

COMMUNAL HARMONY AMONG TRIBAL AND NON-TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OF NORTH EAST INDIA

**ASSAM INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH FOR
TRIBALS AND SCHEDULED CASTES
JAWAHAR NAGAR, GUWAHATI-781022**

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Among Tribal and
Non-Tribal Communities
of North East India.**

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Communal Harmony Among Tribal and Non-Tribal
the proceeding, recommendation and papers presented in
the National Seminar held on 5-6 July, 2002.

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PREFACE

A Regional level Seminar on "Communal Harmony Among the Tribal and Non-Tribal Communities of North East India" was organised by the Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati-22 in the auditorium hall of the Institute during 5-6 July 2002. The seminar was sponsored by the "National Foundation for Communal Harmony, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi under the Project "REACH". The main objectives of organising the seminar was to -

- (i) Discuss the role and contributions of all tribal and non tribal groups in overall development of North East region.
- (ii) Communal and racial harmony prevailing in this part of India, its "present" and "future".
- (iii) To build up the awareness of unity and brotherhood among all ethnic groups.
- (iv) To find out the causes of conflicts and
- (v) To evolve strategy to reduce such conflict and spread the message of communal harmony and national integration.

With this view seminar papers from distinguished scholars belonging to various Universities, Colleges, Research Institutes, Government Departments and Non-Government Organisations etc. were invited based on the following parameters.

- (1) Unity among diversity : North East India.
- (2) Economic and Socio-cultural contours of North Eastern Tribal Society.
- (3) Social change in tribal society : the contributions of non-tribal and other ethnic groups.

- (4) Extremism and Sectionalism : North East India.
- (5) Seven Sisters : Yesterday, today and tomorrow.
- (6) Religious and Racial differences/diversities : steps towards National Integration.

The response was very encouraging and total 14 (fourteen) numbers of papers from 18 (eighteen) numbers of writers from different parts of this region were received and scheduled for presentation in four academic sessions.

INAUGURATION :

The seminar was inaugurated on 5th July 2002 at 10-30 a.m. by Shri Pankaj Bora, Hon'ble Minister of Education, Assam. In his inaugural speech Shri Bora expressed his happiness for organising the seminar on communal harmony and urged the distinguished seminarists to diagonalise the root cause of communal violence and to find out the ways and measures to stop the communal violence and disharmony among all ethnic groups.

Sri B.B. Hagjer, I.A.S., Secretary, Department for Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Classes, in his speech expressed that the communal harmony among the tribal and non-tribal communities of North East States is somewhat better than the other states of India. He also requested the seminarists to make the seminar a fruitful one through discussion and interaction and identify the real solutions to the problem of communal violence.

In his speech, as Chief Guest, Dr. Amalendu Guha, eminent social scientist spoke at length about the communal disharmony among the Hindus and Muslims prevailing in the country, border dispute between the states of North East India and the ethnic problems of Assam etc.

The inaugural function was presided over by Shri Jatin Hazarika, (retd. I.A.S.). In his Presidential Address, Shri Hazarika offered thanks to the Director of the Institute for

organising a seminar on such an important and vital subject and expressed hope that the problems of communal disharmony could be sorted out during the academic sessions of the seminar.

Earlier Mrs. N.A. Hazarika, A.C.S., Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes welcomed the distinguished participants and explained the objectives of the seminar. About 150 people from different places and different walk of life had participated the inaugural function of the seminar.

ACADEMIC SESSION - 1

The seminar had four academic sessions and altogether 12 nos. of papers were presented out of 14 nos. of papers received from 18 nos. of writers. One paper could not be presented due to the absence of the author while the second one was accepted without presentation due to shortage of time.

The first academic session was held soon after the inaugural function on 5th July 2002 and continued for one and half hour from 11-45 a.m. to 1-15 p.m. This session was presided over by Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur, former Director, AIRT&SC and Member, Backward Classes Commission, Assam, Shri P.N. Bharali, District Research Officer, Dibrugarh acted as Rapporteur. Two papers were presented in this session.

The first paper was presented by Sri Jatin Hazarika, Retd, IAS and eminent civil servant of the State on the topic "National Integration in the context of North-East: an Overview" in which he widely discussed on democracy pluralism and national integration in the context of India and North East, its background and with a view road ahead a strong united and resurgent India. The second paper was presented by Dr. D.P. Barooah, former Dean, Faculty of Arts and Vice-Chancellor, Gauhati University, the subject of his paper was "Reflections on India's North East : Between Past and Future" a portrait on Political North-East" he offered certain tentative

suggestions to design a workable federal system in the context of the federal policy and its North East with the end in view of achieving a fair amount of peace and stability. Presentation of both the papers followed by a good deal of questions, queries and discussions.

ACADEMIC SESSION - II.

The second session was held from 2-00 p.m. to 4-00 p.m. under the Chairmanship of Sri Bimal Kr. Hazarika, A.C.S. Secretary, Department of Education, Assam and former Director of AIRTSC and Shri P.N. Bharali, acted as Rapporteur.

In this session also two papers were presented. The first speaker was Sri Ismail Hossain. Asstt. Professor, Assam Engineering Institute and the theme of his paper was "Communal Harmony among the various Tribes and Non-Tribal People's Culture of Assam". A group of folk artists from different parts of the State accompanying him with performance of songs and dances of various ethnic groups on unity and brotherhood. The topic of the second paper was on "Communal Harmony in the folk songs of Abhibhasi Muslim people of Assam" presented by Mr. Gholam Saruwar. Principal, Kayakuchi College, Barpeta. This paper was also supported by musical presentation of songs and dances of Char areas of Assam which had reflected the harmony and peace among all classes of people.

After presentation of these two papers, observations and discussions continued among the participants for more than half an hour. The third paper was accepted by the assembly as the same could not be widely discussed due to shortage of time. The subject was "The Life and Culture of Meghalaya and its integration with the North East" and the author was Ms. Sarbani kar Purkayastha, Lecturer, Umshyrpi Collège, Shillong, Meghalaya.

ACADEMIC SESSION III

July 6-2002 the day begins with warm participation and enthusiasm. The third academic session started at 10-30 A.M. under the Chairmanship of Dr. Amalendu Guha, eminent Social Scientist. He was assisted by Dr. Sunita Changkakaty, a social activist worked as rapporteur.

In this session four numbers of papers were scheduled. The first speaker was Dr. P.K. Haldar, Professor and Head of the Department of Commerce, Tripura University, Agartala who spoke on "The facets of Harmony between tribals and non-tribals of Tripura" based on his own experiences as academicians, vastly discussed all influential factors responsible for conflict and disharmony among tribals and minorities of Tripura in his paper. Number of questions were put forward to him by the audience and Dr. Haldar clarified all of them with sufficient data and examples. This paper was followed by a warmly presentation of Smti. Senehi Begum, Principal, Handique Girls College, Guwahati on the topic "Ahom's relation with some of Hill Tribes: An Overview" - An interesting attempt by her in this paper to overview the Ahom Rulers who were praised in history for their political foresight and wisdom specially in relation to the hill tribes of the North East, "India's North East: Need to strengthen its tribal character" - This paper was written by Dr. Abu Nasar Saïed Ahmed, Director, Amio Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Assam. The paper was forwarded by the Chairman in the absence of the writer. And the last paper of this session was presented by Mr. A.K. Goldsmith a social activist and co-ordinator of Charches Auxilliary For Social Action (CASA) - who presented an unusual paper and talked on the following point- peace. Non-violence, Communal Harmony Pre-colonial status, Social Organisations, Post-colonial status Indian Union, the conflict areas, reasons for conflict. Thus the session was participatory, and full of

quarries and answers and the session concluded with Chairman's comment at about 1-00 P.M.

ACADEMIC SESSION - IV

The after lunch session was started at 1-45 P.M. under the Chairmanship of Dr. P.K. Haldar. Dr. G.N. Das, District Research Officer, Diphu assisted him as rapporteur. Total five numbers of papers were scheduled in this last session. Dr. Sunita Changkakati, Social Activist representing Non-government Organisation and Er. Pradipta Changkakati jointly presented the seminar paper on the subject "Women and Social Harmony : Role of woman's institutions". This paper was prepared on the basis of field experiences facts and figures and comments collected for the people of different areas of North East with whom they have worked. As such they emphasised more on the role of woman and woman's institution to build up social integration in this area.

The next paper was on "Ongoing violence and Repercussions" and the writer was Ms. Sujata Bordoloi, Researcher social works. In her paper she has elaborately discussed the causes of ongoing extremism or insurgency problem of North East India and the main objective of this paper was to present the repercussions of such a prolonged situation of conflict.

A team of three scholars Dr. O.P. Singh, Dr. Debabrata Borgohain and Basanti Dihingia, Professor Department of Psychology, Gauhati University have prepared this paper on "Cross-Culture Contours of Tribal Society of Assam : A psychological Perspectives". - its an observation to the tribal affairs - from the cognitive and psychological point of view and thus also discussed steps for resolving conflicts and creating national harmony.

"Social change in Tribal Society and the Role of Non-Tribal Groups towards change" is the topic on whom Dr. M. Gopal Singha, and Dr. Mrs. Malini Devi Rabha Lecturers

Bikali College, Goalpara have jointly presented their paper - discussed the social change taken place in tribal society due to long period of interaction with non-tribal Assamese composite society and this phenomena have far reaching impact on integration as well as on the process of regional development, however, with a speculation to safeguard the tribal cultural heritage intact.

The last paper of the seminar was presented by Mr. Jibeswar Koch, Lecturer, Dudhnoi College, Goalpara on the topic - "Unity Among Diversity in North East India - Some Suggestions" - The writer looks into the matter from a tribal point of view and put forwarded some suggestions.

