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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



Sambhudhan Phonglo was an Indian freedom fighter from Assam. He is remembered for his stout defiance against the British annexation of the territories of North and South Cachar with Nagaon district and Nagaland. He vehemently protested against British authority over the people of Assam. With the intention to create a rebellion, he united a large number of youths to fight against the British.

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Statehood Days are Marks of Progress

Tripura, Manipur and Meghalaya, three of the eight states that constitute North East India, observed their 50th Statehood Day on the same date of 21 January, 2022. The date of incorporation of these states on 21.01.1971 via North East Reorganisation Act, 1971 may not be anything more than a historical event but in truth it was the beginning of a new geopolitical journey of the people of these states to pursue and promote the unique cultural diversity of tradition, culture and language of their ancestors to newer heights with the constitutional help and support of the entire Indian Union.

The beautiful land of the northeast has an interesting history. Right from the earliest settlers from mainland South Asia to the new-age northeastern states, the region has come a long way in terms of economic, political, and social development.

The predecessor state of Tripura, one of the state of North East, was founded about 1000 AD. The first king who ruled the state under the royal title of Manikya was Maharaja Maha Manikya, who ascended the throne in 1400. The kingdom of Tripura reached its maximum expansion in the 16th century. In 1764, when the British East India Company took control of Bengal, which included Tripura that had been under the Mughal Empire were taken over by the British administration. Between 1826 and 1862 the eastern part was subject to the ravages caused by Kuki invaders that plundered and destroyed villages and massacred their inhabitants. In 1905, Tripura became part of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam and was designated as 'Hill Tippera'. On 13 August 1947, the Maharani signed the Instrument of Accession, joining the Indian Union. There were lot of internal turmoil in the state in the succeeding months and finally on 9 September 1949, the Maharani of Tripura signed the Merger Agreement with the Dominion of India, which became effective on 15 October, and Tripura became a centrally administered Part C State.

The Kingdom of Kangleipak was established by King Loiyumba in 1110 who ruled between 1074 and 1121. He consolidated the kingdom by incorporating most of the principalities in the surrounding hills and is credited with having enacted a kind of written constitution for his state. After subjugating all the villages within the valley

Kangleipak kings grew in power and began a policy of expansion beyond their territory. In 1443 King Ningthoukhomba raided Akla, an area ruled by Shan people, initiating a policy of Manipuri claims to the neighbouring Kabaw Valley. The zenith of the Kangleipak State was reached under the rule of King Khagemba (1597–1652).

Apart from accounts of the more essential Khasi kingdoms in the chronicles of the neighbouring Ahoms and Kacharis, little is known of Meghalaya prior to the British rule. However, in the early 19th century, the British desire to build a road through the region to link Bengal and Assam led to a treaty with the ruler (Syiem) of the Khasi principality of Nonkhlaw. In 1829, opponents of the treaty persuaded the Syiem to repudiate it, and a subsequent attack on Britishers led inevitably to its military operations against the Khasis. By the mid-1830s, most local rulers had submitted to the British. For the next century, the British exercised its political control over the area, then known as the Garrows and Cossiya (Garo and Khasi) States, but the tribals who were left to fend for themselves managed to preserve their tradition and culture in seclusion. In 1947, the rulers of the region acceded to the newly independent India.

The colourful history of northeast which was never documented in its right perspective because of lack of written script and is mostly based on oral history described in ballads, lullabies and chants. The diverse group of people who converged here fought amongst themselves for supremacy over land and nature's bounty, sometimes faced the attacks of alien forces, but they never ceased to evolve and develop their own distinct culture, tradition and rituals. These internecine fights are now over and every state is now devoted to developing themselves as modern states in modern world. The present central government is doing everything possible to bring up the states of north east at par with other developed states of our country. To achieve this lofty goal the northeasterners must maintain peace, amity and brotherhood, not fights over geographical borders, not the excursions of the extremist groups.

Romen Chakraborty

Chief Editor

The Eternal Religion in perspective of Malsom Janajati of Tripura

Chandra Krishna Malsom
(continued from January issue)

10. Belief in the redemption and salvation of soul in heaven for good-doers and retribution by the divine for bad-doers:-

The Janajati people belonging to Malsom Dofa of Tripura State cherishes that *Rwtha* (soul) is immortal. It is believed that man can die but the soul never dies. After death of a man his soul leaves this mortal world for its new destination of *Sorgo* (Heaven), the land of the departed souls. The departed human soul is guided and escorted by *Awipumangwi* or *Asen-ngwi* (Two male gods of death, custodian as police) till *Jamlok* (abode of *Yamraj*). After judgement of his merits and demerits on vice and virtue, Godhead will punish or reward the soul. The good-doers are rewarded and the wrong-doer are said to be punished by giving opportunity of being born in this mortal world in a lesser degree like animals, insects and other tiny living creatures. And the rewarded soul is believed to be given better chance by rebirth in higher status so that he can attain the *Moksha* (salvation) in gradual spiritual development.

Belief in the performance of festivals, ceremonies & rituals and other forms of religious and cultural expression in the worship of divine:

(1) *Khawser* (*Kerpuja*):-

KERPUJA (*Khawser* in Malsom language) literally means austerity in English. This Puja is celebrated 14 days after the end of *Kharchi* puja. It is the strictest puja ever performed by Tripuri people. It may be mentioned here that no puja or worship is so strictly performed as is the *Kerpuja* of Tripuri people, by any section of the people in the world. In this also all the gods of Tripuri people are worshipped at a time. After the *Ama pechi* or *Amba buchi*, the mother earth became unholy, then by performing the *kharchi* the earth is purified and all the god and

goddess became sacred again. It is some thing like *Abul Suhmani* of Tripuri people or some thing like *shraddha*, a kind of purification of the nature and gods. After the *Kharchi* all the gods are sacred again, then the *Kerpuja* is performed by the Tripuri people.

During *Kerpuja* a particular area is demarcated, this area is bounded by the *Kerpuja* symbol. Every entry or exit point of the village are identified. Before the puja is started, all the dying persons, or expectant mothers are shifted to neighbouring villages. Once puja starts, no one are allowed to go out from the area bounded by the puja. Similarly no one shall be allowed to cross the puja boundary and enter the puja area. If an unknown person enters into the puja area, he/she shall not be allowed to go out of the area on any condition.

Generally *Kerpuja* starts in the morning at around 8-10 AM. Once puja has started, no one is allowed to speak loudly or laugh. Shouting, crying, using obscene or slang languages, making derogatory fun, talking of dishonest, and any other unmoral activities are totally prohibited in the puja premises.

At the *Kerpuja*, the gods are worshipped for the welfare of the villages. In the state level, *Kerpuja* is performed, for the welfare of whole of the state in general, at the Palace compound. The gods are prayed to avoid natural calamities like storm, earth quake, floods, droughts etc. and also to prevent of epidemics like cholera, small pox, chicken pox, typhoid and many other diseases. In the puja, different kind of animal may be sacrificed viz. cock, goat, buffalo etc. according to the affordability of the villagers. The required expenditure is collected from the members of the villages. In the earlier days when Tripura was a kingdom, the king would bear the cost of the state puja, but now the state government is bearing the expenditure as per the condition of accession or merger agreement.

In the Agartala city, an area had been identified for performing Kerpuja. The puja starts early in the morning, with a big bang sound, intimating the public that Kerpuja had started. Before that, through the state electronic and print media, people are informed in advanced about its timing. The Chief Priest of Tripuri people, the Chantai performs this puja in the capital town Agartala. At village level the head priest of the respective villages, that is Ochai, performs it.

It is to mention here that Malsom people, belonging to Halam Community of Tripura, perform Khawser in all the Malsom villages under the leadership of Choudhuris (village headmen) of their respective villages every year at the residence of the Halamsa or Rai (Community Chief) for the well being of the whole community and mankind.

(2) Hojagiri: -

Hojagiri dance is one of the famous dances of Tripura. The dance is performed on the occasion of HOJAGIRI Festivals or Laxmi puja, held in the first full moon night after Durga puja, generally 3rd day after Dusshera. The Goddess Mailuma (Laxmi) is worshipped with full reverence and devotion on this day. The dance is performed by only women, of about 4 to 6 members in a team. The Riang clan of Tripuri people performs this dance and they are experts. The male members participate in singing the lyric, playing the Kham, Sumui etc. The women also participate in the chorus. The lyrics are very simple but dance is unparallel.

The ancillary logistics required for the dance are, a Rwlwi(Baling in Kokborok), which is a wide circular rice cleaning article made of cane, a pitcher or kalash, a bottle, a house hold traditional lamp, a plain dish and a handkerchief for each performer.

