious and moral values, social customs, rites & rituals and any sort of acts

done against desire of Almighty God. Simultaneously bliss (punya) is believed to earn positive merits through good-doings in the worldly life in accordance with rules & regulations of God. Thus he who earns positive balance of merit shall be awarded with bliss (punya) of God and those who earned negative balance of merit shall be given sin (paap) by God. As a result, a sinful (paapi) man is said to be punished while the righteous (punyaban) shall be awarded by God. The extent of award or punishment is said to be determined by Almighty God on the basis of a person’s Karma (action) in his/her lifetime on mother Earth. This is why, people in general always think over the consequences or result of their actions bearing in mind the sin (paap) and bliss (punya) in their every walk of life while performing different works. It is a common belief that everybody shall get the result of actions, done in his/her lifetime on earth just after death. None can escape from this universal rule.

9. Belief in the performance of rites of passages relating to the birth, membership of social institution and marriage and death:

(1) Birth rites:-

The Malsoms believe that pregnancy is the natural result of the physical union between married man and woman. They believe that the ethereal soul of a deceased, willing to be born, sometimes appears in dreams before a pregnant mother and, thus enters into her womb. Naturally, a pregnant woman is given light works and is required to observe taboos in regard to food and movement. Besides, for the safety of the both mother and baby three pujas are performed. The pujas (worships) are namely, (1) Sakplang Robol or Phungnei robol (2) Tui arthat, and (3) Abur rusuk.

The Sakplang robol is performed during pregnancy, Tui arthat on the eve of the delivery and Abur rusuk seven days after delivery.

(2) Delivery: -

At the time of parturition (Sangpek), one experienced but non-professional midwife known as Kurma and other well-known elderly lady of the village attends on the mother. The mother sits on a big mat (Darhak), rests on her knees and catches hold of a post or a rope slung down from a beam of a house. One of the elderly woman steadies the mother from behind while the Kurma delivers the baby. As soon as the baby is delivered, the umbilical cord (Mulai rui) is cut by the Kurma with a sharp bamboo split (Sarnat). The cord of a male baby is cut by Kurma by father's Chopper (Chemngai) after placing the baby on a shaft (Chemsong); while a female baby's cord is cut after placing it on a weaving Sword (Rwtwm) of the mother. The placenta (Naote-baal) is thrown away into the jungles after keeping it in a Tuium (a pottery made of jhum gourd) with full of ashes (Ruvut) therein.

(3) Naming Ceremony (Riming-pek): -

The performance for giving a suitable name to a baby is called Riming-pek or Abur rusuk. This puja is performed by an Ochai (village priest) beside a stream or small river with decorative bamboo crafts (Rosong), leaves and an egg. The relatives of the baby can also suggest the Ochai a suitable name. The Ochai either can accept or reject their proposals. So, the Ochai is all in all in this respect.

(4) Kurmamin (To honour the Kurma offering something): -

The baby's mother is socially bound to honour the Kurma by offering a piece of white cloth, a bottle of country liquor and any other household thing for her nursing in delivery. It is said that the parents who deny ungratefully giving any sort of Dakshina (offering out of gratitude) to the Kurma, their son or daughter will suffer from some sort of ill fate in life. Moreover, it is also believed that the ungrateful

parents will also be thrown out to hell by Jama (god of death) after their death. As a result, they may suffer from endless sufferings there for their gross mistake in lifetime.

(5) Breast-feeding:-

For the first three to four months, the baby lives on mother's milk only. Afterwards, in addition to breast milk, a little quantity of boiled rice is given ceremonially by the priest for the first time.

(6) Puberty:-

Rwsa minbom ceremony is compulsorily observed for a Malsom girl at the age of thirteen. It is one of the most significant social customs in the society. This ceremony is generally performed before the first menstruation (Abur). Many young boys and girls participate in the ceremony. During this ceremony, two boys tie a new piece of Rwsa (upper garment of Malsom women) round the breast of the girl, which is made by her mother. But her uncles, from both maternal and paternal sides and her own brothers are tabooed to attend the ceremony. Afterwards, she is accepted and endowed as young girl (Nungak) and her parents can also arrange for her marriage. No such ceremony of puberty is observed for a male Malsom child.

(7) The Marriage System (Rwkai Dan):-

The Malsom young men are attained into marriageable age in 18 (eighteen) to 20 (twenty) years old. In Malsom language, marriage is called Rwkai. There are several stages of Malsom social marriage which are briefly stated below.

(i) Samou-u:-The formal marriage proposal from the parents of a bridegroom to bride's parents or guardians.

(ii) Adande:-The final stage of negotiation, on which date of marriage is finalized.

(iii) Tusin:-The first day of a marriage ceremony on which the bridegroom visits the village of the bride for marriage. During this time both of them are temporarily kept separately in the house of respective relatives which is called 'itung'.

(iv) Pantapui:-The second day of a social marriage in which the marriage ceremony is solemnized at the resident of the bride's parents or guardians. It is the prime day of a marriage ceremony.

(v) Dhalani: - The last day of a marriage on which the villagers of the bride's parents or guardians arrange a feast especially for the relatives of those who worked hard in such occasion in presence of both parents.

Dowry system is not yet introduced in their society. Bridegroom's parents are bound to give some ornaments, clothes, and cosmetic goods etc. to their chosen girl as a token of love but not as dowry. Re-marriage of widow and widower is recognized and permissible in the society. The wedding spot is selected in a suitable corner of bride's house. The spot is well decorated solely with bamboo crafts, flowers, scents, garlands etc. and some other natural objects like a piece of Stone (Lungtat), Chopper (Chem), Vermillion (Sindur), Water, Fire and so on. Each of these natural objects has a great significance. For some instances, stone is kept in the wedding spot as a symbol of Earth, Chopper is weapon, water is Ganga, and fire is Agni. An Ochai (village priest) solemnizes the wedding ceremony by sprinkling the holy water on heads of bride and bridegroom.

Afterwards, both the parents would sprinkle the holy water, then the public does the same to bless the new couple. It is to be noted that the widow (Numwi), widower (Pamwi) and divorcee (Maktongmi) are socially not allowed to do so. There are three classification of marriage in the society; these are—

(a) Samoumin Rwkai: -

In this kind of marriage (Rwkai), the bride is sent to the house of her husband which is locally called as Samak. This system of marriage is getting popular day-by-day.

(b) Samark luinin Rwkai: -

In this type of marriage, a bridegroom is absolutely compelled to stay in his father-in-law's

house for a period of time fixed in mutually by both the parents before marriage as soon as the wedding ceremony is over. After expiry of the specific period, the bridegroom can either return to his own house or stay there for good.

(c) Rawtpui nin rwkai (marriage by elopement):-

Rawtpuinin rwkai is means clandestine marriage. Sometimes it is also found that a few lovers eloped elsewhere to get married because of disapproval of parents from both sides. In such case, the offenders are tried in Choudhuri's Court (in the court of village headman) of the concerned village for their immoral step. Physical punishment and penalty of fine are levelled on the offenders. As there is no provision for clandestine marriage in Malsom Society the offenders are seriously punished.

(8) The Divorce System (Nupurpa Rwmak):-

The concept of divorce is prevailing in Malsom society and it is permissible. The case of divorce may be initiated from either side. In case of any dispute between the husband and wife, the kin try to resolve in a peaceful manner at the initial stage. If they fail to settle the same, the Khawsak Choudhuri (Village headman) intervenes and tries to settle the dispute. If the Khawsak Choudhuri (village headman) also fails to settle at his level then the divorce case is referred to the Malsom Rai Darbar (in the court of Malsom Community Chief) and the concerned Rai (Community Chief) summons both the parties giving opportunity of being heard. He (Rai) hears them accordingly and passes the final judgments either dissolving the marriage or settling the dispute. If one party is found highly prejudiced or aggrieved, the aggrieved party can approach the concerned Rai/Halamsa (Community Chief) for reviewing the case. In such a case, the concerned Rai/Halamsa can review the case decided in his Darbar. There may be sufficient grounds leading to divorce. Some of the most common and important grounds are – maladjustment, desertion, unfaithfulness, adultery, physical and mental cruelty, venereal diseases etc.

(9) The Social institutions:-

The conduct of the members of the Malsom Dofa is regulated through three-fold structure, such as (a) the family authority structure, (b) the village authority structure and (c) the community council. They are described as below.

(i) The Family Authority Structure:

In Malsom Dofa, the conduct of the members in the family is regulated and the socio-economic and politico-religious activities of the family are determined by the head of the family (In-pu). Nowadays, the oldest male member heads the family and his wife acts as assistant. After the death or otherwise, invalidation of the former, the next oldest male succeeds him. The new head could be the eldest son or eldest son-in-law (in case the family has no son or eldest son has been staying with his father-in-law's family). In case the family has no adult male member, the wife of the head takes up this responsibility.