The most interesting part of the seminar was 'the interaction and open discussion', which started at 3-45 P.M. and lasted for an hour. Almost all seminarists have taken part in this session and shared their views openly. A large number of suggestions have come from the participants. Among them are from - Gholam Saruwa, Ms. Nilakkhi Barman, Dr. Malini Devi Rabha, Ms. Phaoduly Basumatary, Ms. Bhanumati Basumatary, Mr. Suprim Singh Basumatary, NGO workers, Ms. Sarulata Devi, Mr. P.N. Tamuli, Dr. Sankar Roy, P.P. Changkakati, and others.

In the concluding session, a recommendation committee headed by Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur was formed which discussed all suggestions furnished. Other panel members of the committee were :

1. Prof. Pralay Kanti Haldar.,
2. Dr. Sunita Changkakati,
3. Dr. Rani Kakati and
4. Ismail Hossain.

Necessary recommendations were made by the members covering all aspects of Communal Harmony among the Tribal and Non-Tribal communities of the region in the

light of the presentations made in the four academic sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS ARE -

1. Communal harmony, the most cherished and all embracing concept in the North Eastern states since time immemorial which has been scrupulously maintained, should be sustained at all cost.
2. Government should keep a strict vigil to the evil designs of politically motivated agencies, fundamentalists and vested interests of the opportunists who seek to fish in the troubled waters.
3. Socio-economic upgradation of the hitherto neglected segments of society should be expeditiously ventured with involvement of qualified and dedicated local elite sections, not necessarily political persons.
4. Self rule/autonomy of the small and big ethnic communities, in terms of numbers, should not be construed as separatist tendency. In fact it is the human nature and of late a global phenomenon. The same should, however be in the broad national spectrum sans chauvinism.
5. Non Governmental Organisations with inbuilt monitoring system can play constructive role in preserving and rebuilding inter and intra community harmony.
6. Tribal ethos, modes and morals, profile of tribal and char inhabitants should be incorporated in the school curricular.
7. Efforts should be made to arrange group visit of school and college students to acquaint the life and culture of various communities within the North Eastern States (Of late groups are taken to

only metropolitan cities and big industries. The students should be collected from various institutions of different districts/sub divisions/ states).

8. Inter community cultural meet should be arranged.
9. Women social organisations play distinctive role in moulding cohesiveness. These organisations should be strengthened. Most of the well meaning women organisations fail to deliver the goods because of fund constraint.
10. Tribal and inter community orientation training courses should be arranged so that each community is able to understand the fellow communities better.
11. Communal harmony is embedded in the holistic wider concept social harmony which has multifarious dimensions. In order to create a healthy society, social evils like drug addict, consumption of liquor, consumerism, blind imitation of alien cultural elements leading to derailment of value, the NGO and women organisations can play a positive role.
12. This kind of seminar can also be arranged in the rural areas among the village develop the people to awareness on communal/social harmony.
13. A tribal cultural group combining all tribal communities may be organised and thus, the group may perform the tribal cultural programmes in the non-tribal societies.

The recommendations of this Regional Seminar were sent to the National Foundation for Communal Harmony, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs New Delhi and the Department of welfare of Plain

Tribes and Backward Classes, Dispur for taking necessary action at their end.

All the participants of the Seminar admitted that the seminar was a grand success. This Institute is grateful to all the participants of the seminar and non-participant observers as well for bringing the Seminar to its successful end.

I offer my special thanks and gratitude to Sri S.K. Agnihotri, Chairperson, National Foundation for Communal Harmony, New Delhi for taking personal interest in sponsoring this seminar.

I also offer my thanks and gratitude to the National Foundation for Communal Harmony, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi for sponsoring the Seminar.

Lastly, I offer my thanks to all the officers and staff of the Institute for their help and Co-operations in organising the Seminar.

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NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NORTH EAST : AN OVERVIEW

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Chief Minister, Assam and
at present, Chairman
Statfed and IIPA Assam.*

For reasons- geographical, historical, political and economic, we have to consider North Eastern Region as a whole. Our country has hardly another region which presents such a varied and diverse picture- the North East in fact a miniature India with wide topographical climate economic, social and cultural diversities. In no other part of the country we do find more than a hundred tribes living together, nor we do find such an area where people speak a hundred different tongues. where ways of life between one community and another are mashed by such prominent differences and where people live in such diverse stages of human history-and yet it is a single region where an underlying sense of one ness and uniformity has woven all strands of different textures and shades into a composite and hybrid whole Geography and practical needs of economic prosperity still continue to underline the inescapable truth that inspite of the Region's disintegration into separate political entries it has to thrive

together to accomplish the bigger economic tasks. Another very significant identity of this Region is being the eastern sentinel of the country having common boundaries with three foreign countries. In view of its strategic location, and danger to any part of this Region is a danger to the whole of India. Therefore maintenance of peace and order as well as preservation national integrity are supreme importance for the interest of this Region as a whole and also of the country at large. Thus while discussing the problems of national integration in North East, we must take into account the over all scenario of the country.

At the dawn of twenty first century we are indeed living in an era of rapid change that both impels and compels quick responses. Externally, we find that the world is facing serious problems that relate to peace, disarmament, poverty, hunger, trade barriers, racism, ethnic strifes, aggressive separatism, religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation etc. Internally, the rise of communalism, fundamentalism, casteism, linguistic chauvinism and regionalism (even separatism) are critical challenges to the very unity and integrity of our country. Given the vast religious, ethnic, linguistic, social and geographical diversities of India our range of vulnerabilities has widened.

India is a vast country of continental dimension with diverse cultures, religions, languages, literature, art forms and thousands of years of history forming the evolving background of its civilizational development. It comprises a variegated mosaic of faiths, belief, ethnicities and identities. There have been many schools of thought, many forms of belief and many types of governance but most people in the country have followed common ways of life. We must be proud of the Indian cultural diversity as

perceived and realized in constructive and not confrontatory contexts. A country that stands for values of love, compassion, tolerance, nonviolence and respect for all faiths, all classes and all callings. Faith in its true and higher meaning must bring people together, not divide them. Religion is a word that comes from the root 'regerio' which means to unite, which is what all religions, in essence, should be doing. In the world of faith, we may be Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis or anything else. In the world of life, we may be rich or poor, urban or rural, plebeians or patricians, thinkers or doers, teachers or taught, intellectuals or luddites, but in the broad contexts of our national identity, we must be Indians first. In this respect there cannot be any compromise. As Gandhiji said years ago "We must cease to be exclusive Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, Jews whilst we may staunchly adhere to our respective faiths, we must be Indians first and Indian last." In the light of the globalization processes which are afoot one may add that we have also to learn to become world citizens.

India has chosen for itself a republican, democratic and secular form of governance. These values and goals are enshrined in our Constitution. Yet religious discords communal conflicts and ethnic and caste strifes can be seen everywhere. These phenomena are at best symbols of quests for identity, security and power. At worst these are highly dangerous developments. which can destroy the very fabric of the Indian nation. We see religion being used for political purposes as a result of which myriad problems of mutual distrust and suspicion, of heat and passion, of hatred, revenge and violence amongst various communities and castes arise, time and again. Ours is professedly a secular state, but, unfortunately, we are

surrounded by many countries, which are theocratic. Fundamentalism is used in these countries by the elites for staying in power. This phenomenon has given rise to deep apprehension in the Indian mind. The rise of fundamentalism is perceived as a serious threat to the

Rise of Fundamentalism and Separatism Indian culture, the Indian identity and to the very unity and integrity of Indian. The origins of fundamentalism can be traced to traditionalism, economic and social backwardness and the manipulation of feudal clouts to stay in power. Traditionalists have been forced by history and circumstances into rapid activism. They see themselves as under some kind of a political, cultural and economic siege with need to fight back using threat and violence, if called for, against the forces of secularism and modernism. They depend on a 'selective retrieval' of the past, on the finality of religious texts on various forms of moral absolutism and intolerance which can go beyond national borders. Fundamentalism gives rise to equally unhealthy responses from those who fear it. A vicious circle gets formed causing serious problems for peace and order. One can observe world-wide trends which constitute different kinds of separatism. All around us, in the last several decades, we can witness sharp rise in the politics of "cultural exclusivism and xenophobia." Ethnic separatism, hatred and distrust are sentiments that have been on the rise. We can see the rise of different kinds of fundamentalism which may be religious racist or ideological.

The world is changing fast, politically, economically, socially and in terms of science and technology. It has shrunk and what happens in one place has quick repercussions at the other. This is the age of

interdependence, the age in which the quest for a new world order is pursued from many quarters, many regions and many constituencies in the world. It is in this context that we need to gather an overview of the situation as it confronts us in our country today. In India the political and social cauldron is on the boil. We have two kinds of culture simultaneously contending with each other, namely, a mass culture on the one hand and an elite

Present scenario in India culture on the other. And it looks, as if, the mass culture with all its adverse consequences is domination. The Indian system has become some kind of mass democracy characterised by severe conflicts and ruled by limpet like oligarchies. Our declared goals are somehow receding from us both in terms of reach as well as grasp. The consequence is that, as an essential value, discipline has become a casualty. Institutions have lost legitimacy and credibility. All this has resulted in social unrest, corruption, violence and insecurity. The increasing concentration of political power, half-hearted implementation of land reforms, unjust dowry system, galloping unemployment, unbearable population pressures, the unending demands of the cake-staking organised sectors of labour including public sector employees and government servants, and a thoroughly corrupt and corrupting election system have contributed in no small measure to general unrest in the country and to the undermining of social, political, economic, legal and administrative institutions that every society needs for ordering its affairs in a civilised manner. A mass culture in which lumpen elements prevail is dominating in the country. While we swear by democracy it is oligarchies that rule. We are falling prey to highly acquisitive and competitive cultural ambitions and life styles which are basically alien to our culture and value systems. Wants

and more wants have supplemented needs. The values of service, sharing, contentment and the exercise of ethical choices have all but vanished. The moral realm has lost ground to the political-economic realm where power and wealth have turned out to be the main engines of ostensible achievement. It is tragic but true that even saints and savants who are supposed to be renouncers have established proximity to the levers of power to wield it in back-seat driving stances. Labour and management, far too often, have become adversaries to the detriment of the economic system. Corruption is rampant in all walks of life. The political and social life is informed by violence. Character assassination has become a fine art, which is fuelled by the circulation-seeking press that depends on sensationalism for promoting sale. There is political and social fragmentation to be witnessed all around. Politics has been criminalized and administration has become a willing or unwilling hand-maiden of this unholy nexus. The society has become permissive, the state soft. A state of normlessness has overtaken us. The judicial system is in crisis as conceded by a recent Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Obtaining justice has become expensive, time consuming the wholly frustrating. It is therefore not surprising that extra judicial criminal means are used to obtain justice.