One has to undergo an extensive training and rehearsal for this dance. It is slow hip and waist manoeuvring dance. It takes about 30 minutes to finish the sequence of Hojagiri dance. The whole of the Huk or Jhum cultivation is exhibited through this dance. To some extent it is similar to Hukni dance, but the rhythm and sequence are totally different. This dance is becoming world famous and had been performed in many international folk cultural programmes. The people belonging to Malsom, Kaipeng, Hrangkhawl, Bongcher, Kalai, Rupini of

Halam Community of Tripura also take part in this auspicious Laxmipuja with full of devotion for Likh(Laxmi, Goddess of prosperity and wealth). They also enjoy the occasions with food and drinks.

(3) Sinan (Hangrai):-

The Tripuri is the promoter of Hangrai or Sankranti festivals. They have first introduced this festival of immersing of remains of ancestors in the holy river. Since then it was adopted by other groups in India and popularized over the years. However, the Malsoms, Kaipeng, Bongcher, Hrangkhawls of Halam Community of Tripura called this festival SINAN (Hangraki in Kokborok).

Mythological legends informs us that when the world was just created by Lord Shiva or Sibrai there was only the grass land and nothing was present. The god then created an egg to produce human being. The egg hatched to give birth to a human being. He crawled out of egg shell and looked around for any one like him, but he found none. There was total silence, peace and tranquility on the earth. He was frightened by seeing this scenario. He remained near the egg shell most of the time and then went back inside the empty egg shell and hid there.

The almighty God was upset by this development. Years later he created another egg, and after ten months it was hatched. There was a big bang when it hatched that shook the earth and gave birth to another human. He was very courageous and powerful. As soon as he came out of human egg shell, he started shouting and announced to whole of the world, 'I am the first to be born in this earth, I am the eldest in the earth, no one is elder to me in this earth. He named him self as Subrai and declared whole of the earth that he is the ruler of this earth and king of this universe'. Hearing the big bang Hangrai got more frightened, closed his eyes and silently remained inside the shell. But when he heard the voice like his own, he came out of his shell and met Subrai. At this, Subrai told that he is older than Hangrai, since then Subrai became elder brother of Hangrai, and people knew them as it is.

Thousand of years later it was time to leave this world, Hangrai grown older than Subrai, one day fell sick seriously. Hangrai was in death bed and Subrai was taking care of him. Then god came before them

and said, 'Among both of you, Hangrai is elder than Subrai, I only know this, because I have created both of you. Hangrai will leave this earth very soon. Subrai will do all necessary rituals to cremate the body of Hangrai.' And god disappeared from there.

Then Subrai cried like a baby, touching the feet of Hangrai, saying, 'Elder brother, I have treated you like younger brother for thousands of years, forgive me for my wrong doings unto you.'

Hangrai said, 'I have done so!' and touched his head as gesture of forgiving and blessing unto him and then breathes for his last.

After death of Hangrai his younger brother Subrai cremated his body and did all the rituals and immersed Hangrai's remaining in the holy water of river on the last day of the month Pousa. Since then every year, people observed this ritual and festival every year and continues till this day. That is why the day is named as Hangrai, which has later on adopted by other ethnic people of India.

Every year the Tripuri people observe the Hangrai day in grand pomp and show. In every house preparation for Hangrai day starts two-three days before. Houses are cleaned and white washed. All the utensils, clothes, articles are cleaned, homes are decorated. Different types of Tripuri cakes, dishes and drinks are prepared, near and dears and relatives are invited for a feast.

Boys of 7-19 years prepare for Hangrai nok (a small type of hut prepared by bamboo and thatched) just near by any pond or pool. Generally it takes 5 to 7 days to make such hut. All the boys of the village gather, make a group and build it collecting thatch from the paddy field or jungle. On the day preceding Hangrai, these young boys collect some money; buy some rice, meats, egg, fishes etc. and cook in the hut in the preceding night. The whole day and night they have a gala of feast, fun and enjoy, and sleep there in the cold chilly night. Before the dawn, even before the cock crows, these young boys wake up, take out all the article from the hut and burn it out. When the fire catches the hut, these boys take a holy dip in the pond or near by river.

After the bath, they will remain there till day light is out. Coming home they will wear all the new clothes/ washed clothes, do the salutation to parents

and seniors at home. When the hot cakes are being prepared at home, these young boys and girls would take the taste of it till they are satisfied.

On the other hand, the seniors also will not remain back in this case. After taking a bath they wearing new clothes, apply natural perfumes. Then they gather in one particular home as decided earlier and partake their own share of cakes, dishes, and Bwtwk, chuwarak etc. and drink, dine, dance and chat. They bow before seniors, take a sip of bwtwk and enjoy throughout the day till mid night.

Spiritually, the son or any sandai of deceased has to go to a holy place or for pilgrimage to Dumbur to immerge the remains of their deceased parents or elders in the Holy river Gumti. There they follow the ritual of Tripuri people and observe the sanctity of the remains of the deceased, take a bath and immerse the remains in holy water of Gumti.

Those who have the means and affordability, go to the holy places like Varanasi, Gaya, Prayag, Sagar Dweep, Haridwar etc. to immerge their parents remains.

(4) Tuipui Dungku (Dungur):-

Dungur (Tuipui Dungku in Malsom language) is a holy place for Tripuri people in Tripura a place of pilgrimages. Every year, on the day of Pous Sankranti large number of people gather here. People come here to immerge their ancestral remains in the holy river of Gumti.

When this site became an important pilgrimage is not known as there is no written records. But there is a legend pertaining to this pilgrimage. Some people may consider it as unauthentic. But Tripuri people consider it as true like that of Ramayana's story. It is in the heart of every Tripuri people, and is told by the grand parent to their grand children every night.

The Story: Once upon a time there was a Tripuri priest in a village; he was very busy in his priestly activity. Every day he has to go to some one's house for religious function. He had no time to look after the family and house hold affair as well as the agricultural work of jhum. His wife is also engaged with him for the same purpose and had no time to over see the family. They had two beautiful daughters, named Raima and Saima. The family household work

is fully dependant on them; they had to go for jhum or huk, cut it, sow seeds, clean and do all such related activity.

Once it was a rainy day, there was a sudden storm. The sisters had no place to take shelter, they had to stand under a tree but it did not help. They were totally drenched; the younger sister was shivering in cold. Her sister Raima could not bear it, she felt very sad. She said, 'Saima, I can not see you shivering this way, there is no Gairing (a machan for us to take shelter). If we had a gairing today, we could have taken shelter there. So if any one could build a Gairing for us I shall accept him as my husband. Let he be ant, grass hopper, bird, monkey, snake, demon or any thing.'

That day, they could do no longer work and went back home. Next day when they went for jhum work, they found a beautiful new gairing. They were very glad to find it in their jhum or huk. When it was lunch time, Raima told her sister to invite her brother-in-law for the lunch. When called, the husband of Raima came, it was a big python. She was scared and hid behind the house, but Raima saw him as human being only. The python would eat most of their lunch; they had to share only a little part. This way they became very thin and lean.

One day their father priest asked younger daughter the reason, which she told in detail. The father planned and told elder daughter to go for priestly work. That day, he along with Saima went to their jhum, and told her to invite her brother-in-law for the lunch as usual. The python came and found his father-in-law and saluted him. When the python saluted him, he severed the python in two pieces, and dumped it in a deep gorge.

At this point of time, Raima's bangles, chain, ear tops etc. fell down all of a sudden. She could understand the reason and rushed to her home. Upon reaching home she enquired about the reason from her sister. She told her in detail about it. After getting the information, Raima went to their jhum filed along with a dog and searched for her husband's dead body. She could not locate it, but because of the dog that she took along with her, she was able to find the dead body of the python in a Khumpui flower field, a kind of shrub flower found in jungle.

She cried holding the head of her husband. Though others would see as python, Raima would see a human being only. She cried until she was totally submerged in grief. She urged and requested her husband not to leave her alone in this world, and she would also accompany him. As she continued crying, her tears turned into a stream, but she continued crying and pleading her husband to wait and take her away along with him. The stream turned into a small river but still she stood there. The water level rose gradually from knee to hip to chest to neck and ultimately above her head and she was totally submerged in the water. Then the river was named as Khumtwi (meaning 'water originated from flower') which later changed to Gumti to Gomati.

The python was none other than Lord Shiva, and Raima was none other than Parvati. They came in this guise to give people a respite from sin and took the form of a river for the people of Tripura.

The place of immersion of Lord Shiva has since been known as Dungur. Since then the place has become sacred and a pilgrimage spot to the Tripuri people. They also started immersing at that place their ancestor's remains every year on the day of Pous Sankranti.

A large fair is being held every year on the occasion, at the site of immersion. Now a days, government sponsored cultural programmes are being organized day and night every year. It is one of the most sacred places for Tripuri people.

A dam had been constructed here in the water fall or Dungur for hydro-power. It has caused massive destruction of jungle, natural resources, submerged many wild life like deer, jackle and many rare and endangered animals. The dam water had also submerged large area of cultivable land belonging exclusively to Tripuri people living there. The Dam had caused massive land alienation and displacement of Tripuri people from their ancestral place where they lived for thousands of years. Dam had reduced many rich Tripuri family into paupers, land less and beggars. Many become psychiatric patients out of this sudden mental shock. The governments compensation had been too little as compared to the forced eviction from their land.