The head represents his/her family at the village and community affairs such as selection of village chief (Choudhuri) and the other members of the council, and to attend village meetings called by the village council.

(ii) The Village Authority Structure:-

For administrative point of view, the Malsoms have a unique establishment of their own. Choudhuri (village headman) is the powerful local authority in every Malsom village. A lot of disputes, quarrels, controversies and minor clashes etc, which take place in a village, are usually settled in the court of the Choudhuri. Hence, the Choudhuri is the competent authority to dispose of the cases lodged in his court. There are two Khandols (peon-cum-messengers) in every Malsom village to assist the Choudhuri who are as follows.

(a) The Khandol Ulwn (Senior Khandol): -

The Khandol Ulwn (Senior Khandol) is appointed by the people of the village at the discretion of the Choudhuri concerned. His duty is to perform as a

senior messenger-cum-police. He informs about any meeting to be held in the residence of village Choudhuri. By virtue of his social position, he arrests the accused and produces the offenders in front of the Choudhuri for justice. One Khandol Tom (Junior Khandol) is attached to him for collection of contributions from each household for community festivals, pujas and the like.

(b) The Khandol Tom (Junior Khandol): -

He is also appointed by the Choudhuri concerned at the discretion of the people of the village. He is the assistance of Khandol ulwn. His main duty is to act as assistant of Senior Khandol while bringing the convicts to the court of the village Choudhuri. He is bound to abide by and work under the direction of Senior Khandol as well as the Choudhuri.

On production of the accused in the court of the village Choudhuri, the Choudhuri will try the offender in presence of Nutrws and Patrws (elders of the village who can give good suggestions for the case). The case is generally disposed of by the verbal verdict given by Choudhuri. Hence, Choudhuri is the competent judge in the village court.

In case, the Choudhuri can not dispose of a critical case lodged in his court, the case is automatically referred to the higher authority (i.e. in the court of the Halamsa) who will settle the case along with his associates and jurisprudents.

The exact amount of fine or particular type of punishment against any offence is normally determined by the village headman (Choudhuri) and his associates. The Choudhuri and his associates negotiate the amount of fine or punishment against the accused with Nutru-patrws (aged and knowledgeable persons) of the village.

(iii) The Community Authority Structure:

The Malsoms also have a salient administrative feature in their samaj. The Malsom Dofa (No.1 Halam), Tripura regulates the whole community.

*(To be continued in
January, 2022 issue)*

JANANETA BHIMBOR DEURI

A farsighted leader of the masses

The nation is celebrating 'Azadika Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate the 75th year of our independence from the British colonial rule. This is an appropriate occasion to remember our freedom fighters who forced the British Empire to leave our country to fulfill the ambitions and aspirations for self-rule. This is also the occasion to remember contributions of those who understood the deceitful policies of the colonial British Empire which at the time of withdrawing wanted to create a fractured and fragmented Indian subcontinent. The partition of the country in 1947 is such a glaring example of treacherous and crafty policies of the British Empire. Many such partitions were planned and encouraged by the evil empire in every corner of the country. Jananeta Bhimbora Deuri was one among the few who saw through the British plans and blocked the further disintegration of the north east. For the unparalleled service to the cause of ensuring Assam's integrity, the iron man of Assam Shri Gopinath Bardoloi conferred the title of 'Jananeta' upon Bhimbora Deuri, the worthy son of mother Asom.

Bhimbora Deuri was born on 16th May, 1903 and died on 30th November 1947. Today we are paying homage to a visionary leader who advocated and promoted development of janajatis with an inclusive idea of vibrant and harmonious Assam. The idea of Assam that has a preeminent place in free India with extensive and universal development of every component of the people, that will uphold identity and glorious history of janajatis, that will remain impregnable from Muslim invaders and encroachers

In 1933 Bhimbora Deuri along with prominent janajati leaders formed Assam Backward Plains Tribal League. As a secretary of the Tribal League he placed demands for reservation of assembly seats for the janajatis to the British Government of Assam and in response to it in 1935 out of 104 seats in the Legislative Assembly four seats were reserved for

the janajatis. He expressed his satisfaction over the representation of janajatis in the Legislative Assembly according to the 1935 Act. He stated that the Act for the first time introduced representation of the tribal people both plains and hills in the legislature. This has arisen hopes and feeling which itself was a great contribution towards the goal to which not only Assam but India as a whole was aspiring for political achievement and advancement.

In the conference of the Tribal League held in Kamrup district in 1938, Bhimbora Deuri clearly stated that while raising the demands for janajatis one should not forget that the janajatis too were a part of the Assamese society. He further firmly believed that only the improvement of the condition of the Assamese community could improve the lot of the janajatis. He highlighted symbiosis between greater Assamese society and the smaller janajati groups symbolically "The Luit exists as Luit because of its lively tributaries and the tributaries are flowing because of the Luit. Their existence is mutually dependent on each other..."

In 1939 Bhimbora Deuri was nominated to the Assam Legislative Council by the Governor. He focused on two important issues confronting janajatis, the first one being the all-round backwardness and secondly the problem created by the illegal migration of Muslim to Assam from erstwhile East Pakistan.

The Tribal League from the beginning wanted to implement the Line System which was introduced in 1920s throughout Assam because Line System according to Tribal League would protect the tribal lands from the inflow of the land hungry Muslim encroachers. The influx began at a rapid rate towards the western part of Assam to take the advantage of sparse population and abundant cultivable land of the countryside. This migration resulted in inflation of the Muslim population percentage to 20% in the bordering districts during the early part of the 19th

century. These invading Muslims subsequently gained the land rights which resulted in creating their own cultural, traditional and linguistic identity. This policy turned out to be the prime cause of large scale influx in the subsequent years. These migrants were mainly from the Mymensingh, Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna areas. This disturbing phenomena was first officially revealed by the Census Report of 1911. These Muslim migrants subsequently came in direct confrontation with the indigenous people of Assam especially with the Mising community on the right over the riverine areas. This confrontation later spread across the state with all other communities over all types of cultivable land. To combat indiscriminate settlement of these migrants the "Line System" was introduced by the British government in 1920. However in reality this system was never fruitful as observed in the Line System Enquiry Committee (LSEC) Report of 1938.

The influx of Muslim encroachers resulted in continuous extinction of many tribal villages. The various janajati groups under the banner of Tribal League were organized to protect their right over land, language and culture. Such a socio-political aggression on the janajati groups of Assam was aided and abetted primarily by the British Government under the pretext of enhancement of agricultural outputs and land revenue.

The political developments since 1937, impact of Second World War and Quit India movement saw fluctuations in the government composition in Assam. Congress under Shri Gopinath Bardoloi and Muslim League under Mohammad Sadulla formed governments in Assam during this period with Md. Sadulla as the Prime/Chief Minister of Assam. This was the most unfortunate happening in the history of Assam.

Bhimbor Deuri termed the policy adopted by Saadulla Governments as a policy of invitation of new immigrants. He further commented that the decision on the question of the Line System was delayed by the Sadullah Government because of their underlying motive though the entire indigenous people of the Assam Valley had been pressing for such a solution. In the budget session of 1940 he stated that Saadulla Government wants to satisfy indigenous people by advocating protection and at

the same time provided room for settling Muslim immigrant population. He further highlighted the difficulty that there was no end to the number of Muslim immigrant population. Such immigrants were being allotted large chunks of land in different districts of Assam Valley.

The Sadullah government opened up reserved lands, de-reserved forests, and professional grazing reserves, displacing the indigenous people of Assam. It also entailed paying a premium for occupying the land. Sadullah Government always wanted to abolish Line system and to get land rights which they propagated as the 'Gift of God' to be shared by everyone. It never provided protection to janajati (tribal) belts. After the revoking of the Line System by Saadulla Government the miseries of the janajati population knew no bounds. Muslim Immigrants could buy and own land in the plains and settle there without any restraint. Bhimbor Deuri suggested for creation of 'Tribal Belts and Blocks' and it was accepted in the assembly with the support of Gopinath Bardoloi. He felt that only 'Tribal Belts and Blocks' could provide protection to the backward tribal people of Assam. As a result in 1947 Gopinath Bardoloi Government created 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks based on Line System by amending Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act 1886 so that tribal land alienation could be stopped.