It is evident to all that India is facing tremendous social, economic and political difficulties. The unipolarity of the power structure in the world, following the dismemberment of the soviet block of countries, has created further problems for all nations. We are in the process of evolving the implementing reforms of historical significance. We hope thereby to release the forces of economic growth, social

Justice and political stability. We have the potential. We have resources. We have manpower. We have technologies or can obtain such of those, as we do not. But, solving our enormous internal and external problems and meeting the great challenges ahead with success is not possible unless there is peace, security and unity in the country. We need a dynamic equilibrium. If every Indian is to become a strong, sincere and reliant partner in national development, if he or she is to share the country's prosperity with justice and equity we must all unite. Great issues of tremendous import cannot be decided in the streets as seems to be the gathering impression. There have to be authority, discipline, communication, trust, accommodation and, above all, a shared vision for changing the national scenario and ushering in a happy dawn. Democracy, it must be remembered, does not imply a weak state. It is not, as Emile Durkheim stated long ago, a mode of minimizing the power of the state but a means of ensuring an active interplay between the state and the rest of the society.

India, the second most popular country in the world, has a very low human development rating according to the UNDP's report. We are big in size but low in results. This is a situation that needs to be changed fast. China and many economies of East and South East Asia have amply demonstrated that this can be done. The Indian tiger has to be uncaged says the 'Economist', but how? One of the most vital truths to be remembered is that development needs a tranquil society, a well ordered state, proper climate of internal and external security and a participating, co-operating citizenry. Most of these elements have been missing in our polity. Hence the difficulties that have been, and continue to be, encountered in

accelerating people-oriented development. Let us cite a recent example. The social religious or ethical unrests that occurred in recent past as well as insurgencies raising heads in different parts of the country and more so in North East have resulted in tremendous loss of life and property, loss of production, flight of manpower from producing centres and great traumatization of communities and individuals 'Bandhs' rallies, 'morchas', civil curfews, gheraos, strikes and violent protests have caused recurrent setbacks to the country's economy, militancy and insurgency have brought commerce, trade and industry in many parts of India to near stand-still levels. Ethnic strife prevails in many areas. We come across the phenomena of private armies having been raised to secure sectional interests and harass opponents. Criminal gangs and mafias have mushroomed. There is as general belief going in the minds of people that redressal is possible only through agitation, peaceful if possible, violent if necessary. Centralization of power has given rise to a feeling of deprivation amongst the states, local bodies and other people's institutions. The command lines in civil services and police have become attenuated and dysfunctional to be replaced by external loops of political and similar types of intervention. As the Police Commission observed in its report many years ago, "a sub-centre of pulls and pressure, Sycophancy, nepotism, corruption and inefficiency in all public services, including the police" has arisen and become widespread. These, then, are the ground realities. The question that arises is how can the often pedalled lofty claims of fair, even handed and just governance be reconciled with the mess of real-world processes, namely, social unrest, communal discord, unaffordable populism, a corrupt political system dependent upon a corrupting election system, rank consumerism, smuggling, black marketing,

spineless administration, police that is feared and the rise of gangsterism in most walks of life. It is surprising that even with these negativities the fabric of democracy is still holding though its traying is all, too, visible. In an ethnically pluralist democratic society whose members may disagree in the political, cultural, religious and philosophic beliefs, if the society is to become well-ordered, there is need for a constructive 'overlapping consensus' which can be the basis for preserving the integrity, unity and identity of the state. Such a consensus has to transcend marrow political considerations if it is to succeed.

Pluralism has been and is the soul of Indian civilization. Yet, pluralism has become very difficult to live with because an atmosphere of distinct, suspicion and fear for identity is prevailing. Several internal and external threats stare us in the face. These threats endanger the very fabric of the nation and its unity, identity and integrity. We do not have a coherent polity that could offer justice and equity to people. It is uncertainty that continues to inform the long and arduous voyage of the nation.

We have chosen a democratic republican system for governing ourselves and given it a strong under-pinning of secuiarism. Democracy, particularly in multicultural and multi ethnic contexts, has its difficulties. As a system it is accompanied by the social opening up towards diversity. Its constituents and peripheries, therefore tend to develop pressures on the system that instil uncertainty. At the same time it has to be remembered that while democracy may be perceived as fragile form of Government that somehow manages to muddle through, more often than

not, in terms of values and satisfactions, we have yet to find a better form that ensures. It was Winston Churchill who stated in the House of Commons in 1947 "Many forms of government have been tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. In-deed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those forms that have been tried from time to time."

We call our country the Union of India. The word "Union" emphasises unity and integrity. We have clearly stated in the Preamble of our Constitution that India will be a secular state. Thus national integration and secularism are two extremely vital policy pillars of our polity and society. Both need debate, discussion and national consensus followed by national determination and national action.

Let us take the issue of unity, which has been, and still is, beset with many challenges and threats both external and internal. For example, we have had long term insurgency in the North-East which continues even today inspite of a plethora of agreements made from time to time, namely, for example, the MNF Accord, the Shillong Accord, the Assam Accord, the Punjab Accord, the TNV Accord etc. Assertive sub-regionalisms can be witnessed in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Assam and Uttarkhand. Punjab was in turmoil for more than a decade and has only recently returned to comparative normalcy. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir is grim and dangerous. Naxalism is on the rise in many parts of the country like Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh etc. Private armies have been raised in some parts of the country where the writ of the state hardly runs. Many insurgencies have been aided, abetted and formented by our neighbouring countries.

Yet again, we face the external threats of economic colonialism. All these threats are deeply worrying. The saving grace, perhaps, is that the federal, regional and ethnic surges have not as yet succeeded in decisive or terminal ways.

We have tensions and conflicts of different types prevailing at different levels. Firstly, we have the Centre-State conflicts on the one hand and the State local government conflicts on the other. The States feel that the Centre has arrogated too much power and resources to itself. The local governments feel the same about the State governments. Secondly, we have conflicts between the Centre on the one hand and entrenched regional elites on the other. One can cite the examples of the Tamil Nadu Government taking the Cauvery Water dispute to the streets and State Governments officially sponsoring bandhs and strikes as protests against central policies. Thirdly, there are conflicts between elites and masses. Fourthly, again we see the new phenomenon of conflicts between national business groups and multi-national companies. Add to it caste and communal tensions and numerous aggressive sub-regional demands and we have a worsening picture. All this makes the country difficult to govern. Lastly, at this juncture, one would also like to point out to the tensions that have developed between the political class on the one hand and public institutions on the other. For decades now the political classes have sought to bypass and, at time, even subvert the constitutional arrangements under which power can only be exercised in a lawful manner. The political class has subverted the judiciary, intimidated the bureaucracy and rendered ineffective many other public institutions of importance such as the Election Commission, the office of the

Comptroller and Auditor General and the Vigilance Commission

The challenges to national unity and its integrity are manifold. To meet these challenges successfully we need strong and honest government, a performing administration and an alert citizenry. The State must become a moral agency to protect and preserve our unity, culture and nationhood.

The challenges that are faced by the country in respect of its unity and integrity are indeed urgent and compelling. These challenges need quick and decisive responses from the nation. It is at the political, administrative, moral and intellectual levels that the country has to respond. As a society we have become corrupt, soft and permissive. The cornucopia of immorality, deceit, bigotry, distrust confrontation and lusting for power cannot sustain the nation. With the collapsing of

*The Road
Ahead*

systems and institutions, with high rates of violence, with dissent as the prevailing ethos, the nation is in the danger of being balkanised. The present times have become turbulent and frightening. At this hour the country needs statesmanship in-politics, promptness, fairness and responsiveness in the people. The need for re-moralization of politics and the reconstruction of administrative integrity is both vital and urgent. Attention needs to be paid to the management of values and culture in the country and this should be the pre-eminent task of our leadership. We need 'politics of meaning', we need a new ethos of sharing and caring, of tolerance and accommodation, of unity and co-operation. Let us then, with full determination and abiding faith, take a vow to stand for India. Let India

get a chance to be strong, united and resurgent. If the country is united and strong there will be room for every faith to flower, every class to prosper and every citizen to grow economically, intellectually and morally. This is the need of the hour. The grim challenges can become bright opportunities. We need statesmanship from our leaders, we need tolerance from our people, we need inspiring acts from our intellectuals, scientists, professionals and those who man administration and law and order forces in the country.

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**REFLECTIONS
ON
INDIA'S NORTH-EAST :
BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE**

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1. I would like to thank the organisers for taking the initiative of organising this important Seminar aimed at creating awareness on inter-community harmony among various tribes and non-tribal people of India's north-east. It is but meet and proper that we should be meeting within the time-frame of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, 1994-2004, as declared by the UN General Assembly following the adopting of 1993 as the International Year of Indigenous People. At the outset, a word about the term 'North-East'. We all know how after the reorganisation of the composite state of Assam and in the wake of coming into existence of the North Eastern Council, for reasons of convenience the seven different units are collectively referred to as north-east. (Sikkim has been added some time back to the list insofar as the NEC is concerned). While politically and geographically

it is alright to use the generic term north-east, we all know that every one of the north-eastern States is possessed of its distinctive history and culture and personality and hence, studying anything pertaining to the north-eastern India would naturally enough mean studies in many aspects of the life and people of each of the states of the region. While common or parallel sources are there and could be there, I think it would be unhistorical to pass over the distinctive nature of individual unit's sources of history or otherwise. Colonial rule meant a world of difference to interactions among the hill men and women, and the dwellers of the plains of Assam, with the alien rulers' emphasis on 'divide at impera'. This explains, incidentally, as to why studies in colonial history are very relevant in order better to pursue investigations in post-colonial history. I wish to leave this aspect of the matter here at that.