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

Swami Vivekananda's Vision of Unification of Science and Spirituality and its relevance for development of India

Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest souls taken birth on the soil of India is often remembered for his address at the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, which compelled the Western scholars to accept the advances of Indian Knowledge System developed in time beyond the capacity of modern intellectual calculations and still flowing through its customs and culture. He was called as "orator of divine right" and "Messenger of Indian Wisdom in Western World" for the same. The Chicago speech was just a glimpse of the treasure of knowledge and vision of Swami Vivekananda.

The pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda was Narendranath Datta. He was born in Kolkata on 12 January 1863 and took the last breath on 4th July 1902. Born with an inquisitive mind and yogic temperament, he used to practice meditation even from his childhood. In early youth days he was associated with Brahmo Movement for some time. By the time he graduated from Calcutta University, he had acquired vast knowledge of different subjects, especially Western philosophy and history. Science and spirituality blended mind of Swami was always in search of essence of God. Whenever he met with any person with knowledge and wisdom, the foremost question he used to ask "have you seen the God". This long awaited query found an end when he went to meet Sri Ramakrishna staying at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. As usual, Swami Vivekananda asked same question to Sri Ramakrishna, the first person who dared to say "yes, I have seen God". Being an inquisitive rebel, Vivekananda didn't stop at this and asked further- whether he could see the God? Sri Ramakrishna not only satisfied and removed the doubts from the mind of Vivekananda about the existence of God, but won him over through his pious, unselfish affection. This meet later culminated in to Master-disciple relationship between them. Before his mortal body in August 1886, Sri

Ramakrishna infused the spirit of renunciation and love for fellow Indian in Vivekananda. His master had assigned him a mission which he first discussed to his first disciple Sharat Chandra Gupta a Station Master of Hathras Railway Station who later became Sadanand after taking up the Monastic name. In 1888 when Swami Ji was in Hathras, Sharat Chandra observed that Swamiji was stressed, thinking very deeply over something, all the time. He asked him the reason. Swamiji replied, "You see, I have a great mission to fulfil in my life. It is a command given to me by my Guru. It is nothing short of the spiritual generation of the whole country."

People generally believe science and philosophy are antagonistic. Swamiji tried to remove this erroneous notion by comprehending the truths in them. science is the search for truth in the external world, and religion is the search for truth in the internal world. Pushed to the extreme, they both meet as there is one truth that is expressing itself internally and externally. Genuine happiness requires a proper balance between the two.

To take ahead this vision he didn't return India immediately after his famous Chicago speech. He was stayed in America trying to get some funds and ideas for starting a Technical School in India. The American newspapers raised question-What happened to spiritual regeneration of the whole country? Had his mission changed all of a sudden? No, nothing was changed, in later 1894, while giving an interview while speaking on 'India and her future" Swami Ji explained against such allegations. The interviewer asked 'What exactly does India need?' Swamiji replied "What we need is Western Science coupled with Vedanta, with Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and Shraddha or faith in oneself."

Now question arises, what did he mean by this statement? When he used the term Western Science,

he didn't mean the conventional meaning rather he meant 'Wealth Generation'. The central aspect of western science is its amazing capacity to generate wealth. Ideas are used to generate wealth. Science gives you that orientation. To understand this idea, the story of discovery of wireless is very interesting. J C Bose who was personally very close to Swami Vivekananda, gave a demonstration before Royal Society, London. Marconi saw that demonstration in the Royal Society. He was able to immediately visualise the wealth generating potential behind the invention of Bose. He went ahead and monetized it and became famous as original inventor. This story is classic and illustrative as it reflects the inventory heritage of Indian minds and what we need to develop.

Let us take another example, we all know that India was one the richest and wealthiest nation in the world for a very long time. Every nation in the world wanted to have economic ties with us then. Sometime in the 15th or 16th century, things started deteriorating faster. And while we slept, Europe woke up. Western world started discovering basic principles on which the world runs. People also started thinking seriously on how those discoveries could be put to use in man's daily life. This led to mechanized manufacturing of products. Here, in India we had rich tradition of manufacturing and techniques but all was based on manual skills. Take the example of incognito days of Pandavas who took job as cook, horse tender and musician in Kingdom of Viraat. It is pertinent to note that even Royal blood people were skilled enough to earn their bread out of their skills. Now question arise, if India had everything, how the Europeans took the lead in manufacturing? Contrary to our pattern, Europeans people with different sets of skills came together, pooled in their money and resources, and brought about an unprecedented level of value addition. That created wealth at an unprecedented rate. We need that amazing machinery of creating wealth in our country too.

In 1892, Swami Vivekananda speaking J R D Tata who became the icon of indigenous manufacture in India said

“We need material civilization. No, not just that, we also need luxury, so that we can generate jobs for the poor.” Very less people know that Swamiji meeting with J N Tata on a ship to America and interaction led to the establishment of Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay by Tata group. Apart from Tata, Nikola Tesla, the scientist who invented alternating current, was, highly inspired by Swamiji who met his in 1895.

All human beings work. Work is so universal. But how to work, why to work, these questions are very important and answer is rooted in Vedanta. Swami Ji didn't mean classical Veda, instead he meant to work in a worshipful manner, earn money commensurate to work, while allowing the attitude of sacredness to transform our consciousness.

The third term Swamiji has used – Brahmacharya. Again, Swamiji didn't mean the classical meaning as celibacy or monasticism. This term simply means 'Self-control'. Self control is essence of success and we need to develop it.

The fourth element of Swami Ji plan was Shraddha which means a positive frame of mind. It distills into the attitude of 'I can do'.

Swami Vivekananda said at another moment, “What we need is to study, independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge Swami Vivekananda's vision of Technical Education that is our own, and with it the English language and Western science; we need technical education and all else that may develop industries so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for themselves, and save something against a rainy day....It would be better if the people got a little technical education, so that they might find work and earn their bread, instead of running from pillar to post and crying for service.”

His thirst for science and spirituality with need of Indianness can be seen in following passage:

“If I can get some unmarried graduates, I may try to send them over to Japan and make arrangements for their technical education there, so that when they

come back, they may turn their knowledge to the best account for India. What a good thing that would be!" The friend asked, "Why, Maharaj, is it better for us to go to Japan than to England?" Swamiji replied, "Certainly! In my opinion, if all our rich and educated men once go and see Japan, their eyes will be opened. There, in Japan, you find a fine assimilation of knowledge, and not its indigestion, as we have here. They have taken everything from the Europeans, but they remain Japanese all the same, and have not turned European; while in our country, the terrible mania of becoming westernized has seized upon us like a plague."

Swamiji warned of the dangers of too much dependence on science and technology and insisted on preserving India's spiritual heritage. He said: 'Material science can only give worldly prosperity, whilst spiritual science is for eternal life. If there be no eternal life, still the enjoyment of spiritual thoughts as ideals is keener and makes a man happier, whilst the foolery of materialism leads to competition and undue ambition and ultimate death, individual and national' Therefore, integrating spirituality in both personal and professional life enhances one's capacity to perform better.

When India obtained political freedom, two visions for the Nation were present in our country. One was the vision of Mahatma Gandhi. The other was the vision of Swami Vivekananda. Gandhi preferred the cottage industry. Every village would provide all that it needed. That was his dream for India. India was to be a cluster of a few lakh self-sufficient villages. He was totally against the use of widespread technology in India. He felt that introduction of technology in India would leave the masses unemployed and hungry. As opposed to the Gandhian vision, Swamiji preferred the capitalist economy. He dreamed that independent India would develop the capability to impart requisite technical & business skills to its citizens and then, with sufficient capital investment from the citizens themselves, wealth would be generated in India and India would reach the heights of economic prosperity that it always enjoyed in the past. That was his dream.

Nehru adopted neither in toto. He adopted a strange brand of socialism for India. The State funded the Steel factories and electricity producing dams and defense equipment manufacturing industries and vehicle factories and built roads and railways and established the telephone & telegraph networks. Premier technology-education institutions were started and skilled, educated people were produced. And by 1970, India had already cleared sufficient backlog of its homework. In fact, 1970s was right time to incorporate the visions of Swami Vivekananda but Indian Political establishment missed the opportunity and economy and skill development process fell prey to regime of corruption, red tapism and lethargy.

The reforms that were adopted in 1991, were hijacked by western forces due to rampant corruption in Indian political system

The present government led by Shri Narendra Modi has started taking steps towards the vision of Swami ji. Now, the important question is: Do we have the education system that can sustain an economy that is in consonance with such reforms? Do we have the education system that can supply the right kind of people to run a society that is the consequence of such reforms? The immediate answer is "No", we don't have although the government has come up with new education policy, skill development programme and resocialization of India on nationalist lines. Hope, all Indians will join the hands and India of Swami Ji dream will be built.