Bhimbor Deuri vehemently opposed the ulterior motive of Saadulla to annex Assam to Pakistan. On 11th February 1946, Gopinath Bardoloi Ministry was formed and it was during this period that the Cabinet Mission visited India. It proposed to divide India into three groups A, B and C where Assam was to be enlisted with category C along with the Muslim dominated area of Bengal. He issued a press release in the newspapers like 'Dainik Asomiya' and 'Sadiniya Asomiya' on 6th August and 10th August, 1946. Through his editorials he made the people of Assam aware of the Grouping System of Cabinet Mission as a scheming policy to club Assam with Pakistan instead of Hindustan. Tribal League was of firm conviction that they would remain part of Hindustan rather than Pakistan. Every leader of the League supported Bhimbar Deuri and he was

(Contd. to Page 12)

Lachit Borphukan: Exceptional patriotism and valour personified

Dr. Indrani Medhi

The battle of Saraighat in 1671 was the culmination of many smaller battles and encounters between the Mughals and the Ahoms which covered almost the entire 17th century. The name of Lachit Borphukan is synonymous with the battle of Saraighat. He successfully repelled the forces of the Mughal Army and curbed the expansion of the Mughal Empire further east. Born on 24th November, 1622, to Momai Tamuli Barbarua, the general of Assam, in the wars that were waged during the reigns of emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan. He had risen from a humble position to the office of Barbarua during the reign of Pratap Singha. Besides being an excellent general he also excelled in administrative work and equally performed well the function of chief executive officer and that of the Lord Chief Justice of the land. The secret of Momai Tamuli's rise to power and eminence was his immense sense of duty and extreme loyalty and devotion to his mentor. Lachit Borphukan inherited the quality of the supreme sense of duty and the capacity of self-effacement in the cause of the enterprise he undertook. Had Lachit Borphukan written his autobiography he would have admitted "From my father I learnt to be dutiful and love my work, and to forget myself in the ecstasy derived from a faithful and conscientious discharge of the trust imposed upon me". His father's courtroom in his metropolitan residence served both as academia as well as training camp.

King Chakradhwaj Singha the then king was impressed by the attentiveness of Lachit and promoted him to be one of the Borphukan. His contemporary Maratha hero Shivaji's success against Mughals in the Deccan during the period from 1663 to 1665 were regarded by Chakradhwaj Singha as the fitting opportunity for his own projected enterprise. The preparation for wresting Guwahati

from the Mughals were fully completed by the summer of 1667 and the Mughals were pushed back to the Manah River the old boundary between the Ahoms and the Mughals. Several Mughals fugitives including Syed Firoz Khan, the faujdar of Guwahati and Syed Sana Sirdar Mir Bakshi were captured by the Ahoms

Aurangzeb received the news of the capture of Guwahati by the Ahoms and he at once resolved to dispatch a strong army to re-establish Mughal supremacy in the Northeast frontiers. He selected Raja Ram Singha, son of Mirza Raja Jai Singha partly on account of his able generalship and partly as a punishment for his alleged involvement in the escape of Shivaji and the Sikh Guru TegBahadur. Another thing that was introduced by Ram Singh was Bulbulir-jooj or the fight of the bulbuls, which is still current during Bihu. Ram Singh is believed to have begun his campaign by praying at the Hayagriva Madhava Temple in Hajo, where he organised the first fight of the birds and started the tradition.

Ram Singha got formal orders for Assam expedition on January 6, 1668. Ram Singha's army consisted of 21 Rajput chief, 4000 troopers at his own cost, 1500 gentlemen troopers or ahadis and 500 artillerymen and with reinforcement from Bengal his total army swelled up to 30,000 infantry 18,000 Turkish cavalry and 15,000 Koch archers. Thus started a new phase of Assam-Mughal conflict in the annals of history, the defensive war of retaining Guwahati and the territories up to Manaha.

Lachit's plan was simple - he intended to fortify and guard Guwahati so as to prevent the Mughals from sailing further east to Gargaon, the capital. He entrusted his maternal uncle with the task of constructing of a rampart near Amingaon, on the north bank of Guwahati. The work was not completed within the stipulated time. Lachit was

aghast. A furious Lachit ordered his uncle to be executed for this. For Lachit Borphukan, his uncle's attitude amounted to treason - punishable by death as per the prevalent law. Without thinking twice Lachit beheaded his uncle by uttering "My uncle is not greater than my country". A maxim still current in the folklores of Assam.

Then there is also the story of Ram Singh sending a box of poppy seeds to Lachit, suggesting that the Mughal army was as numerous as the seeds and the Ahoms would be crushed, to which Lachit responded by sending back a box of sand, suggesting that the Ahom army as the sand grains and far more numerous and insoluble. Sporadic engagements accompanied by proposals of peace continued during 1669 and 1670. Chakradhwaj Singha was annoyed as to why Lachit was wasting time in altercation with the Mughals, which forced Lachit to give battle to the Mughals on open ground in spite of knowing the fact that Ahoms had no chance in an open battle on the ground. It proved to be true at the battle of Alaboi Hill where the Ahoms were routed by the Mughal's heavy cavalry. Nearly 10,000 Assamese soldiers laid down their lives when the day ended leaving Lachit terribly saddened. But the war did not end there. Diplomatic manoeuvres continued along with peace negotiations

The final battle was fought at Saraighat in 1671. Ahom boats built an impenetrable fortification on

water, placing their boats one after another in a row. The Borphukan was too weak to move and was discouraged by Achyutananda Doloi, the astrologer from the attack as time was not yet favourable. The advance of the strong Mughal army and Lachit's failing health was dispiriting the morale of the Ahom army. But once allowed he furiously threw some of them into the water. Inspired by the act of Lachit Borphukan his soldiers rallied and a desperate battle ensued on the river Brahmaputra. The Assamese were fighting for their life and sovereignty while the Mughals for mere magnificence of triumph and territorial expansion. It was on 23rd of Chaita Saka or 5th April 1671 Ram Singha commenced his withdrawal from Assam. The news of the victory at Saraighat was communicated to King Udayaditya Singha at Garhgoan who in return despatched expensive gifts to the commanders. But the joy of victory at Saraighat was marred by the death of Lachit Borphukan. It was his resolute spirit that motivated him to fight the Mughals. It was his timely intervention that the failing fervour of Assamese soldiers to fight to a finish. Lachit Borphukan thus died in the lap of victory.

The Borphukan army was made to dream only of one solitary dream - the victory of the Assamese and an impression was given that Ram Singha defeat was a foregone conclusion. Today on the occasion of Lachit Divas we salute his patriotic fervour and indomitable spirit. ❖

(Contd. from Page 10)

JANANETA BHIMBOR DEURI

unanimously elected leader to voice their decision before the Governor General. Tribal League with Bhimbor Deuri accompanied by Gopinath Bardoloi met Mahatma Gandhi to apprise him of their solidarity and opposition to the bid for bifurcation of Assam. Bhimbor Deuri with his knowledge of and pride in Assam's history, had challenged Mohammad Ali Jinnah by saying that seventeen Mughal onslaughts had been withstood by the Assamese and no one could annex it.

Bhimbor Deuri in a time of crisis tried his best to

unite janajatis and the Assamese people during this most delicate period of Assam history. Rigorous and judicious research of 1937 to 1947 period of history of Assam will emphasise the greatness of Jananeta Bhimbor Deuri in securing not only Assam but the entire north east of our country from falling prey to the travails of partition. Jananeta Bhimbor Deuri with his efforts has safeguarded culture, tradition, heritage and future of janajtis, of Assam and of the nation. ❖

Colourful Conclusion of Shad Nongkrem

The annual Khasi thanksgiving festival of Shad Nongkrem ended with gaiety and fervour marking the five-day rituals at Smit, around 15 km from the capital town, on Friday. Around 300 km away in Tura, the ritual of the traditional Rugala ceremony during which the first specially brewed rice beer along with cooked rice and vegetables are offered to Misi Saljong, the Great Giver, set the tone on the penultimate day of the 100-Drums Wangala Festival on Friday. At Smit, dancers – both male and female – clad in traditional attires took to the Lympung and danced to the beat of the Tangmuri and the drums (Ksing).

Unlike last year, COVID restrictions were relaxed for this annual affair, paving the way for more dancers from across the Hima Khyrim to partake in the final rituals.

Citizens from across Khasi Hills thronged the Ling Sad to witness the festival. Friday being the main day of the festival, started with the Shad Nohkjat early in the morning where only members of the royal family take part in the dance at the Lympung.

It is a day when music doesn't stop – from the time the Shad Nohkjat begins till around 4 to 5 pm when the mass participation of dancers ends. Following this, the highlight of the festival the Pomblang Syiem (goat sacrifice) took centre stage.