* 2. It is agreed on all hands that there is great relevance of continuous studies in ethnicity from all standpoints including most certainly the problem of achieving desirable harmony. Judged by events in the Post Cold war world, ethnic conflicts could haunt the world for decades to come. It appears as though suppressed traditional/tribal/indigenous/hill people rivalries have been released into a power vacuum. How did so much hate accumulate in so many countries and regions? Ethnicity does not necessarily have to give rise to violence, but one could easily manipulate ethnicity to throw people against one another. Secondly, although the question of autonomy bothered the minds of the leadership in the days of the struggle for freedom and definitive stands were taken consider the Constitution-related clauses of the Quit India Resolution and the Objectives Resolution of the Constituent

Assembly these were conveniently forgotten with the result that problems arose in the context of nation-building. It is a painful but dominant reality that nation-building in India has turned out so far to be a rather retarded process, what with preferring guided integration to 'association' and what with onerous centralisation despite fine prattle about 'democratic decentralisation'. I think India is as yet a nation-State-in-the-making, and hence, the concern about nation-building, for a real Union of States called India that is Bharat. Thirdly, for peace to come and prevail, I think there is an emergent need today to cultivate a human rights approach while dealing with all problems of life; civil and political, economic, social and cultural; ethnicity, autonomy and nation-building have all their legitimate shares in the process.

3. We referred to the indigenous peoples and the importance given to them internationally. The indigenous peoples constituted the First People of the world, and, yet, they were pushed into the Fourth World in point of development and recognition of rights. Still now they live at an economic level not much above that of their ancestors. These marginalised indigenous people, exploited and dispossessed as they were of their fertile lands basically by white settlers of those times, won their first recognition as against mere reservation, at the time of the Rio Earth Summit held at Rio de Janeiro, 3-12 June, 1992. The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) approved of an important document, AGENDA 21, i.e. Agenda for the 21st Century. It is mostly concerned with conservation of bio diversity. The indigenous people, like women and youth, have been recognised in Agenda 21 as a special group whose rights

and interests must be protected. The indigenous people have been put on the environmental agenda on an international scale. It was recognised that if the world's rainforests were in danger, so were the forests' inhabitants. If they go, so do the forests. Hence the need (SEMINARID) for putting indigenous people on the environmental agenda. Agenda 21 says: 'Some indigenous people and their communities may require, in accordance with national legislation, greater control over their lands, self-management of their resources, participation in development decisions affecting them, including, where appropriate participation, in the establishment or management of protected areas'. While these are beautifully vague statements, this is recognition enough of the rights of the indigenous peoples and they are expected to make good use of them in the assertion of their rights including political rights, i.e., right of self-determination, plus a combination of civil and political rights, as applicable to a recognised community of people.

4. While speaking of various tribes and non-tribal people of India's north-east, we are not oblivious of the people around us. While we speak of the humankind (mankind and womankind together), might I invite your attention to the following pleasant scenario as pictured in a simple but moving description. 'The colour of skin, facial features, languages, habits, traditions and customs—all of these factors distinguish them from one another, but do not prevent them from living together, from interacting with one another, or from uniting in a world community known as humanity' (May Kolkov, Alexander Tverskoy, THE BIRTH OF NATIONS, Progress, Publishers, Moscow, 1979, English ed. 1990). We now turn to the north-east.

5. India's north-eastern region after the reorganisation of the composite State of Assam consists of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram. Assertion of tribal identity and legitimate aspirations of the people led to the creation of separate identities with the break-up of the old Assam. But even after the creation of distinctive units, differences among different ethnic communities surfaced leading to socio-economic and political movements centring round what has come to be termed as identity-crisis. At times when the basic demands of a movement like the six-year old Assam movement came to be officially recognised, albeit paper recognition in the absence of actual implementation, other ethnic communities inside Assam appeared to copy the same leading to the emergence of ethnic movements of communities like the (Bodos), and this in turn led to assertion of ethnic identity by other smaller communities. A repetition of the same story is found in varying proportions in other areas of the north-east. At times smaller communities tend to associate or merge forming thereby bigger entities to facilitate movements with political demands.

6. As events proved, the Sixth Scheduled scheme under the Constitution failed to satisfy the popular aspirations in the hills areas which was why there grew up the demand for separate hill states. The framers of the Constitution could not see the desirability of forming different hill states comprising basically the concerned ethnic groups. The States Reorganisation Commission (SRC), formed on 29 December 1953, although displaying considerable understanding of the problem, could not come forward with a viable method of resolving the issues. It considered the demand for the creation of

a hill state in Assam as impracticable (SRC Report, pp. 186, 259-60). But, Contrary to the vision of the SRC, the reorganisation of the composite state of Assam and the border region called NEFA took place by stages leading to the formation of four predominant tribal States, viz. Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. In fact, reorganisation of north-east India began with the establishment of Nagaland in 1963, preceded by a violent movement insurgency is still a problem, although hopefully the current cease fire could mature into a workable settlement. Meghalaya achieved statehood in two stages, first in 1969 as an 'Autonomous State' within Assam and then in 1972 as a full-fledged state in the wake of the large-scale reorganisation of north-east India. Mizoram's insurgency began in 1966 under the Mizo National Front (MNF): it was formed into a Union Territory in 1971 and secured the status of a state in 1987, thereby ending the insurgency. The NEFA Union Territory of 1948 was renamed Arunachal Pradesh and it achieved full statehood in 1987.

7. There have been Accords galore in the north-east beginning, with the Assam Accord (15 August 1985) and then the Mizoram Accord (30.6.1986) and the Tripura accord (12 August 1988). The Assam Accord is in tatters while the politics of Accords has not succeeded in other areas (with the possible exception of Mizoram where substantial progress was noticed) due to the surfacing of new problems. There is an endemic insurgency situation in practically every area of the north-east region. Where it was not there, new demands for a 'Union Territory' status were made in certain areas within constituted States, as in Assam's Barak valley, Arunachal Pradesh, and on paper, at least, in Manipur.

8. District Councils in a number of cases have come to grief. The three autonomous district councils in Mizoram are seeking Union Territory status. As reports go, at least one outfit in the Garo Hills area of Meghalaya seeks the creation of union territory. In Assam, the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC)- now split into two rival factions- stand for autonomous statehood for Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills districts of Assam under Article 244-A of the Indian Constitution. Now, United Peoples, Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), a militant outfit now split in two factions, has entered the fray with separatist demands with their own pro and anti cease fire programmes.

9. Militant outfits have proliferated over the years in all the states of the north-eastern region. They demand either sovereign statehood or separate state status within or outside the Union or a constituted state. Predominantly tribal militant outfits, as reports go, sometimes take resort to 'ethnic cleansing', for instance, in Boro areas of Assam and in the autonomous district council area in Tripura. While ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) demands a 'sovereign independent Assam'. the Bodo militant outfits like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) wanted independent status for the Bodo tribal people. Recently, the BLT with the support of ABSU (All Bodo Student's Union) have opted for BTC (Bodo Territorial Council) within Assam; BTC experiment is proving highly controversial, with the majority non-Bodo communities in the proposed BTC region having opposed its creation while BLT has threatened to take resort to arms once again should there be any dilution of a BTC of their concept. The militant outfits in Manipur also demand sovereign

status for Manipur. As for Nagaland, the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) stands for a 'sovereign country- A United Nagland that includes all Naga inhabited areas of the 'Indo-Burma region'. On the other hand, the Nagaland Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah)-now in cease-fire agreement with the Government of India-envisions the establishment of a 'greater Nagalim' including contiguous Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and even Myanmar. Although some militant outfits of the region appear to present a 'united front; vis-a-vis the Government, there are reported intra-militant internecine conflicts (as in the case of Bodo militant outfits in Assam and some militant outfits in Tripura). Inter-militant conflicts also arise regarding programmes of independent statehood for instance, the Manipur rebel organisations are opposed to the scheme of statehood as advocated both by NSCN (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN (K) further to this welter of controversies, the matter of peace talks with rebel/militant outfits has also turned out to be controversial. In Assam, the much-advertised talks with ULFA continue to remain a non-starter; as far as Nagaland is concerned, only precarious cease-fire obtains.

10. The dominant reality in the country's north-east has been an increasing phenomenon of alienation. Those pledged to uphold the Constitution have only succeeded in building a 'monument of misdirected energy' by neglect and callousness. Congress has been the ruling party for over four decades in the country and most of the states including those in the north-east; recognising the reality, even its leadership in the north-east had to acknowledge its responsibility for such a sorry sight. No less than a body of Congress (I) leadership in the north

east including Chief Ministers, Union Ministers, PCC (I) presidents, A/CC (I) members and Congress (I) Working Committee members concluded in a unanimously-adopted resolution in July 1994, according to a widely published press report that: Half a century after independence, the north-east remains isolated and backward, spawning unrest and alienation; 'precious little has been done to end or even lessen this sense of isolation' (N.E isolated and backward, says NECCC (I) resolution', The Statesman (Calcutta), 4 July 1994). Self-condemnation could hardly go any farther, The much-vaunted economic packages of both the United Front and NDA governments have not succeeded in addressing the acute problems of poverty and unemployment in the region fanning thereby the flames of alienation to the great dismay of large sections of people in the region.