We can sum up the relevance of Swami Vivekananda in words of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose which reads thus - "Swamiji harmonized the East and the West, religion and science, past and present. And that is why he is great. Our countrymen have gained unprecedented self-respect, self-reliance and self-assertion from his teachings."

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“Teachings And Philosophical Knowledge of Yuma Samyo/ Yumaism on Human Values, Spiritual And Social Upliftment”

Sandhya Subba (Singzango)

The Limbus are one of the autochthonous tribes of Sikkim, Eastern Nepal, Hill Districts of West Bengal and North Eastern States of the Himalayan regions. They have a distinct religion of their own known as “Yuma Samyo/Yumaism”. Reciting Mundhum and performing rituals based on it is the integral part of Limbu tradition. The Mundhum of the Limbu is addressed to “TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA” and she is believed to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite and eternal. She is worshipped in her earthly form as a household deity “YUMA SAM” (Spirit of Yuma). The Limbu Shamans known as Phedangmas, Sambas, Yebas and Yemanis are religious practitioners through trance or possession are able to transport knowledge as a mediator between God and Limbu people (general public).

The Philosophical Ideas of YUMA SAMYO are as follows:

1. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES:

Yuma Samyo believes in single Goddess Tagera Ningwaphuma or Yuma as a supreme deity of Limbus while still recognising other Gods and Goddesses (Mangs). TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA is the creator and a sustainer of the Universe, the Protector of human beings and is worshipped in every Limbu household as “YUMA”. This shows the feminist perspectives of Limbu religion. While we see mostly male deity dominant in contemporary religion. This feminist belief system makes YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM unique to other religious belief system worldwide. Female Goddesses are worshipped and given much respect. Example: worshipping of Yuma for AKWANAMA (house warming rituals) and HANG SITLANG (main pillar rituals)

2. YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM is ANIMISTIC : Most of the divinities are personification of nature. Limbu worship nature such as Spring waters, trees, mountains, fire, moon, sun,

air etc. They believe every object of nature has soul. This belief justifies how YUMA SAMYO/ YUMAISM strikes a balance with nature. It is close to nature and environment because all the rituals are based on nature worshipping. In today’s world it has become important to balance our ecosystem due to materialistic mentality and global warming threat, while YUMA SAMYO/ YUMAISM is always insync with NATURE.

3. YUMA SAMYO/ YUMAISM does not entertain IDOL WORSHIP, IMAGE & INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP: It believes nature has no forms so do the souls too. Limbus are nature and ancestor worshippers. They worship TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA, who is omniscient and omnipresent.

4. YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM doesn’t have WRITTEN CODES OF DO’s and DON’t: One uniqueness about YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM is its absence of rules and regulations for believers. Rather MUNDHUM has many moral stories where one can get WISDOM. Examples:

Buddhism has 8 Fold Paths as one of the principal teachings.

Jainism has Five Great Vows (Maha-Vratas).

Hinduism has Vedas, Shastras and holy scriptures.

Christianity has The Holy Bible.

Islam has The Holy Quran. All emphasises the teachings and certain do’s and don’t while YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM doesn’t have any direct do’s and don’t holy scriptures for believers.

5. YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM always practised WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

A) CHEP-YANG SYSTEM: During the wedding ceremony there is one ritual where bridegroom (bewla) has to give one coin (yang

mundra) to the bride (bewli). This same coin is wore by a married woman only in the form of bangle.

The Limbu women enjoyed much freedom as compare to other community because if incase she opt to end the marriage then she only has to return the coin (yang mundra) back to her husband. This was a very easy way to get divorced without any hassle. # Similar to “Triple Talak” in Islam, where the man have the right to declare Talak but in YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM, it is the women who enjoys the right and privileges to break the marriage.

B) MUNDHUM also has a beautiful story on ‘Right to Equality’’: When TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA after the creation of Mencham yepmi (Humans) both Man and Woman. She decided both of them to be married for population density. However, during the wedding ceremony, there was one ritual of weighing (measuring) both bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom stood heavier than bride, so to sought balance/ equality between them, TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA put some gold, silver, gems and jewels at bride’s side for balance between two gender. This shows equality between genders (male and female) also this is the reason behind Limbu women wearing heavy jewellerys and ornaments.

Nenduri- measurement scale (Taraju)

Tongli- (Bow and Arrow) is still prevalent in Limbu Mekham (lagan).

6. YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM has a greater influence in SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT of Community: Through celebration of festivals based on Mundhum such as KOKFEKWA TONGNAM, CHASOK TONGNAM, SESEKPA TUMYEN etc. This festivals encourages community effort, unity, awareness towards culture, language, rituals and traditions.

7. The SHAMANS plays a vital role in YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM: Phedangmas/ Yebas are not restricted to any systematic Do’s and Don’t unlike other religious system. There is a spiritual possession or trance inside the shaman’s body who recites MUNDHUM once possessed by TAGERA NINGWAPHUMA or YUMA (Guru charnu body ma). They follow discipline practice of division of responsibility without any written code of rules.

Each shamans does their own ritualistic practises without interfering each other. Example:

Sambas perform natural death rituals while Yebas perform unnatural death rituals. This shows the sign of civilised society where division of labour is prevalent. It also shows developed ritualistic culture.

8. YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM teaches us to bestow high respect to our TUTUTUMYEHANGS, one who is eldest, experienced and expertise in Mundhum and Limbu rituals.

9. YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM develops Spiritual Upliftment by keeping us intact with our roots and ancestors through rich folktales, folklores, moral stories in Mundhum, songs, dance etc. Also by teaching us to respect women, and equal respect to both livings and nonliving things.

10. ANCESTOR WORSHIP is very important in YUMA SAMYO/YUMAISM: To pay high respect to our ancestor souls. During TONGSING/ KHAOMA, we pay our attributes and call upon our ancestors to guide the departed soul. (SAMLINGMA)

we also erect Falaicha/ Chowtara/ Rest shed after the completion of the rituals for the public use. In some places, plants are also being planted such as Bar-Pipal trees. I hope my writings help readers to get some insight into our cultures, rituals and traditions. This is to create awareness towards preservation of our rich traditions. I invite all kinds of healthy criticisms and suggestions to improve this article and awareness.

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Contribution of Momai Tamuli Barbaruah in formation of Society

Dhiren Saikia

During the reign of Swargadeu Pratap Singha, Momai Tamuli Barbaruah was a very enthusiastic administrative officer, for whose ideologies, principles and plannings he is still a person of respect and memorable. According to history, he was from Lukhurakhan clan of Ahom. His real name was Momai Nesang. According to sayings, once Patap Singha was introduced to Momai Tamuli Barbaruah while he was travelling in front of Momai's neat and clean betel forest and entering Momai's house. And then Swargadeu took him to kingdom thinking to be useful in future. In this way, Momai Tamuli Barbaruah got the chance to take part in administration. According to information, he was poor in past. In fact he kept himself mortgaged in his niece's home due to not being able to take loan of four rupees. In the year of 1618, the places which were not under the rule of Burhagohain, Bargohain and Barpatragohain, were taken under the rule of Barbarua. According to historians, his designation matches with the Chief Secretary of modern administration. He selected the occupations for the people of the village to be self-dependent. He encouraged the people for weaving. He selected weaving, reaping and planting paddies specially to women.

Momai Tamuli Barbaruah introduced the Paik System : He introduced the Paik system. He formed a group of three paikes and named them as Mul, Dewal and Tewel respectively. Every Paik had to do work for the king for four months. He fixed officers like Saikia to look after 20 groups of Paiks, Hazarika to look after for 1000 groups, Phukan for 6000 groups, and Rajkhowa for 3000 groups. His another contribution was Pacha

system. The king collected revenues and taxes by this Pacha system.

Construction of the Bridge of stone and highway by Momai Tamuli Barbaruah : Under his leadership, many bridges of stone and highways were constructed. Darika Bridge of stone, Jabaka, Chatai Road etc were too constructed under him. His another contribution was to form forest of betel, banana, litchie, betel leaf, vegetables etc in the villages. Production of silk larva, nurturing and rules of cutting threads were addition to his contributions. The historians also got proof of the traditions of keeping looms and weaving gamocha and other clothes in looms. These were another contribution of Momai Tamuli Barbaruah's. He was not only smart and intelligent, but a capable fighter too. He had skills in sword fighting, regatta, building of rampart of soil. The historians admitted that the Ahom administration was developed specially under the administrative skills of Momai Tamuli Barbaruah.

Creation of Fort in Chamdhora : Momai Tamuli Baruah was a clever, expert and far sighted. It was known that the Ahom king Pratap Singha gave a massive responsibility like of general. Then he reformed the Ahom armies and created the forts of Kaliabar and Chamdhora powerfully in short time. In the year of 1638, there was a conflict between Ahom and Mughal involving the fort of Chamdhora. It was known that after the defeat in this conflict, the Mughal general Jainuddin returned back to Guwahati.