According to the elders of the Hima, on this day, 12 goats or Khatarsla from the royal family are given away for sacrificial purposes, followed by sacrificial goats from the Raid and the villages and clans falling under Hima Khyrim. Speaking to The Shillong Times on the sideline of the dance, the Syiem (chieftain) of Hima Khyrim, Dr Balajied Sing Syiem, said this is a festival that binds together the administrative set up of the HimaKhyrim – one of the traditional institutions of the Khasis. “We happen to inherit such a great institution where we have to comply with the well being, the goodwill of the people to carry forward our responsibility diligently and with an important thing in mind — that is to ensure this tradition is followed well in the future and for perpetuity,” he said. Issuing a clarion call to the tribal youths, the Syiem of Hima Khyrim said, “A community that has its own culture and preserves it

has its own identity.” The younger generation should know their history and uphold their roots, he added.

The annual dance was also witnessed by Speaker Metbah Lyngdoh, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, KHADC Chief Executive Member, Titosstarwell Chyne, Judge of the Meghalaya High Court, HS Thangkhiew and Nongkrem MLA, Lambor Malngiang, among others. In Tura, the 44th 100-Drums Wangala festival is taking place at its new and permanent site called WangalaA'dam, at Chibragre, 13 km from Tura, for the second year in a row. The biggest harvest festival of the Garos is taking place while simultaneously adhering to COVID-19 protocols to check against the infectious disease. Adviser to the Chief Minister and North Tura MLA, Thomas A Sangma and Selsella MLA, Ferlin CA Sangma participated in the Rugala ceremony that was also witnessed by a large number of visitors. The Rugala which is performed by the Nokma (Village chief) concluded with the rhythm of 100 drums.

Addressing the Wangala troupes and the crowds, Thomas A Sangma recalled the valuable contributions of the pioneers of the then Wangala Festival Committee to promote, protect and preserve the tradition and culture of the Garos. Looking at the increasing peoples' participation in the festival, he said that this will help to safeguard the culture and traditions as well as boost the morale of the political leaders. Endorsing the chief guest in his remarks about the importance of preserving and promoting the traditions of the Garo tribe, the Selsella MLA expressed her gratitude for being given a chance to attend the festival and also mentioned about the pioneers of the Wangala festival and their foresightedness in preserving the unique culture of the Garos. Despite embracing Christianity and other religions, the Garos should preserve and protect their culture and traditions, she appealed. The day's events also included the indigenous games of Tug of War, Ajea and Doroa cultural competitions, amongst others. In the Tug of War final, the Rongkhon team defeated the Rompa Matgrik team from Baghmara to win the event for the fourth time in a row.❖

AZADI KA AMRIT : BHAGAWAN BIRSA MUNDA

Prime minister Shri Narendra Modi and his Cabinet took the decision on 10th November to celebrate 15th November, the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda as Janajatiya Gaurav Divas to honor the sacrifices made by the janajati brethren in the freedom struggle of the country. The country is celebrating Azadika Amrit Mahotsav as part of 75th year of our Independence. To celebrate the iconic role played by Bhagawan Birsa Munda celebrations were planned from 15th to 22nd November, 2021. The birth anniversary of Bhagawan Birsa Munda is a day of pride not only for the janajatis but for the entire country. Noble personalities do not and should not be shackled by the boundaries of caste, tribe, region and religion. They fulfill their inner callings and complete their lifework in the prevailing context of the society and country. Their acts and thoughts become a pathway for others and the larger movement gains strength and reputation. Birsa Munda's life story is such an example. Birsa became Bhagawan Birsa Munda because of values that he cherished and sacrificed his life for. We have to understand deeply his inner urgings to understand why people revere him as Bhagawan.

Birsa Munda is seen as a Bhagawan, a freedom fighter, a martyr, a social reformer who championed the cause of the suffering fellow beings against the grinding maladies of an offensive British rule and other abuses and led a humanitarian campaign of relieving the misery of the masses and securing justice for them.

Birsa was born on 15th November, 1875 in Ulihatu village on Thursday and was named after the day he was born according to Munda custom. Birsa's birth ceremony were performed at Chalkad, his father's mothers' village. Birsa's early years were spent in Chalkad. Driven by poverty Birsa was taken to Ayubhatu by his parents where he stayed for two years. From this place he went to Kundi Bartoli to his elder brother and stayed with him for some time.

There he passed his lower primary examination. For Upper Primary education he went to German Mission School at Chaibasa. This period is marked by intense activities of German and Roman Catholic Missions in janajati areas of Chotanagpur. Here he coined the slogan Saheb Saheb Ek Topi (all whites, missionaries or the British wear the same cap) when he realized that missionary interests and the British rule are supplementary to each other.

Around 1890 Birsa went to Bandgaon. He participated in agitations stemming from popular disaffection at the restrictions imposed by the British laws imposed upon the Munda upon traditional rights in protected forest. Around 1893-94 waste lands in Munda areas were constituted into the protected forest categories under Indian Forest Act VII of 1882; at some places forest settlement operations were launched and measures were taken to determine the rights of the forest dwelling communities. Villages in forest were marked off in blocks of convenient size sufficient for the villagers. Outside of the blocks lay the protected forest areas in which old ancestral rights of janajatis were regulated, even curtailed by the British laws. Birsa led number of groups with the petition of resumption of forest rights. But nothing came of it. By 1894 the Chotanagpur Protected Forest rules framed under Indian Forest Act had come into force. Birsa was not a passive spectator but an active participant in the movements going on in his neighborhood.

In 1895, at the age of 20, Birsa rapidly evolved through a sequence of events into a Prophet. Spiritual awakening and experiences brought out new divine qualities in Birsa, earned the reputation as a healer. British and mission officials reported that large number of people were visiting Birsa to get cured. Gradually he began preaching as well. He called it Birsaism. He called upon his followers to attend his prayer meetings every day. Gradually his

followers started calling him Dharati Aba, the father of the Earth. He started bringing in reforms in the old system of puja, prayers and rituals and introduced simple system of praying and offerings. Slowly the prophet was identified with God himself. People approached him as their Singbonga or the Sun God. Contemporary folksongs commemorate the tremendous impact of Birsa on his people, their joy and expectations. The name of Dharati Aba was on everybody's lips. There was an undertone of protest against the missionaries as they denounced Birsa's reforms. But these reforms were slowly growing into popular independent movement. In 1895 out of this religious beginning emerged the agrarian and political character of the movement. The complexion of the movement changed. Birsa provided positive political program to the Mundas who were discontented due to land and forest laws. His objective was attainment of both religious and political freedom. Birsa and his followers used to proclaim that the Sarkar Raj will end and his Raj will begin. The British administration wanted to arrest Birsa at this point of time as a suspected lunatic or as person whose activities were likely to create breach of peace. They issued warrants under section 353 and 505 Cr P C, the first related to assault or use of criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of his duties and the second to making, publishing or circulating any statement, rumor or report conducive to public mischief. Birsa was charged with inciting the crowd to disaffection to the British Government with obstruction and assault of the government police in execution of their duty, and spreading propaganda which seemed to have been intended to cast odium on her Majesty's government. He had exhorted the people to refrain from paying rent to or rendering any further obedience to the Government and its officers. The British government charged him for his connection with the agitation on forest issues and land problems. Birsa was arrested for first time in August 1895 in Bandgaon village. After his arrest more than 7000 Mundas gathered in Chalkad with their weapons. The British authorities expected outbreak of hostilities. The British Commissioner

recognized the intentions of Birsa's followers to be revolutionary and took precautionary measures to calm down the tension. The British administration had initially taken Birsa's movement very lightly. But later they realized that they were sitting on a powder cag. The missionaries sent the report that it was extremely dangerous to allow Birsa to return back with his people as it will take very little for him to ring them together and start the movement afresh.

Birsa was sentenced to prison for two years and was released on 30th November, 1897. He was warned not to start his revolutionary movement. Birsa undertook to give no more trouble. The movement had gone underground gaining in depth and emerged as more powerful and potentially more dangerous than before. The two famines of 1896-97 and 1899-1900 created more trouble for the people as well as for the British government. Five to ten percent of population spread over 700 miles were affected.

Within few days of his release his followers met him at Chalkad and pleaded to set up an organization which will secure their lost rights and to drive out the British. Preparation for larger movement were set in pace by visiting ancestral places and launching an intensive propaganda campaign to boost the morale of the people. The disciples were divided into two groups: a group concerned with the faith and another to organize the movement. There was a political slant to the propaganda. The main theme of the propaganda was on constant reminder to the people of the golden age of their ancestors, of the need to revive the old manners and customs and regain their land, forest and rights. He visited three ancestral temples and picked up sacred thread from Naw Rattan, Tulsi leaves and Prasad and sandal paste from Jagannathpur. The psychological preparation for the struggle was complete.