11. Manifest alienation has been particularly so in the 1990s. Increased alienation has been caused due to a variety of factors like State violence, unabated continuance of engineered violence in areas peopled by different ethnic communities, politicking by the administration, continued imposition of Black laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Disturbed Areas Act, severe curtailment of citizens' basic democratic rights, perceived identity crisis due to unabated influx of foreign nationals, the politics of corruption, non-implementation of Accords like the Assam Accord ever since the AGP regime since 1985 and thereafter, etc. Excesses committed by the Army at times gave rise to situations of guerrilla warfare; mindless violence caused by individual or group acts of terrorism, violence at the instance of number of militant outfits and retaliatory violence also contributed to making the situation extremely

unbearable. A violence-free atmosphere is hard, to come by in practically all the States in the north-eastern region, particularly in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, and in Manipur in varying proportions. Reports of violence come out almost daily in the press as also in some studied reports of human rights organisation.

12. Taking a comprehensive view of the situation in the north-east, there are reasons to believe that the political leadership committed grave errors in confounding political problems presented by the militant organisations with law and order problems. Nagaland peace initiative is to be welcomed. Let the process be extended to other areas of the north-east; the cease-fire agreement with BLT be extended to other armed outfits like the NDFB of Bodo areas, the non-Bodo areas, and most importantly, steps ought to be taken in a meaningful way to hold negotiations with ULFA in the interest of free and frank discussion, all acts, of violence on the part of all including State terrorism be ended, and the ban on militant and underground organisations deserves to be lifted to give peace a chance.

13. Certain political and their leadership were found to be indulging in diversionary tactics by calling for amendments to the Constitution aimed at introducing a Presidential form of Government, fixing a fixed tenure for the Lok Sabha as if it is not already there (Article 83(2) of the Constitution provides for the Lok Sabha's mandatory continuance' for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer'), and providing for two-thirds majority for voting out a ministry in office by a motion of noconfidence. They get into seats of power by a simple majority and advocate majority for having to be unseated; they do not suggest anything about the incorporation of the right to recall as a method for

- securing rightful accountability of elected personnel by providing for a procedure under which the electorate may vote to terminate the membership of delinquents. They do not seek amendments to the Constitution to provide for autonomous States with residuary powers even while providing for fewer essential powers for the Centre. Neither the Sarkaria Commission nor the recently concluded Commission to review the working of the Constitution had anything to say about the Constitution-related legacy of the freedom struggle including the relevant pledge in the Objectives Resolution of the Constituent Assembly. Governance suffered with consequent mess in federal functioning.

14. Having said all this, how to design a workable federal system in the context of the federal policy and its north-east with the end in view of achieving a fair amount of peace and stability?

Elsewhere, I offered certain tentative suggestions in this regard.

These are as under :

- 1) Review and restructure the Constitution of India in conformity with the Constitution-related pledge of the freedom movement and the Objectives Resolution of the Constituent Assembly.
- 2) The Union's powers may extend only to defence, foreign affairs, communications, currency, economic co-ordination and related matters while the rest of the matters are to be vested with autonomous States with residuary powers, deleting, at the same time, the Concurrent List (List-III).

- 3) Powers under the Eleventh Schedule and Twelfth Schedule are to be transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions up to and including the District level, parliamentary democracy, now shared between the Centre and the States, needs to be extended to the local authorities having regard to the definition of the States' as given in Article 12 of the Constitution.
- 4) Autonomous States will share autonomy with regions or regional areas within a State to accommodate the legitimate urges and aspirations of ethnic communities in the regions or areas peopled by them in a sizeable majority.
- 5) The political issues raised by militant organisations are to be resolved through a process of dialogue and discussion, political issues are not to be confused with law and order issues; there should be an end to all acts of violence by everyone, the State taking the initiative in this regard.
- 6) Since centralisation does not work, instead of inducting the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission (a non-statutory body) as Chairman of the North-Eastern Council (NEC), chairmanship of NEC should be made to rotate among the Chief ministers of the relevant States.

15. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS :

The north-east region is peopled by a large number of ethnic groups. It is possible that communities hitherto un-assertive or non-assertive could at some time come

forward with its assertive claims imbibing the experience from other groups irrespective of their size. There is evidently a ferment among ethnic groups almost all throughout the world. Felt or perceived grievances give rise to political problems and most political problems have their genesis in groups of humankind's struggle for existence and survival in their meaning of the term. Extended democracy and greater decentralisation in real equality appear to provide an answer to existing and emerging problems of ethnic assertiveness.

In a situation wherein belief in virtues of autonomy is held with conscientious intensity--autonomy/self-determination not being inherently secessionist--federal political culture ought to be the defining characteristic of our civilisation.

COMMUNAL HARMONY AMONG THE VARIOUS TRIBES AND NON-TRIBAL PEOPLES' CULTURE OF ASSAM

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Assam is the pioneer state of north-east India which leads multi-coloured culture of different communities living in the hilly and riverine plain areas. It is the only State of India which defines its nationality in a broad way. For this reason, different communities of this region can think them as a part of broad Assamese nationality.

Assam is divided physically into two main parts the highlands of the frontier tracts to the north and east, and the plains below. The plains consist of the great river valley of the Brahmaputra. The river Brahmaputra runs through the heart of Assam. This great river is called 'Brahmaputra' or Sri Lauhitya' in Sankrit and 'Lohit' or 'Luit' in Assamese. It enters the north-eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi hills and turning nearly due west, passes through all the districts of north Assam. It is the chief artery and highway of Assam. Therefore, the

whole history and culture of Assam are intimately connected with the great river Brahmaputra¹.

Besides the physical classification, the province, Assam can be classified into two main valleys: namely, Brahmaputra valley based on the great river Brahmaputra and the Barak valley based on the river Barak. In these two valleys, both the tribal and non-tribal group of people live. Their communal harmony and integration is mainly based on culture; but a small part is political and religious.

In the beginning of this discussion, we will go through the cultural harmony of tribal and non-tribal people of Assam. In this frontier region, the main tribal groups are Bodo, Mising, Rabha, Deori, Tiwa, Karbi, Dimasa, Sonowal, Kachari, etc. Most of them belong to Hindu religion but a small part had converted to Christian. The Hindu Tribes have religious relation with non-tribal Hindus both in ritual and social. Some of their religious songs and montras are also same in theme and structure. But their relation with non-Hindus; specially with Muslims are mainly social and political.

The communal harmony of different tribes and non-tribes of Assam is mainly bound by spring festivals; like Bihu. The spring festival Bihu is observed in Assam as Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu. A judicious analysis however, would show that the *Bohag Bihu*, in fact, had an origin in the primitive fertility cult, as evidenced by its songs and dances which are full of sexual symbols and significance², but it has a social value which can bind

1. Dr. B.K. Barua : A Cultural History of Assam; Vol 1. 1986. Bina Library, p. 2.
2. Dr. B.K. Barua : A Cultural History of Assam. Vol. 1. 1986, Bina Library. P. 132.

a multi-cultured and multi-coloured society into a common platform. Apart from the Assamese Hindus, the Bihu festival is observed with a religious fervour. But it is a fact that the earlier form of *Bihu* was non-religious and secular. Therefore, all communities of Assam observe *Bihu* by their own distinctive form. The Bodos celebrate the spring festival Bihu as '*Rongali Baisagu*' in the month of Baisakh (mid April). It is almost similar to Assamese *Rongali or Bohag Bihu*'. The meaning of some special *Bihu* songs of *Rongali Bihu* in Assamese language is same as to the songs of *Rongali Baisagu* in Bodo language. For example :

Assamese : "Lāo Khā bengenā khā
Basar Basar bārhi jhā.
Māyerar saru bāperar saru
Toi hobi bor bor geru"³

Bodo : "Lao ja pānithāp jā
Basar basar er hānja hanjā.
Bimeni khither, phiphāni khither,
Nāngsar jagan hālua gldil"⁴

The English rendering of the above verse is as follows'
"Eat gourd, eat brinjal;
Grow up year to year.
To spite your mother and father,
You will be large bullocks'.

This song is sang at the time of cow-worship. Other traditions of this Bihu is similar to both *Rongali Bihu* and *Rongali Baisagu*'.

3. Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami Bohag Bihu Bareboroniya Chobi (Edited), Chandra Prakash, 1996.
4. Dr. K Brahma : Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos. 1995 p⁴ 49

This similarities also observed partly to the *Ali-Aye Lvgang* of Mising tribes, "*Baikhu*" of Rabha Tribes, *Bisu* of Deori Tribes, *Busu* of the Dimasas, etc. The various tribal communities have their own distinctive forms of folk dances, of these, the Kherai and *Bagurumba* of the Bodos, the *Chomangkan* and the *Hachachakekan* of the Karbis, the *Busu* of the Dimasas, the *Pharkanti* of the Rabhas,⁵ the *Gumrag choman* of Misings and so on. These community-dances also shows assimilation in their forms with Bihu dances.

The other largest group of plain tribes are Misings. They mainly live in the char and riverin land areas of upper Assam. There are various festivals performed by the Misings. The most significant among them are the *Ali-Aye-Irgang* and *Po:rag*. They perform the three main *Bihus* (festivals) of Assam, namely, the *Magh Bihu*, *Bohag bihu* and *Kati bihu*, but the two festivals mentioned earlier are of their own. They perform these according to their traditional customs. Like their own traditional puja-cum festivals, the Misings perform *Bihus* with equal enthusiasm. The three bihus, now-a-days, are regarded as part of their culture. The Assamese *bihu* songs and Mising *oi-ni-tom* are equally popular among them. Both the Misings and the non-tribal plains people are interdependent so far as the performance of *bihus* is concerned⁶. The *Ali-Aye Lvgang* to Mising community is a seed-sowing festival and related to agriculture, like *bihus*. The *oi-ni-*

toms are love-lost and intimation songs of youths. Some secular *oi-nitoms* like *bihu* songs are.

"Asi Jili Jilko, miksi jili jiliko,

Asi Jili Pvnycpc, miksi jili Pvnpcmāng".⁷

(meaning : The tears of my eyes are well compared to the torrent of a hilly streams. The hilly stream has chance of drying up one day but mine is perpetual (Sometimes it also comes in such rhetoric).