(The original Assamese article published in Oitihya Barta, May 2019 has been translated into English by Deepsikha Das)

Why our Indigenous Faith and Culture should be preserved and protected?

Dr. Hage Tabyo

Background and broad concept of Donyi Puloism:

Before emergence of all sorts of isms (organized religions of the world), the world had a universal and informal religion with an extensive and all pervasive outlook as broad and comprehensive as that of energizing and all pervasive Sun-rays. Myth says that one of the most sublime Vedic Philosophies was churned out by Ved Vyasa by dint of an amalgamation of the indigenous and informal religious hymns and chanting of the priests and shamans from all over the world. The pieces of data were collected and compiled by the disciples of Ved Vyasa which in due course of time became the very foundation and basic structure for sublime growth of the Hindu philosophical scripts, the Vedas. This was the fountain head upon which the Hindu religion was born, which is the most ancient and stable principal religion of India, out of which other religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and others, branched out in the subsequent periods. So, one has to remember the fact that our religion is indigenous religion and the faiths which are more ancient than most of these sects of religions which have taken their shapes only out of our basic philosophical concepts of worshipping the natural entities, principally the Sun and the Moon.

Therefore, we the children of our ancestor, Abotani and allied indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh should invariably feel genuine pride and glorified to be part of that glorious past genre whereupon the inheritors of this pristine and ancient religion have the most pluralistic outlook in perception of God that is embodied in everything. The very principle of the Danyi-Pulo (Donyi-Polo, for other Tani groups) is the only living faith and culture that is existing in a harmonious alignment

with the Nature, and weaved into way of living in the very original and natural fashion and appropriately fitted in the indigenous dispensation.

One can judge and query oneself, “Whose God of any religion in the world can be seen and manifested in a physical shape?” The Danyi-Puloism (Donyi-Poloism) is the only religion whose God himself reveals amidst the disciples and alike. The Sun and the Moon (Danyi & Pulo) represent in the way in which the divine principle manifests itself, that is eternally veiling, unveiling and then revealing themselves in nature; for example, in the alternation of light nad darkness, heat and cool, or unity (analogically, the sun of the daily sky) and multiplicity (analogically, the stars of the night sky).

The basic concept of the Danyi-Puloism is that the chief guardians of the universe are the Sun, the Almighty Ayo Danyi, and the Moon, Ato Piilo-as the eyes and ears of human conscience. The Divinity has projected in the ways to man showing him the right path to tread in his life. All the happiness is given through his right action, and the right action is that which follows the order of nature, that of Danyi-Piilo. By that way of right conscience nature guides man. Therefore, prayers are to be offered to him in a regular basis as to keep a close link between God and man. According to our traditional beliefs, love, compassion, equality and selflessness are naturally orders of Danyi-Pulo and they are inscribed in nature. The ethical dimensions of Danyi-Pulo also mean-purity, beauty, simplicity, uprightness and frankness.

Scopes, Challenges and concurrent status:

To quote Mihin Kaning (an Apatani scholar), “Religion is a system of faith and worship or it can be stated as the outward act, or form by which men indicate their recognition of the existence of a god

or gods having the power over their destiny.” Although there had neither been a written scripture nor any organized religion and educational institutions in the past, yet our eternal traditional faiths and culture was very much strong and vibrant in the olden days as it upholds the old values enshrined in the saying, “Nyukhu naming ho pwmw rwgyw, Nayo naming ho tako gyegyw”. Meaning, - one’s home is the place where one and all use to meditate and pay obeysance to the gods. So, our dwelling house has been regarded as a holy and sacred place where one and all used to perform almost all the rituals, and equally has been the very place where the knowledge and wisdom is assimilated and disseminated.

So, it is our age old tradition that we, the Apatani parents and elders, do impart or share the oral literature among youngsters, friends and relatives at home sitting around the hearths till very late nights. Also in the festivals like Subu, Murun, Myoko, etc. where there used to be competitions of ballad songs such as Ayu, Busi etc., mainly among male folks where one and sundry evaluates, reviews and recharges one’s knowledge and only thereafter, one is acknowledged as learned and earned as Miji according to his profoundness in term of knowledge and expertise on the oral tradition. Such is the very way how the ‘Miji-migun’ has been inculcated and percolating down to the next generation thereby maintaining a balance between the matter and spirit of which self confidence of each member of society is ensured and rejuvenated.

If such a link is not followed up, the existing culture is definitely going to fade into oblivion. The question is whether we can tolerate such a situation to happen in the Apatani society and still live a life happily ever after, owning and accepting an alien culture instead, neglecting our very own centuries’ old forefather’s gifted and blessed tradition, owing to our laziness or carelessness? There is a kind of a situation today similar to one stage during Abotani’s life and times. In those days, when all the malevolent spirits of this Earth, viz. Turbo, Lyabo, Myotw-Pilya, Dingyan-Su, and others did conspire to eliminate Abotani from this Earth as the later was very clever,

cunning and powerful than them. Somehow, later on, Abotani overcame that situation with the help of his sister, Dolyang Changiang and well wishers and by performing the Myoko rite.

So there is that similarity of the situation prevalent in the present day. Our very own Indigenous faith and culture is being attacked covertly and overtly by various hostile elements particularly Christianity to swallow up and wipe out from this world. Thus, the very pristine and ancient living culture is being pushed towards backyards.

It is admittedly true that many of the Indigenous customs and traditional rituals may have few or many elements that are in consistent with the modern day life. But it is true for most of the religions including very established religions of the world. It is noteworthy that all religions have passed through successive reformative movements initiated by preachers and thinkers. We too can do kinds of review and reform or modify such many or few contents and text versions of our culture with due help of living Miji personnel and Nyibus alike. It is high time to come forward by elites and intelligentsia groups to break the barriers of shyness and reluctance to forge ahead to make our age old culture and faith vibrant, alive and kicking as ever before it is too late.

When our other Indian counterparts like Hindus, Sikhs etc. and other ancient civilizations, notably the Chinese and Japanese could invariably embrace modernity by vigorously preserving their ancient faith and culture, why we too similarly can’t carry forward the legacy of our forefathers? However, it is also worthy to note that the success of our Donyi-Polo faith movement has crossed the Tani cultural borders recently which is indeed inspiring the rise of the ‘Rangfraism’ among the Tangsas of Changlang District and ‘Intayaism’ among the Mishmis of Dibang Valley.

It is a matter of pride that Arunachal Pradesh is one of the few remaining places on this Earth where indigenous faiths are still the living systems. In other places, tribal religions have either drastically been modified or abandoned altogether due to proselytization or conversion to other faiths. In many

of such places, the people are only now trying to rediscover the inner core essence of their original traditional religions. Such ones can be cited as an instance of the Seng-Khasi movement among a section of the Khasis of Meghalaya. After more than a century of conversion to Christianity, a section of Khasi tribe wishes to return, revive and reinstate the pre-Christian, Naturalistic indigenous faith called the 'Seng-Khasi' religion. The similar is a case in Imphal Valley of Manipur, where the dominant Meitei-speaking Manipuris have been Hindu Vaishnavites for nearly 300 years now, following the patronization of the new faith by King Garib Nawaz. And yet, among such ardent Vaishnavites there arose, especially in the recent past centuries, a revivalist movement to restore the Pre-Vaishnava Nature worshipping religion, called 'Senamahi'. The Senamahi faith has certain following in the Imphal valley. The revivalist movement also lent an edge to Meitei ethnic cultural identity consolidation.

By and large, the culture and faith are only two sides of the one same coin. One cannot be separated from the other. But now a days some section of our society attempt to separate these two and erroneously tend to own and accept only one and discard the other which is nothing but their illusion only.

Analyses of Core Issues:

Today, it has become oblivious that the pristine and unabridged forms of our faith, tradition, customs and practices are getting diminished due to modernization and centrifugal mode of dispersal of populace, also because of obligatory absorption towards various livelihood professions.

Some of the principal factors may be enumerated as follows:

1) Due to the perennial absence of incorporation into the study lessons/course of study containing traditional, moral and cultural values in the modern education system so introduced in educational institutions, although having been able to produce bright professionals among today's generations but with miserably weak in cultural sensibility and having a inherent feeling of traditional learning system being

obsolete. As a consequence, today's people's attraction has been drawn only towards material prosperity giving rise to vulnerability apostasy.

2) Lack of written documentation of oral tradition, giving rise to confinement of text and ballad literatures conservatively only with the Nyibus(priests), making them beyond the reach of common men, resulting to latter's ignorance, awkwardness/ lack of proximity to the subject-matter and weak in self-confidence.

3) The incessant onslaught of alien faiths and cultures projecting themselves as the only saviours of humanity as well as epitome of modernity and civilization with huge resources and well prepared strategy having covertly and overtly.