This phase marks the shift of activities from Chalkad to Dombari. Dombari was more secure, surrounded by hills on all sides. It was inside the heart of Munda area where as Chalkad was on the fringe along the route to Ranchi or Chaibasa. Dombari was the place associated with the Kol armed struggle. It

had once resounded with triumphs of the powerful combination of Mundas and Laraka Hos against the British, commemorated with pride in Munda folksongs. Dombari became the nerve center of the armed struggle. A representative gathering of all Munda areas was held in February 1898. Another meeting was held in March 1898 on Sambua hill. The decision for armed struggle was taken unanimously. Meetings were held in all Munda area usually on hillocks and inaccessible sites. Birsa visited many places where he was welcomed with great enthusiasm. The next representative meeting was held on Dombari hills in November 1899 which marked the beginning of intensive preparations of armed struggle. There were 16 meetings held in different places of Munda areas. Area incharges were deputed with strict orders of preparing for armed struggle. Birsa's ideas penetrated even the remotest households within one and half years of intense efforts.

The establishment of Raj under Birsa became the ultimate political aim. The series of events is really long and exciting. The struggle spread in many places in Ranchi, Singhbhum districts targeting the British government. The incident particularly needs a mention is that of arrest of Gaya Munda and his entire family in Bandgaon village. The courage shown by him and women of his family deserves a heroic chapter in school books for students as an example of how spirited they were, even women who fought holding small baby in their one hand. On 3rd February 1900 Birsa was caught by the British police second time. He died in Ranchi jail on 9th June 1900 due to cholera and dysentery. However no other prisoner had any symptom of cholera in the jail. Hence a strong belief was that he was poisoned inside the jail.

Birsa and his movement should be evaluated in the context of the national freedom struggle for freedom against the British. The rise and establishment of the British Empire saw the beginning of the first phase from 1795 to 1857 of janajati resistance movements which was spontaneous, elemental and widespread involving not only janajatis

but many. It was led by the traditional chiefs who foresaw the effects of British colonial system. It was resistance to the new system forced upon the people by the British colonial rule and new classes of the people who were inducted by it namely the system of local administration and taxation, evangelization, the new land lords, moneylenders and government officials, all of whom were to be expelled in a violent upsurge. This formulation would generally apply to all the movements of this period i.e. the uprisings among the Pahariyas from 1756 to 73, in 1784-85 Mahadev Koli tribe in Maharashtra and Tilka Manjhi of Santhal tribe raised the sword; the Chuar revolt from 1795 to 1800, Kurchiyas under the leadership of Talakkal Chandu attacked British in 1802 and then led organized struggle against the British invasion in Wayanad in 1812; in the North East Singphos attacked British forces in Sadiya in 1830s; Kol tribe in Chotanagpur area raised the armed struggle in 1832; the Khonds in Orissa fought in 1850; the Great Freedom Struggle by Sidho-Kanho in Santhal region was in 1855; Nilambar-Pitambar of Kharwar tribe have immense contribution in the freedom struggle of 1857 in Jharkhand, Bhagoji Naik led the struggle of Bhils in 1857-58; Raghunath Shah and Shankar Shah sang revolutionary songs before being torn asunder into tiny pieces by cannon balls for leading Gondwana's battle against the British; the Lushaijanajati people of Mizoram attacked British forces in 1860; the Sentinelese janajati people of Andaman and Nicobar island attacked British in 1883; Shambudhan Phonglo from Dimasa janajati fought in 1883 against the British in Dimasa areas of Assam; the Angami Nagas revolted against British around 1880s; the British government was afraid of Tantya Bhil's revolutionary activities in late 1890s.

The second phase from 1860 to 1947 was characterized with violent struggles as well as the agrarian-cum-revivalist movements. This phase coincided with the onset of the intensive period of colonialism which saw a much deeper penetration of British administration and laws in janajati and peasant life and economies which intensified the exploitation of janajatis. As a result of this far

complex type of movement represented a curious mix of agrarian, religious and political issues. It was demonstrated through janajati resistance movements against the assaults on their traditional systems. It was followed up by the socio religious or revitalization movements which were expressive of the janajati's urge to create new order. These two lines of the movement throughout the country revealed striking similarities, a basic unity of response to almost the same kinds of British laws and administration.

It was evident in the armed struggle in Bastar in central India in 1911; in Tana Bhagat's movement in Bihar from 1914 to 1919; more than 1500 Bhils were massacred gruesomely in hills of Mangarh in Rajasthan on 17th November, 1913; supreme sacrifice was offered by the Koya tribal community in 1922 under leadership of Alluri Sitarama Raju; from 1926 to 1931 Haipou Jadonang raised the banner of struggle in Naga areas; Cruel British force could not mellow the iron resolve of a delicate 14-year old young lady, Rani Gaidinliu; the Gond and the Kolam fought in collaboration in 1941 in Telangana; Lakshmana Nayak in 1942 raised the struggle at Koraput in Orissa. These are some of the glorious chapters of janajati armed movements against the mighty British forces. The Birsa movement belonged to this phase and was undoubtedly its most outstanding representative.

The opening up of janajati areas through the establishment of British administration which was far from beneficial to the Mundas upset the traditional system. The general ignorance and neglect of rights and customs of janajatis by the new laws were fatal to the janajati interests. This led to the process of the transformation of corporate ownership of villages of the Munda communities into individual ownership, mostly under non janajatis. The British policy was of isolation on one side and creating enemies within the societies on the other. Hence petty police and forest officials, for Mundas became synonymous for arrogance and meanness. The agents of the breakdown of the janajati agrarian system, the aliens, moneylenders could be identified in Munda imagination with a snake, a witch etc. The

combination of these factors spelt alienation of the land that dealt a cruel blow to all that the Mundas cherished in their life. This disaffection was made worse by the regulations governing the reservation of the forest which came directly in conflict with the traditional rights of janajatis on forest land. The breakdown of the agrarian order entailed social consequences. The incidence of liquor drinking and migration of Mundas as laborers to tea gardens and elsewhere weakened the traditional authority. The famines made the situation more explosive.

The British had allowed entry of Christian missionaries creating an impression of a potential ally of the British in perpetuating their rule over the janajatis. The contempt was seen in ideas such as 'mission to civilize the most backward, savage or semi savage population fit for nothing but for carrying burdens and serving as serfs. The western education that was brought along with Christianity were totally alien to the social system of Mundas. Three missions were working in Munda areas, German, Anglican and Roman Catholic missions. Anglican mission which was known as the Government's church kept completely away from the movement. Christianity introduced new elements which upset the old way of life and interfered with their social customs. Birsa had come to the conclusion that the missionaries always had deep and personal connections with the British and provided information to cut down any resistance from the janajatis in time for continuation of their rule. Roman catholics not only attacked Birsa's personal life but also pleaded for the most stringent punishment against his followers. The choicest epithets were used to describe Birsa. For them he was a young monkey, more a fool than a knave, a fanatic, an infatuated youth with dubious moral character, etc.

The Christian mission played its role to further its own interest by assuring the Mundas that they will get back their land and forest that they had lost if they follow their directions and remain Christians. The British made every attempt to misinform about the movement. Initially the British opinion was that it was merely an agrarian movement. However

subsequently imposed a religious character after some period. The divide and rule policy was again evident when they dictated that the movement was not only against the zamindars and their petty officials but also against Hindus in the tribal areas. The Indian national congress underlined the political character and described the movement as anti-missionary and anti-government. But Birsa was far more concerned with the British rule that rendered the tyranny of the zamindars possible. He underlined the agrarian and forest land issues in his deliberations preparatory to the violent struggle. Birsa would go to the zamindars and their petty officials to persuade them to mend their ways and if he failed in his mission they were supposed to be expelled from the area. The movement was agrarian in its roots, violent in its means and sought political solution in its end by throwing out the British rule and establishment of his rule.

Birsa aimed at complete independence, both political and religious. This is a very important aspect of Birsa's movement that needs to be understood in correct perspective, which ultimately earned him the title of Bhagawan. Birsa led his movement one step beyond agrarian agitation and incorporated a religious movement almost complete in its institutional, theoretical, prophetic, and regulatory aspects. Birsa provided a clear cut and positive politico-religious direction and content to the armed movement. Birsa led down strict ethical code. Birsa's ideal order aimed at complete overthrow of the British raj, European missionaries and officials who had dishonored ancient customs and rituals of janajatis of the area since 1850s. Birsa's movement aimed at the recreation of the old society which was fading away during the British rule.