"Apindokin Sumāgolo

Apinmetlā Kāmeengā

Oinom Kengkin of kumādonā

Oinom mālāng of Kāmmāngānc

Achhc bidum bolopenā

Rāggo Kclcg Kclangcnā

Achinodag, achinadāg of Konengcmo

Sāgc gckg, Sāgc golcg of gclcgola."

(meaning : I did not cry before recognise the rice. I didi not cry for you before identify you).

"Nokkc okum Kekondc. ngokkc okum Kekonsc

Siyāng ānc dungkelā., oinonm kālvdāgdo Kapāmng"⁸

(meaning : Your home is in this bank, mine is that bank. In the midst, the Siyang river is flowing; therefore I can not see you in time, oh my beloved!).

5. B.N. Dutta : The Comprehensive History of Assam. Vol. II. edited By H.K. Barpujari. Publication Board, Assam, 1994, P. 424.

6. Jatin Mipun. The Mishings (Miris) of Assam Development of a New Style. Gian Publishing House, New Delhi-2, 1993, P. 26.

7. Dr. Nomal Pegu : The Mising. A Colourful Tribe of the Brahmaputra Valley, Quoted from "The Misings : Their History and Culture edited by Dr. Jahar Jyoti Kuli, Ayir Publclation, 1998, p.41.

8. Dr. Ganesh Pegu : Mising Jana Sahityaa, G.M.K. Publication, Guwhati-1, 1996, p. 52

"Dhansiri dolbcm chiripādc̄m yodkomto

Oiȳc̄ ngoyik tām̄tcd̄m otoronge degkomto"

(meaning : The river Dhansiri has blocked by obstacles and our love is resisted by unknown enemy).

"Armoniyc̄m tāgimang kalgānc̄m tagimāng

Oinokm lyngong gomogde āsināngcm
doyugdung."¹⁰

(meaning : No need for harmonium nor record player. Oh my beloved, the songs of your threat has robbed my heart).

Besides the Miris or Misings the other group of tribes live in the riverine land areas of upper Assam is Deoris. The Deoris are one of the four divisions of the Chutias. These divisions are Hindu-Chutiya, Ahom-Chutiya, Borahi-Chutya and Deori. The last named have been able to maintain their old traditions, religious beliefs and practices in fact in spite of various socio-political trials and tribulations through the decades.¹¹

The original abode of the Deoris was on the banks of the river Dibong. Tengapani and Patarsal which now fall within the jurisdiction of Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and Chapakhowa sub division of Dibrugarh district of Assam. Their present habitations are spread in the riverine areas of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of Assam.¹² Since the Deoris

are riverine tribe, therefore they are divided into four divisions according to the name of river and place-name. These four divisions of Deoris are : (a) Dibangia- the riverine inhabitants of Dibang, (b) Tengapania- the riverine inhabitants of Tengapani, © Borgonya - the riverine inhabitants of *Bornoi* and (d) *Patargonya*-or Patsadia.¹³ Among them, only the Dibangia section maintains the traditional language whereas the other three sections have almost forgotten their languages. They speak Assamese language fluently.

The main festivals of Deoris are -*Kati bihu* or *Bisu*, *Magh Bihu* and *Bohag bihu*. Among these three, *Bohag Bihu* or '*Bohagiyo Bisu*' and *Magh Bihu* or *Magiyo Bisu* are mainly observed during a year. In respect of social stratification, the Deoris society can be broadly divided into two divisions, viz, secular and religious.¹⁴ The '*Bohagiya bisu*' is the one of secular festival of Deoris. The '*bisu*' songs of Deoris are both love-lost and secular like Mising *Oi-ni:toms*. These have a lyrical similarities with Assamese bihu songs. Therefore secular *bisu songs* of Deoris can help to develop the integral process of communal harmony. Such particular bisu songs are:

"Amchchiti tirgna Kuli duwa Ogaran

Bohagiye bisu Kon ninā.

Bisune hāron esiri lāderan

Na-buji chchorabo ninā"¹⁵

9. Sokbhas Kagyung : Oi-ni:tom. Quoted from 'Mising Sanskritir alekhyā', edited by Bhrigumoni Kagyung, 1989, P. 175.
10. Tabu Taid : Oi-nhtomor Potobhumi. quoted from 'Mising Sanskritir Alekhyā', ibid, p. 170.
11. Tribes of Assam. Part-I Tribal Research Institute. Assam, 1987, p.22, edited and compiled by. B.N. Borodoloi, G.C. Sharma
12. Ibid. p. 23

13. Gagan Ch. Deori : Sakalar Atit Aru Bartaman. Quoted from 'Asomor Jaanajati', edited by - Dr. Promod Ch. Bhattacharjya, Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1991, p. 101.
14. Tribes of Assam Part-I, P. 27.
15. Rameswar Deori Deori Bihur Bongeet. Quoted from- "Bohag Bihur Bareboroniya Chobi", edited by Dr. P.D. Goswami, Asom Janakristi, 1996, p.57.

(meaning : The mango tree will bear seeds, the koel will cry and will give forecast of Bohag bihu when you will bow your head at the time of bihu and all will bless you to be well)

"Duwa oi chngnāeJingnā kerongnā
Niyo yāh kudungnā dukun,
Māyā oi chāngnā niyo cho-h wkudungna
Hey buji Remselibā nikon."¹⁶

(meaning : I will stay at your house as flying bird, I will fall on your body as a love and call you 'Remseiba').

"Ochchā egābāchchā Ochchā dāgābāchchā
Dāmdī ebānā chchoni.
Esālu logāri gātigi logān
Mākoke dāminoi jāh."¹⁷

(meaning : How beautiful cloth is weaving and what type of flower is tracing you. Esalu (a weave figure on a long cloth used by women) and Gatigi (a weave figure on a cloth like gamose)-these two cloths are weaving. The weavers shuttle falls down again and again).

"Luītiyo latuwa sugungnā keronō
Asukurah kengnā dukun,
Bākiire bujipāl sugureenāke
Burmaha mukumiji lakun."¹⁸

(meaning : The 'latuwas' are floating on the river Brahmaputra and will stay at a char. Thus my life is also floating like the 'latuwa' and will stay at a place and tears will fall down).

16. Chiphung Gungang - edited by Dr. B.N. Dutta. 1986.P.127.
17. Ibid, p. 128
18. Rameswar Deori, Ibid.p.54.

"Disāng noi lehengnā ken de buji pāl
Tengāpāni lehengnā ken
Yōy bābā leheron gogoi kākāi le-heron
Ane jodi chchu mu-ja-len."¹⁹

(meaning : I will leave Disang and Tengapani rivers. Even I can leave my own parents, brothers, sisters and all relatives; if you tell me the truth).

"O'buji moināsi suruchchāle jālāisi
Niya you bābāy punji,
Niya you babiri niyo bābā gunini
Nonāmāl nimāye āji."²⁰

(meaning : Oh my beloved. The lovely girls of parents from childhood,; mother thinking and father listening; but no bridegroom).

ugoy kanu jām chchiba kanu kam
Chchibā chchāgu higeremme dini,
Chhibā chu langnā chibā chaguh kengnā
Dugjumai kejenne dini."²¹

(meaning : The past has gone, the new one has come and the path of progress has reached. We should go forward with a new language and culture).

Thus, the spring festival songs of Rabhas. Dimasas, Tiwas, Karbis and Sonowals - Kacharis also highlights the secular form of culture. Not only in the *Bhiu* songs,

19. Ibid. p.54.
20. 'Gitor Suriya Nadi', edited by Biren Hazarika and Prabin ch. Kalita Udayan Prakashan, Sibsagar, 1996.
21. Ibid.

but in practice, the *bihu* festival inspires the youths of all communities to overcome the communal and social barrier of religion, language, caste and customs. The bihu festival and bihu songs reflect the social life of all communities of Assam. Specially the Bohag bihu songs express the feelings of community cultures, traditions, love and affection and breaks the communal barrier of society. Since, *bihu* is a social platform, therefore all the young boys and girls meet together and express their feelings to each other and represent the secular songs which can break the caste and community feelings and bind each other by love and harmony. Such songs are :

*'Jānji nolkbhetile jenge oi jābore
Luitek bhetibo kone,
Amāk bhetise somājar bāndhone
menekno bhetibo kone.'*²²

(meaning : The twigs of trees and sweeping have obstructed the way of Janji river who has obstructed the river Luit? We are obstructed by the bindings of society; but who can bind the mind).

*'Dhansiri dālengkhon bāndhile oi chenāikon
Lohāre shala khā māri,
Amāke bhetile oi samajar bandhone
Duti deha duphāle kari.'*²³

(meaning : The Dhansiri bridge is made by the bar of iron. We are obstructed by the bindings of society and separated our two bodies into two parts).

22. Source, 'Amar Bihu Bhangota Nal'. Prabin Gogoi, 1989.
23. Ibid.

*"Phulani bāribi sāine pethiyāla
Kon pānihi dihaniyā phul,
tomare logote deha diloheten
Tume holā ojati- kul."*²⁴

(meaning : I see the garden -which one is the beautiful flower. I can give you heart; but you are the inferior caste).

*'Tomāloi chāote jēpanā diote
bindhile oghaiyā hule
Tomar mone gole moro mone gole
Ki karibo Kalita Kule.'*²⁵

(meaning : I was injured by thorn when watching you. If we agree to love each other, then what will do the Kalita caste).

*"Dhān bohābbore ghutukā jokāti
Sowan birikhar khori,
Tomāre āmāre Kone mon bhongāle
Dehāke duphāle kori."*²⁶

(meaning : The round metallic vessel and the fire-wood of sowan tree used to boil the paddy. Who had diverted our mind, separating the body into two pieces?).