Conclusion:

To uphold the very value of an old adage in Apatani: "Popi Nitin ka lenda mi sanw lyipu kune masa, Sarmin hormin ka lenda mi kusu lyiru kwne masa",

It would be an act of wisdom to mend our own house and stay in conformity with the changing times and modernity than to stay in obeisance with an alien friend whose house is well built but who hates our nature of dwelling. These hostile elements well realize the diminishing pattern of interest and difficulty in applicability among the present generation people in dissemination and assimilation of age-old oral traditional methods. Hence, their exploitation is beyond a limit. So, one should stay grounded and must not allow to die this living culture, lest our revered ancestors and progenies would blame the present generation. Lessons should be learnt from the Jews who have still preserved their ancient faiths from the external cultural onslaughts by their much stronger neighbors since 1800 years with their faith and social responsibility alone. To preserve, protect and promote the indigenous faith and culture, the Meder Nelo Council movement by Apatani Danyi Pulo meder-Nello Council, Ziro has been taking up various reformation activities which is aimed at sustaining and maintaining our indigenous faith uninterruptedly.

107th birth anniversary of Rani Gaidinlu observed

As the entire nation is celebrating the 'Azadi Ka Amrita Mahotsav' to commemorate the completion of 75th year of the hard earned Independence of our country, the villagers of Boro Haflong in Dima Hasao district under the aegis of 'Mpuilo Boro Haflong Youth' have made all arrangements to celebrate the 107th Birth Anniversary of the legendary Freedom Fighter, Padma Bhushan recipient 'Daughter of the Hills' Ranima Gaidinlu with a simple yet august celebration observing all formalities in view of COVID 19 on January 26 coinciding with the Republic Day.

Though Darrang district on the northern bank of river Brahmaputra in no way is connected with Dima Hasao district or Ranima Gaidinlu, but at the initiative of Er Keshab Kumar Sarma of Mangaldai serving in the Railway department at Haflong, a sculptor of high repute Pradip Karmakar of Mangaldai constructed a life size statue of this legendary freedom fighter which was installed at the entry point to New Haflong Railway Station in 2010.

Significantly this statue is the only of its kind in the entire country. "While I was serving in the Railway department at Haflong, I came to visit the Boro Haflong village and came in close contact with the villagers. I was surprised to know that no statue of

this 'Daughter of the Hills' was installed in any place in the country. As per the discussion with the villagers I asked Pradip Karmakar of Mangaldai to construct the life size statue of Ranima Gaidinlu to which all the villagers extended all cooperation and support. It is my privilege to get involved in such a noble venture" said Er Keshab Kumar Sarma.

In this year's celebration of the birth anniversary of Ranima Gaidinlu scheduled on January 26, the villagers have invited journalist Bhargab Kumar Das of 'The Sentinel' as the chief guest and Journalist Ganesh Dutta, Hitesh Hazarika and Dharmendra Narayan Dev of Mangaldai as the guest of honour. Recalling his involvement in the installation of the statue, the villagers have also accorded invitation to Er Keshab Kumar Sarma.

Ranima Gaidinlu, considered as an incarnation of the 'Goddess Cherachamdinliu,' was arrested in 1932 at the young age of 16 and was convicted with life imprisonment by the colonial British rulers. After spending 14 years in different jails, she finally got her release in 1947 after the Independence. This legendary freedom fighter breathed her last in 1993 at the age of 78. She was awarded 'Tamra Patra' in 1972, Padma Bhushan in 1982, Vivekananda Sewa award in 1983 and Birsa Munda Award posthumously.

Two from Assam Conferred the Most Prestigious Padma Shri

On Tuesday 25 January the government of India made the announcement for the list of Padma Awards for this year. Two from the northeastern state of Assam have successfully made to the list of Padma Shri Awards. It is a moment of pride for Assam that two eminent personalities from the state will be receiving the most prestigious Padma Shri Award 2022. According to the Padma Award list released by the Centre on Tuesday, Shakuntala Choudhary from Assam has been selected for her contribution to social work for the welfare of society.

Notably, Shakuntala Choudhary was earlier honoured by the government of India with the National Awards for Senior Citizens - Vayojhetha Samman in the year 2021. Miss Shakuntala works as the supervisor at the Kasturba Ashram located in Guwahati city of Assam and is recognized as a well-known social worker of the state. She has immense contribution to the well-being and empowerment of women across the country.

Another eminent personality to receive the Padma

(Contd. to Page 19)

Six from Northeast chosen for Padma Awards 2022

According to the press note of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shakuntala Choudhury and Dhaneswar Engti from Assam, Lourembam Bino Devi and Muktamani Devi from Manipur, T Senka Ao from Nagaland and Khandu Wangchuk Bhutia from Sikkim will get the Padma Shri award.

While Choudhury has been chosen for the award for her contribution to social work, T Senka Ao, Bino Devi and Bhutia have been selected for their contribution to the field of Art. On the other hand, Engti will get the award for his contribution to literature and Muktamani Devi has been chosen for her contribution to the trade.

Padma Awards – one of the highest civilian Awards of the country, are conferred in three categories, namely, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. The Awards are given in various disciplines/fields of activities—art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc. ‘Padma Vibhushan’ is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; ‘Padma Bhushan’ for distinguished service of high order and ‘Padma Shri’ for distinguished service in

any field. The awards are announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year. These awards are conferred by the President of India at ceremonial functions which are held at Rashtrapati Bhawan usually around March/ April every year.

Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, former Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat, classical vocalist Prabha Atre and Gita Press founder Radheyshyam Khemka were chosen for Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award. Senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad and Communist veteran Buddhadeb Bhattacharya were among 17 Padma Bhushan recipients.

This year the President has approved conferment of 128 Padma Awards including 2 duo case (in a duo case, the Award is counted as one) , said the press note.

The list comprises 4 Padma Vibhushan, 17 Padma Bhushan and 107 Padma Shri Awards.

34 of the awardees are women and the list also includes 10 persons from the category of Foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI and 13 Posthumous awardees, it added.

(Contd. from Page 18)

Two from Assam Conferred the Most Prestigious Padma Shri

Shri Award 2022 is Dhaneswar Engti from Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Dhaneswar Engti is a well-known lyricist and a writer who is widely recognized for his contribution to the field of Karbi music and Karbi literature. Dhaneswar Engti has been selected for the most prestigious award in the field of Literature and Education. The renowned writer has earlier received the prestigious Kristinandan Literary Award in the year 2017.

The Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma took to Twitter to express his delight over the achievements of the two eminent personalities and to congratulate them on being selected for the most

prestigious award. The chief minister in a tweet wrote that the contribution of Dhaneswar Engti in Karbi music and literature will be cherished forever by the upcoming generations. On writing about the selection of Shakuntala Choudhary for the Padma Shri Award, he stated that Shakuntala Choudhary has devoted her entire life to the service of mankind and the Padma award is a fitting tribute to her contribution to society.

It may be mentioned a total of six esteemed personalities from the Northeast will be receiving the fourth highest civilian award, Padma Shri for the year 2022.

UNESCO Heritage Site Tag Sought for 'Living Root Bridges' of Meghalaya

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has asserted that the 'Living Root Bridges' in Meghalaya must meet the categories of 'Faunal Diversity' and the 'preparation of health cards' to attain the tag of United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site.

The Living Root Bridges is situated inside a remote village in the northeastern state of Meghalaya. It is a breathtaking destination for tourists and it showcases the botanical and socio-cultural links between nature and human culture.

Dr Dhriti Banerjee, the Director of ZSI, a premier and reputed zoological organization, has stressed two aspects for fulfilling the IX and X criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage. Sites showcasing significant ongoing ecological & biological processes and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals are represented by Criteria IX.

On the other hand, sites that contain significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation is represented by Criteria X.

Meanwhile, Professor K Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India is also in favour of designating this destination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. He said that Living Root Bridges deserve the UNESCO tag due to its rich micro and macro species associated with this majestic destination. Scientists from the ZSI recently paid a visit to some sites of the 'Living Root Bridges' for assessing its faunal diversity. They documented

as many as 83 faunas, which includes six mammals, five aquatic, 72 terrestrials, from the 11 Living Root Bridges.

It is worth noting that six species of mammals were reported for the first time from two bridges. "A fruit bat, *Macroglossus sobrinus* K Anderson, was found with seeds in spit and seemed to be a potential seed disperser, which needs further investigation. Entomofaunal diversity includes eight orders (two aquatic, six terrestrial) within the radius of 200 metres of Living Root Bridges assessed," the ZSI said in a statement. The statement added that Nohwet, a living root bridge site, was found to have more diversity of butterflies, dragonflies and aquatic insects than other Living Root Bridges.

Furthermore, no infestation of Isoptera (termites) was observed in any of the root bridges and the scientists also spotted spider webs on tree trunks. The scientists also stated that 'Living Root Bridges' houses several critically-endangered species of flora and fauna and is therefore a major reason to be listed as an UNESCO World Heritage site.