The movement so wide and simultaneous testified to the extra ordinary craft and secrecy in strategy, planning and organization. It was spontaneous, sudden in its eruption, elemental in its character like volcanic outburst, violent in its fury and passion, unrestrained by any qualms and scruple. It has grown out of forty years of the Mundas' frustration caused by the expropriation of their land and forest by the

British.

The Mundas were hardly any match for the British army; the counter offensive against the Birsa and his group was a simple walkway. There were however instances of stubborn resistance expressive of the Munda's contempt and defiance of authority and of their unfounded faith in their master. Birsa and his team evolved new techniques of communication with their people. They held meetings at secret and selected sites, composed prayers and incantations and prescribed and practiced rituals to destroy their enemies and put an end to the British Raj and Queen's kingdom. They also employed new symbols and conveyed ideas allegorically through folksongs.

The major feature of the movement was the absence of any hostility against the non janajati elements who were socially and economically integrated with the Mundas. They did not look upon these communities as exploiters. The social reforms that Birsa introduced were clearly evident here. Birsa introduced social reforms that are brought through spiritual advancements among Mundas. He had deeply grasped the core of Vaishnavism which was in the heart and spirit of the people in the region. In Sri Chaitanya Charitamrit we find references of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu while travelling from Nilachal to Mathura went through the forests of Jharkhand blessing evolutionary reforms in the society. No Birsa's religious ceremony would be complete without the participation of the barbers and washermen. The interaction between janajatis and non janajati communities was an accepted fact by the janajati leaders. The janajatis were never completely isolated from others in our history. Their isolation has been relative and never absolute. We can study reformative changes that Birsa initiated among the Mundas were in tune with reforms that were brought by social reformers in other parts of the country. Birsa's reforms rose from the loam and the soil of the Munda land. The reforms that Bhagwan Birsa urged for were encompassing every aspect of janajati life stressing more on spirituality and unfolding the strength of atman. Hence we find canonical insistence to live human life free from any

addiction so as to keep the precious soul and body healthier for dedication to the almighty God; old customs of wearing of a sacred thread (janeu) and sacred paste, offering prayers instead of sacrifices to spirits were restored, ancestral ceremonies of purifications were revived, wearing of wooden sandals, every house should be kept neat and clean and should have a Tulsi plant in its courtyard; every household should diligently care for cow; the mother earth should not be tilled on Thursday, and many such simple and universal principles. The reforms were introduced not only to preserve tribal integrity but also to establish an equation with the peasant castes that were integrated with the Mundas. The interaction of the janajati and non janajati groups had imparted a fullness to their socio economic system. In large perspective, the Munda movement ran parallel to the Indian renaissance and partook its verities: the stress on the past, social reforms and internal purification.

The Birsa movement halted the rapid breakdown of the agrarian order and led to the creation of more manageable administrative units. An immediate result of the Birsa's movement was that the British government felt the urgency of the need for preparing a record of rights for the lands of Mundas. Birsa's movement jolted them into a clear perception of the issues involved. What the Mundas essentially needed was the security of their tenure, recognition of their rights in land and the preservation of the Mundari customary system of land holding. Only a settlement operation could provide the basis of agrarian security, bring to light the variety of local customs and tenures, determine them with precision and thus secure them. The Commissioner strongly felt that the troubles would continue if a complete survey and record of rights was not prepared throughout the Munda country and the bethbigari system abolished. This system had reduced the Mundas to extreme poverty and thrown hundreds of thousands far away as laborers. Immediately after the Birsa's death new settlement policy commenced. The new reforms brought in relative relief to the Mundas. The most visible change was in the fall of of number of cases,

both in civil and criminal in title suits in Munda areas. Suits for the arrears of rent were easily disposed of. The Tenancy Amendment Act of 1903 contained first recognition of the Munda traditional system which ensured the safe enjoyment of their tenancy and protection of rights of Mundas. Subsequently Chotanagpur Tenancy Act VI of 1908 was passed which marked the end of a century of agrarian strife. It safeguarded number of points which Mundas claimed as central part of their social system. The time honored right of the janajatis to reclaim land was recognized. The DC was empowered to eject forcibly any alien who may have acquired lands in Munda villages; and with provisions for restrictions on the sale and transfer of lands. However it came too late and could secure the traditional system in very few villages.

The Birsa movement was followed by the institution of a number of administrative measures aimed at bringing the people and administration closer. In 1902 the Gumla sub division was formed to facilitate the administration of justice enabling the British to keep close watch on the Munda areas. Khunti sub division was established on 1st December 1905 creating a seat of administration in the heart of the Munda area.

Birsa's movement contributed to a growing consciousness among the janajatis of the Chotanagpur area. He came to be identified increasingly with the aspirations of his people. Socio religious movements that sprung up bore close resemblance to his movement. Birsa was the Bhagawan not only of Mundas but of Chotanagpur as a whole. His influence reached in to Oraons. Tana Bhagat movement among Oraons which played an important role in the national movement in 1920s bears close resemblance with Birsa' movement including ethical codes for his followers.

Azadika Amrit Mahotsav is a perfect occasion to research deeply not only Bhagawan Birsa Munda's struggle but also the contribution of entire janajati communities of our country. The social knit of the people of such a huge nation like ours needs deeper scrutiny and analysis. ❖

The Tribals now partners in India's development: PM Modi

Reaching out to tribals, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday lauded their contribution to Indian culture through the ages and said Lord Ram drew inspiration from them during his exile as he slammed the Congress for “neglecting” adivasis during its previous rules. Tribals were now partners in the country's development and benefitting from various welfare schemes launched by the BJP-led government, he said.

The PM also announced that henceforth Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas, the birth anniversary of revered tribal icon Birsa Munda, will be celebrated like Gandhi Jayanti, Sardar Patel Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti. “When we talk about tribesmen's contribution some people get worried. They don't believe in the immense contribution of tribals to Indian culture. Their contribution had not been explained to the countrymen. People were kept in the dark,” Modi said, addressing a mega tribal meet organised on Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas here. “Those who ran governments in the past did not give priority to them. The country's 10 per cent (tribal) population was neglected,” he said, attacking the Congress without naming the party. “Tribals were not given their dues by the earlier governments and were deprived of basic facilities,” he said. Drawing on history and referring to the Ramayana period, the PM said Lord Ram drew inspiration from life of tribals when he was in exile and stayed inside forests. “The time spent with tribals made a huge impact and turned a prince into the most perfect man. Lord Ram drew inspiration from every aspect of forest dwellers' life,” Modi said.

Development is now taking place in 100 aspirational districts which remained backward during the earlier (Congress) regimes, Modi said. Modi reiterated that India is celebrating the first Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas after Independence, adding the tribals' art and culture, and their

contribution to the freedom struggle and nation-building is being remembered with pride. The country cannot forget the bravery of Gond queen Durgawati or the sacrifice of Rani Kamlapati, he said. “The previous regimes have committed a crime by ignoring the tribal icons and their contribution. The contribution of the tribal society was either not told to the country and even if told, very limited information was given,” Modi said. The PM said he was moved when the recipients of Padma Shri working for tribals came barefoot to the award ceremony in New Delhi. “The indigenous community never lacked talents, but unfortunately the previous governments did not give them opportunity,” he said.

Modi said now the tribals, along with the rest of India, were reaping the benefits of different welfare schemes. They are partners in the country's development and their welfare is a top priority for the government, he said. The Prime Minister praised the tribals for their large-scale participation in the vaccination drive against COVID-19 and asked others to learn from them. Modi lauded Birsa Munda, Rani Kamalapati and other tribal heroes. The Prime Minister recalled how people of the Bhil tribe helped Rajput king Maharana Pratap. The struggle of Veer Maharana Pratap cannot be imagined without the brave Bhil tribe who fought shoulder to shoulder and made sacrifices, Modi said. “We owe a lot to the tribal people,” he added. He said without the participation of adivasis, India's development would not have been possible and maintained forest laws have been tweaked to benefit tribals. The PM said products made by tribal communities are being marketed online to make them economically strong. “These products were being sold in the international market now,” he said and listed the schemes being run for the tribal uplift.

On the occasion, Modi launched multiple initiatives for the welfare of the janjatiya community, including the 'Ration Aapke Gram' scheme in Madhya Pradesh. The scheme is aimed at delivering the monthly quota of PDS ration to beneficiaries from janjatiya community in their own villages every month, so that they don't have to travel to the Fair Price Shop to collect their ration. Modi also handed over genetic counselling cards to beneficiaries, marking the launch of the Madhya Pradesh Sickle Cell (Hemoglobinopathy) Mission. The Mission has been developed to screen and manage patients suffering from sickle cell anaemia, thalassemia and other hemoglobinopathies and to increase public awareness about these diseases, whose impact is seen to be more profound on the janjatiya community of Madhya Pradesh.