*"Dikhow noi eribo paro moi lehorī
janji noi eribo paro.
Tomere piriti eribo nowaro
Nekhayo moribo paro."*²⁷

24. Source : 'Bohagi -Nakul Ch., Bhuyan, 1992(7th edition), p.119.
25. Source : 'Bihunamor Tatparjya aru Nandonik Soundarjya'-Tirtha Phukan, Natun Asom, Guwahati-21,2000, p.121.
26. Source - "Bohagi" - Nakul Ch. Bhuyan, p. 158.
27. Source - 'Bihu' -Eti Samiksha' -Lila Gogoi, Granthapeeth, Guwahati-1, 1987,p.87.

(meaning : I can leave the Dikhow river, even I can leave Janji river, of my beloved. I can pass my days without food, but I can not separate you from me).

Tomār kotā tāmōl nekhao moi lahorī
Amāre moribo kul.,
Ojāti nahao moi bijāti nahao moi
*Tomār āmār eketi kul.*²⁸

(meaning : I do not take your betel nut, because our caste will be un-holly. I am not inferior caste nor other caste; we belong to same caste).

"Chote goye goye Bohāge pālehi
phulile bābori phul.
Tomāre logote moro jodi morim moi
*Eriham nijore kul.*²⁹

(meaning : After the month of 'Chat' the Bohag is reached and the 'babori' flower is blossoming. I can die with you leaving my own caste).

"Jagaro phulile Nāharo phulile
birikhe salāle pāt
Amārno deshote na-phui phulile
*Manohar eketi jat.*³⁰

(meaning : A variety of gardenia "Jagar" and the mesua ferrea "Nahar" are : blossoming and the trees turned their leafs. The new flowers are blossoming in our country; because all human being belongs to one caste).

28. Source : Bihu -Utpatti aru Krambikash' - Dr. Surjya Das, Samannaya Granthalaya, Nalbari, 2001 p. 10.

29. Ibid. P. 11

30. Ibid. P. 11

"Dohol dhol mādoi modār phul
Amigorokhiyā eke jāti eke kul
*Mādoi modar phul.*³¹

(meaning : Musical drum and madoi moda or flower. We are cow-herd, one nation one caste, modoi modar flower).

The north-east India's seven states are seen to be seven elder and younger sisters of a common family. The bihu festival binds these seven state's community by communal harmony under one roof. In the *Bihu* songs the hills and plains community assimilates through the bridge of unity. Such bihu songs are :

"Ami sātobhoni sātatioti jntar
Aye saru suth kete,
Ami sātobhoni jhao ghorāghori
*Aye chekupāni take.*³²

(meaning : We are seven sisters, we have seven spinning wheel and mother spins the small threads there. We seven sisters meet each other. When we return home, the mother sweeps).

"Pāhāro āmār bhoiyāmo āmār
Borluit milanar sanko,
Oitkoi senehor bohāgor bihuti
*Nepati kenekoi thako.*³³

(meaning : The hills are ours, the plains are ours and the river Borluit is the bridge of unity. Therefore, our Bohag bihu also so sweet and lovely for us; we can not remain stay without it).

31. Ibid. P. 11

32. Source : Bihu Utpatti aru Karmabikash - Dr. Surjya Das. P. 35.

33. Ibid.

Thus, the Bhiu festival and songs show us the last goal of communal harmony breaking the castism. For example :

"Luitor bālīte Konhuwā phulile
Phulile simalur phul,
Ai Asomiye Sobāko ādore
Nibichari Jāti kul"³⁴

(meaning : The Saccharum sonianeum' i.e. 'Konhuwa' and the 'heptaphyium' or 'Simalu' flowers are blossoming. Our mother Asomi embrace and welcome each other breaking the bar of caste and community feelings).

The famous folk-artist, cultural activist Hemanga Biswas pointed out in his writings that the honour and prestige of bihu is going to grow up through the tribals, sub tribals, castes and religious communities in the Brahmaputra valley. This festival is free from the influence of religious customs, and Goddess, evil spirit etc. The main objective of Bihu is to protest the inequality and racial segregation of upper class Hindu societies.³⁵ Mr. Biswas also wrote. "The secularism and present life of Bihu and its strong humanistic voice, equality of men and women, freedom of women's love-all was the opponent of religious high caste Hindu societies customs, opposite to Manu's rules."³⁶

One ancient tradition of *Rongali bihu* is celebrated locally in Dhakuakhana of Lakhimpur district in the name

34. Ibid. P. 47.

35. Hemanga Biswas "Lokasangeet Samiksha : Bangla O Assam'. Assamese edition - Asom Aru Banglar Lokasangeet Samiksha,' Journal Exporium, Nabari. 1990. p. 1.

36. Ibid P. 25.

'Phatobihu'. 'Phato' means a place where traders assemble for trade and payment of duty, a wage,³⁷ In Dhakuakhana the 'Phato' is located near by the Charikoriya river where the officials of Ahom kingdom collected taxes from peasants of different communities of the State. 'Habung' since about sixteenth century and peasants exchanged and marketed the different essential commodities. Since that time, different communities like Ahoms, Chutias, Deoris, Mising, Sonowal Kacharis, Koibartas, etc. assembled for seven days in the month of 'Bohag' and naturally celebrated the *Bohag bihu*.³⁸ The folk song of Phato *Bhiu* reflects the unity, integration, assimilation and communal harmonies of above mentioned communities. At present the different communities assemble at *Phatobihutoli* on the north bank of Charikoria river at Dhakuakhana for three days in the third of fourth week of Bohag i.e. first or second week of May. The significant Bihu songs of *Phatobihu* which reflects the communal harmony. are :

"Mohghuli chāporiloiāchiba oi lāhori
Phātobihur botorā pāi
Mising āhibo Deorio āhibo
Āmār bihu bhāngotānāl."³⁹

(meaning : Come to Mohghuli chaponi when you are noticed about Phatohihu. Mising and Deoris will come; nobody can destroy our bihu).

"Chānkoriyār pārote bohāge nāsise
Joubanar piriti khelā.
Mohghuliloi ahiba phātobihut nāsibā
Pātibā sampritir melā."⁴⁰

37. Hemchandra Barua ; 'Hem Kosha'.

38. Source : Dhakuakhanar Phatobihu'-edited by Sibaprasad Gogoi and Ismail Hossain, Cambridge India. Kolkata. 2001.

39. Ismail Hossain : 'Phatobihur Etihash Aru Oitijya', Jyoti Prakashan, Guwahati-1, 2002

40. Ibid.

(meaning : The Bohag is dancing on the bank of Charikoriya river, sporting the love of youth. You come to Mohghuli Chapori, dance on Phatobihu and arrange the meeting of integrity and communal harmony)

In the villages of Sibsagar district some *bihu* groups perform the *bihu* song mentioning the different tribes and hope to build the foundation of greater Assamese nationality. For example :

"*Dihazng Disang Dikhow Janji Dhansiri
Bahunadi loglāgi boiyeno Brāhmaputra mājānadi
nāchoni*

Seidore nāchoni Bodo Mising Kachari

Nānājāti loglāgi hoi-no Aasomiy mhājājāti nāchoni."

(meaning : The great river Brahmaputra flows and its sub-rivers Dihing, Disang, Dikhow, Janji, Dhansiri meet to it. Thus the great Assamese nationality forms by Bodos, Misings and Kacharis).

Besides *Bihu*, the other important source of communal harmony in Assam is *Sankari* Culture. Srimanta Sankardeva, the pioneer saint of Vaishnava movement of Assam and North East India, had formulated and spread out the Hindu culture into liberal form. Sankardeva's philosophy is based on '*EK Deva EK Sevā*' i.e. the creator is one, worship one. He wrote :

*"Kukur Srigāl Gardabharo atmāram,
Janiyā sobāko porī karibā pranam"*⁴¹

(meaning : The soul of dog, fox and ass are equal; pray all equally).

41. Sankardeva 'Kirtana', quoted from -Sri Sri Sankardeva Sri Sri Madhaabdev-Kirtenghoshā Aru Namghoshā, edited by Keshyananda Goswami, p. 471-472.

Sankaradeva tried to unite the greater society into one common platform, and circulated his philosophy to all communities. Being pleased to his ideology, for famous Muslim saint Chand Khan, Paramananda from Misings, Gobinda from Garos, Narattam from Nagas, Romai from Kachari, Purnanda and Sri Ram from Kaivarta. Haridas from Baniya, Damādar and Joyananda from Bhot, Narahari from Ahom, Bhattadeva from Brahmin and Joyhori from Javan (Muslim) perceived the disciple from Sankardeva. Srimanta Sankardeva tried to bind the Aryan and non-Aryan, Ahom-Kachari, Mising-Koch and other communities by one rope of integration and circulated his liberal philosophy from the view of culture and geographical boundaries of then Assam, Kamrup and Behar; for which we have got today's broad Assamese society.⁴²

Specially the Muslim saint Chand Khan who is more popularly known as Chandsai, Professionally a talior, was the more favourite disciple of Sankardeva. His vast knowledge both in Islam and Vaishnavism was so much rich. A number of Zikirs are introduced in our society in his name. He also compiled the biography of celebrated vaishnava pontiff Gopaldeva.⁴³ Chandsai also sewed the dresses of *Sankari Nam and Bhaona*. For this reason, we find the similarities of Islamic dresses partly with *Sankari dresses*.

42. Dr. Hiren Gohain - 'Asomiya Jaliya Jivanat Mahapurushiya Parampara', L.B.S. Publication, 1987. P. 17.

43. Dr. M.M. Saikia - 'Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance. 1978.

The Muslim Saint Chandsai of sixteenth century also defeated the Brahmin disciples of Sankardeva in several debates on *Vaishnava* culture. He was also called 'Kabir' by his Assamese brethren.