The 'Living Root Bridges' is locally referred to as 'Jingkieng Jri' and is conserved by the communities of Meghalaya through their sacred customary practice of preserving the groves known as 'Law Kyntang'. 'Living Root Bridges' are made from rubber tree roots, which is known as *Ficus elastica* tree and their tangled webs of roots provide a stable alternative to wooden bridges. It is considered to be one of the finest creations of nature.

Last but not the least, Meghalaya could witness a significant boost in tourism if this jaw-dropping site gets the UNESCO World Heritage Site tag.

‘Unseen Meghalaya’ Bags Best Short Documentary Award

“Unseen Meghalay — Journey into the Unexplored Living Root Bridges” which highlights the beauty of Meghalaya’s living root bridges, earned the award for best short documentary film at the 14th Jaipur International Film Festival, The short film, created by famous filmmaker Sapan Narula and produced by Canon India, highlights the world’s only live root bridge, an ancient natural legacy unique to North East India’s Khasi woods.

“We are happy to have won this prize for the best short documentary film at the prestigious 14th Jaipur International Film Festival, 2021,” the team of Unseen Meghalaya remarked in response to their achievement at JIFF. The entire team would like to express their gratitude to the jury for choosing our film, which presents a lovely story about a strong link between nature and a 24-year-old Khasi kid named Morningstar Khongthaw who is working to conserve and preserve this natural heritage.”

As noted, the film takes the audience on a journey with Morningstar and his young apprentice across the world’s only triple Decker living root bridge and the world’s longest-living root bridge. These bridges, which were once the lifeblood of tribal societies, are now threatened by modernization and climate change. A living root bridge is made by guiding the pliable roots of the *Ficus elastica* tree across a stream or river, then allowing the roots to grow and strengthen over time until they can support the weight of a person. Young roots are frequently tied or twisted together, and inoculation is used to stimulate them to connect with one another.

The *Ficus elastica* tree’s roots are well suited to anchoring themselves to steep slopes and rocky surfaces, therefore encouraging them to take hold on the opposite sides of river banks is not difficult.

The film has been shot at the rare locations of Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, India.

Morningstar Khongthaw, a 24-year-old Khasi native, has taken it upon himself to conserve and maintain the root bridges, which his tribe believes are their ancestors’ spiritual heritage, erected with ancient ways passed down through centuries in this secluded jungle wonderland. Simran Gill, the creator of Film Trotters Media, is the film’s creative producer and scriptwriter. The film has also been selected for screening at a number of prestigious film festivals around the world, including Cannes International Independent Film Festival (CIIFF) 2021 (Nominee); Venice Shorts 2021 (Finalist); Switzerland International Film Festival (SIFF) 2021; and Goa Short Film Festival 2021.

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Archival material on Arunachal heroes handed over to Rajiv Gandhi University

Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Friday officially handed over the archival manuscripts and materials of about 2,000 pages on various tribes to the History Department of the Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) in a simple function organized here. The History Department of RGU has been appointed by the Government as the nodal department to compile a blueprint on the unsung heroes of the State, who would be given due recognition during the celebration of year-long 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

The historic documents were collected by Nepha Wangsa and Chow Bilaseng Namchoom from important repositories of the Delhi-based National Archives of India, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi and the Indian Council of Historical Research, besides the State Archives of Assam, the British Library and Museum and various other sources. The handing over ceremony was organized at the joint meeting of the Core Committee on Unsung Heroes of Arunachal Pradesh with the research sub-committee of RGU, which was chaired by Mein.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Chief Minister said that the current work is a huge responsibility and should be done with utmost care. "Many engagements of the indigenous people with the British government are still unknown and untraced. There is the task on our part to rewrite our own history from the perspective of our people," he said. He added that the British accounts, their official correspondence, writings of Missionaries and other documents found in the archives are the sources of information.

Mentioning the example of the publication of 'Arunodoi', the first magazine published from Assam in 1846, Mein stated that it reflected categorically about the Khamti-British war of 1839

and Mishmis. "Other documents depict the four Anglo-Abor wars, Wancho engagements with the British at Ninu, other engagements of the Nyishis, Singphos, Akas etc," he said. "Such documents speak volumes about our people of those times which are not known to the present generation", Mein said, and added that the State needs to rewrite its history with the help of such documents and make it known to the world.

He added, "It is a blessing for our State as the Government of India is initiating 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', which gives us special opportunity to garner information on the unsung heroes of the State and also give them due recognition." The Deputy Chief Minister urged the History Department to prepare a report within a stipulated time frame with utmost care with thorough research under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Prof Saket Kushwaha, and assured support of the State Government in the process of the execution of the blueprint. "The nature of the work to get the unsung heroes of the State recognized is challenging, but it will be historic, once the compilation and extensive research is done in our perspective and included in the NCERT books," he pointed out. He urged the research committee members to work as a team seamlessly without giving any scope for criticism in future. Core Committee member Tai Tagak informed about his tour to various parts of the State during which he visited various war memorials. He suggested the need to establish a martyr's memorial at Itanagar. Tagak also mentioned the war heroes of the Indo-Chinese war of 1962, where many Arunachalee jawans were martyred on the line of duty, besides many porters who volunteered to aid the Indian soldiers during the war. "Such heroes should also find a place of recognition which can be included in the 50 years' celebration," he added. Research

scholar Nepha Wangsa, while sharing his work experience, informed that he was doing the research work since 2015 on the Wancho-British war incident at Ninu. He expressed his gratitude to the Deputy Chief Minister for all the help rendered to him to carry out his research works and collect the archival materials from various repositories of India and abroad. The Vice-Chancellor of RGU informed that the university is making its best effort to execute the

work its scholars have toured the State to collect information from various sources and community-based organizations as part of sincere efforts to complete the task. Prof Ashan Riddi of RGU talked about the progress of the work and field visits carried out by the research sub-committee in various districts of the State. He also presented a timeline and said that the final report to the Core Committee headed by Mein will be submitted in June this year.

Nagaland Villagers Build an Indoor Stadium

In order to host a grand wrestling event for nine villages, a temporary Indoor Stadium was set up by the locals of a Nagaland village with a seating capacity of 5,000 people. The Indoor stadium has been constructed in the Thipuzu village that comes under the Phek district of Nagaland and the site is located 52 kilometers from Kohima. The makeshift stadium of 210 by 210 feet has been constructed by the villagers by themselves and has been completed after a lot of effort.

Interestingly, the locals gave a theme to the stadium as 'Do It Yourself (DIY). The locals made stadium to host the 29th Chokri Area Wrestling Association meet starting from Thursday 20 January, 2022. The green-colored stadium is constructed on open grounds with the help of wood, tarpaulin, bamboo, and greenhouse nets. The managing chairperson of the wrestling Association informed that to make the rooftop of the stadium about 1800 meters of greenhouse nets was required and to built the walls of the stadium about 100-kilogram tarpaulin was used. 4 gates are provided for entry into the stadium among which there are two mini gates and two main gates. Space is also provided

for parking purposes and for shops at the side of the stadium.

Notably, the stadium was completed within the time period of 14 days by a total of 30 local villagers without taking aid from any other sources or any type of blueprint. The team of people setting up the stadium was led by a villager named Medove Tetseo. The DIY stadium shows the hard work, passion, and dedication of the villagers, who worked hard to make a well-built stadium for wrestling meets in the area.

It may be mentioned that about 230 people were involved in carrying out the construction with materials like like woods, bamboo and other materials. Veshuzo, the management chairman informed that an amount of Rs 80,000 was used to complete the construction of the indoor stadium.

It is believed that the same stadium will host the 7th edition of JCBKK (Japfüphiki Chokri Baptist Khriesarüü Krotho) which is a religious meet of the Chakhesang tribe from the Chokri area and Angami tribe from the southern area of Nagaland.

Nalanda University

Prasanta Kumar Kalita

(Translated into English from original Assamese by Arunabh Barman)

What is University?

“The word Universitas is one to which a false explanation is often assigned for polemical purposes by controversial writers, while the true explanation of it at once supplies us with a clue to the nature and historical origin of the institution itself. The notion that a University means a Universitas Facultatum – a School in which all the Faculties or branches of knowledge are represented – has, indeed, long since disappeared from the pages of professed historians; but it is still persistently foisted upon the public by writers with whom history is subordinate to what may be called intellectual edification. However, imposing and stimulating may be the conception of an institution for the teaching or for the cultivation of universal knowledge, however imperative the necessity of such an institution in modern times, it is one which can gain little support from the facts of history. A glance into any collection of medieval documents reveals the fact that the word ‘University’ means merely a number, a plurality, an aggregate of persons. Universitas vestra, in a letter addressed to a body of persons, means merely ‘the whole of you’; in a more technical sense it denotes a legal corporation or juristic person; in Roman Law (though in strictness a wider term) it is for most purposes practically the equivalent of collegiums.” (Page No. 6-7, The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages, Hastings Rashdall, 1895)

“In course of time, it was used with reference to an institution which embraced all the arts and sciences, whereas Newman called that a University which held out invitation to students of every kind.” (Page No. 1, The University of Nalanda, Hasmukh D. Sankalia, 1934).