The PM also laid the foundation stone of 50 Eklavya Model Residential Schools across various states and UTs, including Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tripura and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu. At the event, Modi paid rich tributes to noted historian and Padma Vibhushan awardee Balwant Moreshwar Purandare, popularly known as Babasaheb Purandare, who died at a Pune hospital on Monday after a brief illness. "Historians of the country will remember Babasaheb Purandare for long. He has left us...Babasaheb's contribution of delivering the history of Chhatrapati Shivraji to commoners was priceless. The Madhya Pradesh government had given him the Kalidas Samman," Modi said. ❖

Janjatiya Gaurav Divas celebrated at Arunachal Raj Bhavan

Governor BD Mishra along with tribal leaders of the state celebrated the Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, commemorating the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, at the Raj Bhavan here on Monday.

The governor interacted with community leaders of different tribes of the state and hosted a high tea on the occasion. The Governor stated that "Birsa Munda was a great freedom fighter, a people's leader and a regional hero who fought for the rights of the tribal people and strived for preservation of tribal faith, culture and traditions. The people revered him so much that they gave him the title of 'Bhagwan'," He further added that the tribal people of India immensely contributed in the nation's freedom struggle and the Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aims to acknowledge their sacrifices and contributions. Governor Mishra said that "The activities and objectives of Janjatiya Gaurav Divas must not be confined to the celebration only but promote

welfare activities for the tribal people with futuristic vision," He requested the tribal leaders not to forget the past, when tribal people took part in the freedom movement and urged that ".....the tribal leaders must take the society, state and the nation on the path of progress and prosperity, work for the wellbeing of the posterity and conservation of nature's bounty".

On behalf of the tribal communities, PG Tago and Olen Megu Damin conveyed their gratitude to the central government and to the governor for the Janjatiya Gaurav Divas celebration. They said that the celebration would help in highlighting the contributions of the tribal communities in the freedom struggle.

Former RGU Registrar Dr Tai Nyori presented a book titled 'A Freedom Movement in the Twilight – Tribal Patriotism in the North-Eastern Frontier Tracts of India', authored by himself, to the Governor. ❖

Unique cultural practises of Kongthong village highlighted

Joining hands with the rest of the country to commemorate the ensuing Janajatiya Gaurav Divas –Tribal Pride Week, being launched to recognize the valiant efforts of tribal freedom fighters, a special programme was held at Kongthong, the ‘song and whistling’ village over the weekend to recognize the unique cultural practises of the village as part of the continuing celebrations of Tribal Pride Week.

The programme was anchored by the Department of Arts & Culture in collaboration with Tourism, Sports Departments, National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), CRPF, Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) and the village authorities who actively joined hands to commemorate the Janajatiya Gaurav Divas in a befitting and meaningful manner. To recognize the unique cultural practise of JingrwaiIawbei or musical name calling of Kongthong village which also has earned the village a distinction of being India’s nominee as ‘Best Tourism Village’ to the UNWTO, various departments and stakeholders are collaborating in the present period by organizing several activities at Kongthong village to highlight and recognize its unique cultural practise, which has earned it several accolades within the State and also at international levels.

Amongst the plethora of activities and in recognition of the unique cultural space it occupies, the village was awarded two special artistic plaques awarded by Arts & Culture Department and Tourism Departments respectively, which were handed over to the village authorities and to the custodians of Kongthong’s unique cultural practise. The NIFT prepared 75 flags and distributed it to the performers as part of Azadi Ka Mahotsav, besides 50 flags to the village authorities to mark the State’s golden jubilee. The CRPF also arranged for 75 saplings, which were symbolically planted all over the village as part of India@75. The Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) anchored a lively and participative workshop on Sustainable Tourism/

Sustainable Livelihoods and Intangible Heritage for the village authorities and the village tourism entrepreneurs as part of Village@75. Other key highlights also included ensemble performances and cultural demonstrations of JingrwaiIawbei-musical name calling, personalized song names and tunes by the 75 performers and children of the Indigenous Agro Tourism Cooperative Society of Kongthong.

FR Kharkongor, Commissioner & Secretary, Arts & Culture, who represented the Department, in his address, while lauding Kongthong village for its unique cultural practice and acclaim earned through cultural tourism, also informed that the department had already produced a specially composed Freedom Song composed in folk fusion style, extolling and celebrating the three Brave Hearts of Meghalaya-U Tirot Singh, U Kiang Nangbah and Pa Togan Sangma, representing Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes along with other unsung heroes. Also Read - Public Distribution System rice has been released for the month of November in Shillong He also informed that as part of the ‘Janajatiya Gaurav Divas’ and in active collaboration with the ICCR, the Department is at an advanced stage of preparation of a special docuseries –Revisiting The Warrior Heroes of Meghalaya, an audio-video docu drama based on the three warrior heroes of Meghalaya, which will revisit the heroic lives and their brave exploits against the colonial powers. ❖



Nature worship in Arunachal Pradesh: Nocte Tribe

Nokte Panka

The Nocte tribe is one of the major and oldest tribes of Arunachal Pradesh inhabiting in Tirap District. They are the true lovers of nature and the great appreciators of its beauty and uniqueness. The people of the Nocte are the profound saluters of natural elements as they thought the natural things are the greatest creations of God and Goddess.

With the beginning of its existence, the Noctes had many faiths and beliefs in the existence of God and Goddess. The Philosophy of the Nocte about the sky has a broad and deeper meaning. They think the sky above our head is the fantastic creation of God. The heavenly bodies in the sky like the stars and the moon are the greatest creation of the God. The early philosophers of the Nocte believed that the sky above our head is to be honoured or saluted. Hence, the people of Nocte have their own faiths and beliefs of the existence of the God in this vast universe. The People of the Nocte worship God by introducing RANG 'O'.

The Noctes strongly believe that their village and their daily activities are regulated by the God that is Rang 'O'. Whenever or wherever the people of the Nocte go or perform any daily activity they first pray to their God by saying or uttering Rango Kathun Kathak Rang. Here 'Rang' means the sky and 'O' indicates the entire universe – the God's creation. Kathun Kathak Rang means the way of appreciating or bowing before God. Nocte community strongly believe in worshipers of the nature. They believed that the sky, the stars, the moon, the mountains, the rivers, the giant trees and so on are the greatest creations of the God. So they believe that such natural things are to be chanted and offered prayers. The forefathers of the Nocte earnestly believed and stated that nobody has seen the actual figures of God but He is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. So the people are profound worshipers of God's

creations by uttering – Rang 'O'. No big thinker or the scholars or the philosopher of any other races had taught them to worship God and Goddess, worshipping God came to them naturally. Many faiths and beliefs of God's existence had been passed on orally from generation to generation. Here, we may depict some of the faiths and beliefs of God existence among the Noctes. We also want to let the world know why the Noctes believe in worshipping God's creations – the NATURE.

1. Joban-som: Since time immemorial, the Nocte worship the nature- the creation of God and Goddess. JOBAN-SOM. During JOBAN-SOM no actual form of God and Goddess is indicated or identified. The Nocte believe that their village is under the control of God and Goddess. They pray to Almighty Rang 'O' by offering local rice beer called 'Juming'. This offering is called Rangtam. JOBAN-SOM is performed annually in every village of the Noctes. On this day, the male members gather at Morong (Nocte's Assembly Hall) or at worshipping place to perform puja. They pray to Rang 'O' for happy, peaceful and prosperous life. This puja is also performed whenever there is an occurrence of natural calamity and spread of epidemic diseases. If a village is under attack of an epidemic, all the linked roads connected to the particular village are closed for a day. No one is allowed to leave the village and no outsider is permitted to enter the village. This is called 'Pankasak' locally. Adhering to 'Pankasak' is mandatory for each and every individual of the village where it is being performed. Even no emergency stranger can enter in the village during that period. If any one is found guilty of not properly adhering the Pankasak, fine is imposed on the person according the village norms (customary law).

2. RANG-TOAN: The Nocte believe that the lightning and thunderstorm and the heavy pouring

of snow or hailstone are the signs of God's anger. Sometimes vigorous lightning and thunderstorm damage the particular tree in the village. The Noctes believe that their people might have done something wrong and need to pray for pardon from Almighty Rang 'O'. So to please the angered God, three elderly persons of the village perform puja beneath the damaged tree by sacrificing one red cock and Rangtam (offering local rice beer called Juming). On the next day, no one is allowed to leave the village or perform any social activity. The holiday is called Piantongja. The people remember Rang 'O' on this particular day. This puja shows that the Noctes are the true worshipers of God's creation – THE NATURE i.e is lightning and thunder God.