Nalanda, which is about 40 miles south of Patna, is the birth and death place of Sariputta, the beloved disciple

of Buddha and also known as right hand of him. Ashoka is said to have built a temple here. But this place was established as a center of learning around 450 BC. This is because the description of Fabien Chang, a Chinese traveler who visited India in 410 AD, did not mention the importance of education in this place. However, with the patronage of many kings of the Gupta Empire, it was soon able to gain recognition as an important learning center. Although a staunch Hindu supporter, the Gupta rulers shared maximum of the cost of developing the Buddhist university, providing equipment and developing talent. Shatruditya, popularly known as Kumaragupta I (410-454 AD), established a monastery here and laid the foundation for the development of Nalanda’s heroism. The magnificent Buddha Temple located in this monastery has been famous as the central place of worship for many centuries. Tathagata Gupta, Narsingh Gupta, Baladitya and Budhgupta all built monasteries together at this place. Baladitya’s successor Bajra and a king of Central India built two more monasteries here. By the eleventh century, new buildings were being built in Nalanda with donations from Hindus and Buddhists.

Plan of the building:

Excavations have revealed that Nalanda University was one mile long and half a mile wide. The monasteries and stupas of all the monks were built as per the earlier plan. All of them were built in an orderly manner in a row. The Central College had an auditorium with three hundred small rooms for lecturing on eight different subjects. The construction of some of the mansions was magnificent. Contemporary accounts suggest that the Nalanda buildings touched the clouds. From this it can be inferred that the size of these buildings was quite large. There was a large body of water adorned with blue lotus and full of clean water. These reservoirs not only beautified the entire university campus but also served as a source of water supply. The residential area was surrounded by a wall and there

was an entrance to the south.

Arrangements of Accommodation and feeding:

The Bhikkhu (Monk) students were residents of the monaster[es] built for the purpose of living. Evidence of the existence of thirteen or more such monasteries is evident from the excavations. The monasteries were at least bicameral and had one and two rooms. Each room had a bed of stone for each occupant and adequate space for lamps and books. By looking at the system of water supply for each monastery yard, it can be inferred that due attention was paid to the problem of water supply. Rooms were allocated on the basis of seniority and were re-examined annually. Kitchens were arranged in a wide space in each monastery.

It proves that the dormitories had meals together. The university donated a fortified village and provided free food and clothing to the Bhikkhu students. According to the rules of the Buddhist monastery, this facility was extended to the Bhikkhu (Monk) students who had agreed to offer some special services. However, due to the patronage received from the Hindu rulers, such facilities were provided to all Hindu students.

Number of Students:

In about 65 AD, I-tsing lived in Nalanda with more than three thousand monks living together. "In the Nalanda monastery the number of priests is very large, and exceeds three thousand." (Page No.154, A Record of the Buddhist Religion, *I-tsing, 1896*). According to the biographer Hiuen Chang, the population of Nalanda at that time mostly touched tens of thousands. In fact, this biographer never came to India and therefore this information is less credible. According to Hiuen Chang, a number of monks and nuns lived here. From all the data it can be estimated that at least five thousand monks lived in Nalanda in the middle of the seventh century AD.

Monasteries and Universities:

Nalanda was not just a monastery, but its reputation as a center of learning spread far and wide. According to Hiuen Chang "The priests, to the

number of several thousands, are men of the highest ability and talent. Their distinction is very great at the present time, and there are many hundreds whose fame has rapidly spread through distant regions. Their conduct is pure and unblemished. They followed in sincerity the precepts of the moral law. The rules of this convent are severe, and all the priests are bound to observe them. The countries (States) of India respect them and follow them. A day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night they engage in discussion; the old and the young mutually helped each other. Those who cannot discuss questions as per Tripitaka are obliged to hide themselves in shame. Learned men from different cities, who desire to acquire quickly a renown in discussion, come here in multitudes to clear their doubts, and then the streams (of their wisdom) spread far and wide. For this reason some persons usurped the name of Nalanda and craved for honor in return.. (Page No.170. Buddhist Record of The Western World, Vol.II, Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang A.D.629, 1884)". The names of the eminent scholars and skilled logicians of the university were written in white letters in the list of all the new students and guests. "They receive grants of land, and are promoted to a high rank; their famous names are, as a reward, written in white on their lofty gates. After this they can follow whatever occupation they liked." (Page No.178, A Record of the Buddhist Religion, I-tsing, 1896)".

Enrollment of Students:

The enrollment process was very strict and of good quality. If anyone wants to enroll here, first they have to face some difficult questions from the gatekeeper, many of which are unanswered. Both ancient and modern texts had to be studied in depth before enrolling here. Therefore, the new students who came here had to perform very well in very difficult discussions. The number of unsuccessful people was seven or eight out of ten compared to the number of successful people. "From the number of unsuccessful students, which was seven or eight out of ten, it is evident that the examination must have been very strict. Students of moderate talent were not only bound to fail to get admission but by

their non-admission they even forfeited their fame as eminent debaters. This entrance examination, as it is clear from words like 'other quarters' and 'strangers' seems to have been held for those students, who had not received their 'primary' and 'secondary' education at Nalanda. But for the students who had received their 'primary' and 'secondary' education at Nalanda and who were generally those who had embraced Buddhism, no such examination was necessary. They had to study, first, the Buddhist works and then works of other faiths and systems. Then in course of time, when they had finished certain works, they were placed in charge of various department of the University, majority of them being appointed as Acharjyas." (Page No.148, The University of Nalanda by H.D. Sankalia,1934) But those who are talented, full of knowledge, especially capable, famous, eminent persons, they were able to associate their names with the names of all the famous people of this University.

Age of Enrollment:

(1) One should be at least twenty years old for enrollment in Nalanda. This is because it took five years to study 'Vrittisutra', which started at the age of fifteen. In order to study in India from China, one had to first acquire knowledge in this subject (grammar). "They should study hard day and night, without letting a moment pass for idle repose. thus instructed by their teachers and instructing others they pass two or three years, generally in the Nalanda monastery in Central India, or in the country of Valabhi in Western India." [Page No.175,177, A Record of the Buddhist Religion, I-tsing, 1896] "But the statement of I-tsing, we think, applies to those students who went to Nalanda to get the Nalanda-seal on the knowledge and culture already obtained by them." (Page No.149, The University of Nalanda by H.D. Sankalia, 1934)"

(2) Nalanda also had students who had spent their entire lives as monks. Not all such students are in their twenties, but they entered Nalanda only five to seven years ago, having mastered the grammar. For these students, Nalanda was not just a university, it was the center of secondary education, from which

they gradually progressed and entered the university. From the above discussion it is clear that there were two age limits for enrollment in Nalanda.

The age limit for all, like Dharmapala and Shilvadra, who came from outside, was twenty years, and for all the other monks who joined the association, it was thirteen or fifteen years.

High standard of devotion and erudition:

The abbots of Nalanda were famous for their devotion and erudition. Among these, both Dharmapala and Chandrapala illuminated everyone with the light of Buddha's wisdom. Quality and consistency, whose reputation for good education has spread in modern times. Shilvadra's perfect excellence made him shine in the midst of darkness. All these memorable persons knew that they had surpassed all their predecessors and reached the highest excellence and had surpassed all the predecessors in the field of scholarship. Each of them has written almost a dozen books and commentaries which are still going on for the reason of details and clarity. The seven scholars mentioned above were fully developed in the first half of the seventh century. The seven hundred year history of Nalanda was marked by the emergence of certain and highly qualified scholars. It has already been said that up to five thousand monks and nuns lived here during the reign of Hiuen Chang. About one thousand of them were able to explain thirty types of formulas and about ten were able to explain fifty types of formulas.

Arrival of students from India and abroad

Many students from different parts of India and foreign countries were eager to study at Nalanda University. Fahian, Hiuen Chang and I-shing, not only these three Chinese scholars were attracted to Nalanda. Thirty years between the travels of Hiuen Chang and I-shing, Thom-mi, Hiuen-chiu, Tao-hi, Aryavarman, Buddhism, Tao-ching, Tang, and Hui-lu, all of which are located in China, Korea, Tibet, and other parts of the world Came to Nalanda. These people spent a long time in Nalanda and copied a large number of ancient texts.

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



Living Root Bridges of Meghalaya

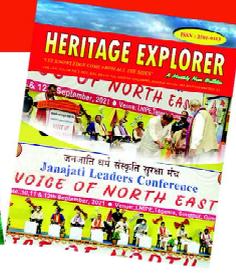
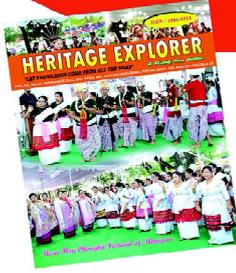
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