3. LONG-SOM: In some villages of the Noctes, the stone-structure is praised and worshiped. The people of the Nocte believed that the stone is the hardest and the perfect creation of Rang 'O'. So some people salute stone-structure. Worshiping of the stone-structured by the Noctes is called LONG-SOM. Here, 'Long' means stone and 'Som' means pray. Here also puja is performed by male members of the village. The day is observed as holiday called 'Rang-Somja'. Today one can witness the lady Rock-Statue at a place called 'Longput' near Wasathong village under Deomali Sub-Division. This Rock Statue clearly informed us that the Nocte also worship the Rock Statue.

4. alt-well & Salt spring: The Noctes also believed that they were blessed by Rang 'O' by sending Salt Goddess to the society. The Folklore of the salt well and the salt spring clearly stated that one of the ladies of the Nocte was given special worldly power (mystery) to create salt spring for the needy people of the Noctes. One of the most famous salt springs is located at Pullong village called 'Poosum'. Whenever the salt is being extracted from the salt spring puja is always performed and two chickens – one white and one black are always sacrificed in the name of Salt Goddess (Sum-Wangcha).

Today the passersby of this salt spring remember the salt Goddess and the salt spring is saluted in her name. The salt spring is always cleaned annually and

performed puja although salt is not extracted now a days.

5. The VOO-SOK Practice: The VOO-SOK Practice is one of the most important practices of the Noctes. It is mainly connected with the Nature – the creation of Rang 'O'. The word 'VOO'- means bird and 'SOK' – means practice. This puja is solemnized on the onset of Chalo-Loku – the main festival of the Noctes. In performing of the VOO-SOK certain ritual is performed wherein certain predictions are made by the performers of the rituals who are the elder members of the community. The ritual involves breaking of eggs one by one by the chiefs of the village with the help of the Daawa (the Nocte Astrologer) and the TANWA (the NoctePujari) to study the future happenings of the society and of the community. The broken eggs is placed on the KOPAT (wild leaves) and studied the entire structure of the egg cell. The inter and intra future course of the village is studied by this method. The future of the nearby villages and residence are also studied by this method. If there is something wrong to happen in the nearby villages according to their predictions made by the priest, this is conveyed to the village and the people concerned in order to adopt safety measures. This prediction also used in the selection of land for cultivation by the farmers. This has been practiced by the Noctes since older times. All the important elderly male members of the community such as the chief, the Daawa. The Tanwa, the Mongwa and other specialist persons are remain present while VOO-SOK is performed in the VOO-SOK-HO (the launge) which is the part of Morong (Pangdong).

Finally, it can be suggested that the Noctes of Tirap are not only the worshiper of the Nature but also they love Nature through its various creations. They always try to get blessings from Rang 'O' for their all round development through offering puja to the Rang 'O' Almighty on certain occasions.

JAI-HO the Nocte heritages and the faiths and beliefs to shine the tribe and India better. ❖

(The writer is a Teacher in Tirap district, Arunachal Pradesh)

Chavang Kut 2021: The unique harvest festival

The festival of Chavang Kut is being celebrated in Manipur from 1 November. Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh extended his best wishes on the occasion, adding that he was hopeful that the harvest festival would result in greater peace and brotherhood among the communities living in the state. Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio also took to social media to mark the occasion, wishing a “prosperous harvest” to everyone celebrating the festival. BJP state president Sharda Adhikarimayum took to social media to extend her best wishes for the post-harvest festival, calling it “a reminder of our roots, diversity and to retain and promote the traditional and cultural values”. The state unit of the Congress Party also extended its best wishes on the occasion, calling Chavang Kut one of the biggest festivals in the state.

The festival of Chavang Kut or autumn harvest festival is marked by the Chin-Kuki-Mizo community (CHIKIM), being primarily celebrated in Manipur. The festival is seen as an opportunity to promote peace, prosperity, and unity in the state.

The Meitei and Naga communities also participate in the celebrations. The festival sees the communities perform their folk dances and songs and show gratitude to the gods for the harvest. The Chavang Kut developed from the week-long harvest festival of Chang (paddy) Kut, with the present state-level Chavang Kut being celebrated since 1979 in the village of Keithelmanbi.

One of the prime attractions of the festival is the Miss Kut beauty pageant, with contestants from different communities walking the ramp in their best traditional attire.

Chavang Kut is marked as a bank holiday in Imphal, with all shops and establishments remaining shut during the festival. The festival is one of the major harvest festivals that are observed in the region, along with Chapchar Kut, which is marked in the spring season in March, also being celebrated by various communities in the state. Two other festivals to mark significant stages in the agricultural cycle, MimKut and Pawl Kut, are also celebrated in the region. ❖

Sumi community of Naharbari celebrates Ahuna

The Sumi community of Naharbari, East Dimapur observed Ahuna Festival on November 13. Member of Parliament, Tokheho Yephthomi hosted the celebration in his residence.

A press note received here stated that the MP greeted the Sumis and called upon the community members to be steadfast in the social development of the society by way of being front runners of peace and unity among all Naga. He said observing the occasion is the time to give thanks to almighty God for his abundant blessings upon the people and to move forward in togetherness for the betterment

of the society.

Kakheto Yephthomi shared the significance of the festival. The function was chaired by Phoisho Zhimomi, chairman, SCNED and recorded by Kitoho Aye, secretary, SCNED. Shikheto Shohe, pastor, SBANED prayed for God’s grace for the community. Women pastor, Hukatoli Yephthomi said the invocation while Shikheto Achumi, treasurer SCNED proposed vote of thanks. Presentation of various cultural items by members of the community marked the occasion. ❖

Museum & Heritage Village for Garo Tribe to Be Set Up

In an attempt to attract more tourists, the Meghalaya government is busy in setting a museum dedicated solely to the Garo tribe of the region. The mega project has been announced by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma. Reportedly, the Garo Heritage Village in West Garo Hills district will be set up at a cost of around Rs 10 crore. CM Sangma further said, "This will be a museum showcasing the tradition and culture of the Garo community at Chibragre locality of Tura in West Garo Hills district." According to tourism department officials, the Garo Heritage Village and its infrastructure would be a boost to tourism in the state.

CM Sangma tweeted saying, "Govt is committed to promote & preserve the rich culture & traditions

of the Garos. With this objective, Govt has earmarked 10 Cr to develop a Garo Heritage Village at Wangala'dam with various infrastructure facilities and amenities." The CM made the announcement during the famous 'Wangala Hundred Drums Festival' celebrated by the Garo tribe every year. He further wrote, "Happy to present the sounds and colours of Garo Hills in this short video of the festival today. May the spirit of Wangala bless each of you!" CM Sangma also presented a cheque of Rs 20 lakh to the Hundred Drums Wangala Festival Committee for organizing the festival with grandeur.

It may be mentioned that, the Garos are among few remaining matrilineal societies in the world and the people take their clan titles from their mothers. ❖

Chavang Kut 2021 celebrated in Dima Hasao

The people belonging to the Kuki community celebrated Chavang Kut in several villages of Dima Hasao with traditional fervour and grandeur on Monday maintaining Covid protocol

Chavang Kut is the major festival of the Chin-Kuki community all over the world. This festival is celebrated specially in Manipur, Assam, Tripura, Chin state in Myanmar, Delhi and in Shillong.

This festival is celebrated after most of the harvest is over. The villagers, to show their gratitude to the almighty, sing and dance praising the Lord. In this festival, folk songs are sung with traditional dances. During the festival traditional dances like SAGOL PHEIKHAI, SELPANG LAM, LOMLAM, JANCHALAM, VACOL LAM, PHEIPHIT LAM, SALU LAM, GAL LAM, SUHTA LAM, MOLKANG LAM, (stick dance) KHUL LAM are performed with

the tune of musical instruments like – Gosem, Sumkon, Pheiphit, khong, Dahpi, Dahbu, selki, lhemlhei, theile etc. Though the Chavang Kut is being considered to be the major festival, other festivals like Chapphou Kut, Mimkut and lholhum kut are also there to be mentioned.

This year at N Leikul village, some 9 km from Haflong, Chavang Kut was celebrated with day long program also considering the vaccination status of 95% along with display of traditional items which were used in ancient days in their daily lives so that the young generation could have the knowledge of ancestral belongings..

In the evening a grand feast was also organized aiming to maintain togetherness among fellow beings. ❖



Shad Nongkrem festival of Khasi Community



Chavang Kut, the post-harvest festival of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo (CHIKIM) community