Another Muslim saint of seventeenth century was extremely influenced by Sankardeva's *bhakti* movement and devoted to the liberal philosophy of Islam; called *Sufism*. The saint was Hazarat Shah Miran alias Azan Fakir, who entered Assam in the third decade of seventeenth century from Bagdad of Iraque with his younger brother Nabi. Azan Fakir also known as Azan Pir of Shah Milan. He composed almost hundred sixty Zikirs in Assamese language in the period of 1635 A.D. to 1642 A.D.⁴⁴ and acquired knowledge of Assamese folk songs like *bihu-geet*, *biya-geet*, *tokari-geet*, etc. and entered the melodies of them to *Zikirs*. He also composed some *Jari-geet* and performed jari dance which has distant relation with Assamese *Bihu-huchari* and *ozapali*⁴⁵. The following zikirs show the communal and cultural relations of Hindus and Muslims of Assam.

"Mor manat ān bhāv nāi O'Āllāh
Mor manat bhīn por nāi O'Ālāh
Hindu Ki Musālman eke Attār formān
mor manat eketi bhāv".⁴⁶

(meaning : Oh, Allah, no other thinking in my mind, Hindu-Muslim are created by same creator, I think all equally).

44. Jikir Aru - Syed Abdul Malik, G.U. p. 82.

45. Assomiy Jikir -Jari Sar' edited and collected by S.M. Hossain, Jyoti Prakashan, Guwahati-1 1990, p. 19.

46. Syed Abdul Malik Azan Fakir Aru Surya Jikir, 1991. p. 54

"Chāri Veda Giyānoke koy O'Āllāh
Chāri Veda giyānoke koy,
Chāri Veda pār hilo giyanoke nebhābilo
Giyānor nāl pār ichoy."⁴⁷

(meaning : The four Vedas are the source of knowledge. Oh Allah, I have read the four Vedas; but no identity of knowledge).

"Qurāne purāne ekeke koise
Bujibā giyānor loke,
Santa Mahanta Auliyāsokoie
Eketi nāmote khāte."⁴⁸

(meaning : The Quran and Puran says same,; the Saints and Auliyas also prays one lord).

"Rahamar Girihāt, tumi Allah sāhab oi
Jhodi korā dariyar pār,"
"Hindwe bitale, hoy sāheb hoy
Māhe-parsāde, hoy sābab hoy
Hāy hāy oi, Musalmāne bilele rutialah rahamar
Girihat, tumi Allah Saheb oi
Jodi kore dariyar par."⁴⁹

(meaning : Oh my merciful lord, you help us to cross sea. The Hindus distributed the 'Mah-prasad' and Muslims distributed the bread).

Azan Pir settled permanently at Chumpora near Simaluguri of Sibsagar district and married an Assamese lady. He probably died sometime around 1690 A.D. He was buried ground at Saraguri Chapori near Dikhow river

47. Ibid. p. 56.

48. Isnail Hossain 'Hindu musuliman Prashna. Samannay Aru Sanghat, Imprint, Guwahati, 1994, p. 64.

49. Asomiya Jikir -Jari sar', p. 135.

in Sibsagar district. The monastery of Azan Pir already become a place of pilgrimage both of Hindus and Muslims.

Like Azan Pir, another Muslim Saint was Giasuddin uliya whose monastery also became the shrine of Hindus and Muslims at Hazo or Poamecca. Another sufi saint Mohammad Hasim of Barak valley died near by Goreswar of Kamrup district and his monastery also became the holy place for all communities. We get mention in his book of poem 'Amara Sundari' and 'Ahdan Jamin', the Hindu', - Muslim assimilation and communal harmony. Hasim strictly opposed the barrier and social castism of Hindu and Muslim. The other monastery of Muslim saints; like Jahir Auliya, Bahar Majar, Gasi pirar Majar, pach pirar Majar, etc. are also standing as the symbol of Hindu-Muslim harmony. Specially Satya Pir still holds his influence in the Bengal and Assam's society. It is believed that he was a Hindu convert from Rajshahi district of Bengal and 'Satyapir' was his title only. Many Hindus of north Bengal are said to have adopted Islamic faith in his hand. Among the Hindus, he is known as Satyanarayan, is one of the important religious functions of the Hindus in western Assam and Koch Behar.⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that in 'Pan chhall' of Satyanarayana no distinction is shown between Satyapir and Satyanarayan.⁵¹ Some traditional songs signify this integration.⁵²

50. Dr. M.M. Saikia -Assam-Muslims. Relations and its Cultural Significance, p. 187.

51. Khan Amanatulla Choudhury -Koch Biharer Itihas, p. 73, Quoted from the book mentioned in foot note 50.

52. Quoted from 'Assom- Muslims Relation and its Cultural Significance - Dr. M.M. Saika, p. 187.

"Satyapir nāme pujā kārībe yavanā
erup kārībe seva jhār jhei mane."

(meaning : The Muslim (Yavan) will worship in the name of Satyapir. Thus all will perform the worshipping in their own way).

Satyapir also credited for introducing the 'Shirni' function without the use of meat. He also removed 'Narabali' i.e.human sacrifice system in the name of God from then society. One myth or religious belief is at present also believing in our society that once the king Sisupal advised his followers to sacrifice a boy for Kali Puja to desiring child. When Satya pir benedicted the boy and the whole process of sacrifice was failed. Regarding this myth, one traditional folk-song is :

"Satyapir bole rajā sunaha bachan
Kalikāle avatār mui Satyanārāyan
Hindur devata Musalmanar Pir
thare ghare moor nāme bharilo jikir."⁵³

(meaning : Satyapir says to king that 'I am the incarnate of the present age. My name is Satyanarayan, I am the deity of Hindus and Pir of Muslmans. The songs have been continuing door to door of both the communities against my name).

Not only in the *Sufi* forms, but in the *bhakti* movement relating to satra and temple also, we get various elements of communal harmony, in 1943, the head of *Vaishnavite* monastery of Garmur of Majuli island pointed this relation of Muslims and Hindus with Satras in the preface of the book '*Ummul Quran*' written by Moulanaa

53. Quoted from -'Sangmishranat Asomiya Sanskriti - Abdus Sattar, 1986 (3rd edition), p. 53.

Jayebullah. He wrote - I understand, after readout this book of Quran in Assamese verse, that this religion (Islam) is similar to our monotheist *Vaishnava* religion."⁵⁴ In middle period of Ahom history, it is found that there was some Muslim saints who were called 'gosain' 'The Muslman Gosains have their own satras or establishments and residents disciples (Bhakat) who however, are not bound to celibacy"⁵⁵. The influence of the *Vaishnavas* on the Assamese Muslims can perhaps be inferred from the reverential references to Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva and the occurrence of the word '*namā*' as a substitute for 'Kalima' in the Aassamese Zikirs.⁵⁶ Besides these, we also get reference in Assam history about the relation of '*Daula*' family of Sibsagar with *Sibadoul*.

The Hindu-Muslim harmony in Assam also based on political issue. Our history refers that the early period of Ahom Kingdom was unsuitable with Muslims; but the middle and last period was very fruitful and sound in the British period, the Hindus and Muslims of Assam unitedly fought for freedom.

We also find Muslim-tribal relation and integration in the greater society of Assam. We know that, the religious philosophy of the Bodo tribe centres round the super power of '*Bathow Ban*' and they celebrates the traditional Bathow puja. This puja festival is also the integral part of communal harmony of thirteenth-fourteenth century's social history of Assam. According to this history, the Bodos worships their God in the name of thirteen deities. These are-Bathow Barai, Aileng, Agrang, Khaila, Karji,

54. Sri Sri Garmuriya Goswami (Pitambar Deva Goswami)- '*Salago ni Mukhpolra*' of Ummul Quran.

55. Refer to Assam, Muslim relation and its cultural significance'.

56. Ibid. p. 222

Rajkhandra, Sangaja, Alai Khungi, Bhandari, Ranachandi, Buili bari. Laokhar gosain and Nawbn Badshah. Among these, the Nawab Badshah belongs to Muslim community. At the time of Bathow Barai', the Bodos offer a seat for the Muslim deity called '*Nawab Badshah*'. They also sacrifice a hen for this deity. Due to the honour to '*Nawab Badshah*', nobody occupy this seat at the time of *Bathow Puja*.⁵⁷ Some folk and religious songs introduced in the Muslim societies also influenced by Bodos or Aryans⁵⁸. Dr. Birendra Nath Dutta, the famous folk-lore scholar pointed in his book that the '*Pir-deu*' has introduced to Bodo and Rabha societies. the influential Langadeu, Langamara or Langaraja of Rabha societies was equally popular to the non tribal Hindu and Muslim societies. This is done by the influence of Islam.⁵⁹ In the Darng's culture, the Muslims use the musical instrument 'Kali' which was originally came from tribals. The '*Kali*' shows the Islamic influence upon it. The '*Dhepa-Dhullyar Dal*' of Darrang also used the '*kali*' in the wedding ceremonies and other social functions of Hindu and Muslim societies.

A large area of land of Assam are the char and chapori areas. Basically the char and chapori area's inhabitants are Muslims coming from East Bengal. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a part of the East Bengal Hindus converted to Islam by the influence of Sufism. These parts of converted Muslims had been preserving their traditional cultures relating to both the religion Hindu and Islam and the myth of these societies.

57. Anil Boro - '*Bodo Sakalar Bathow Puja*', Source : '*Namoni Asomor Loko Sanskriti* -Asom Sahitya Sabha 1995. p. 54.

58. '*Sur Parichoy*' -Kirtinath Bordoloi, Source : Luit Borah Aru Islam - Medini Choudhury

59. Dr. B. N. Dutta - '*Goalparar Loko Sanskriti Aru Asomiya Sanskritiloi Eyar Avadan*.

Earlier we had mentioned one secular traditional song 'Satyapirar geet' in the name of Satyapir of Muslims and Satyanarayana of Hindus. Similar to this, the *Gaji pirar geet* in the name of *Gaji*, *Dariyarpirar Geeet*, *Banbibir (Bandurga) geet*, etc. are the secular folk-songs among the Char and riverine land area's Muslims and Hindus of Assam and the North East. Another secular traditional folk song is mentioned below which may integrates and assimilate the all communities. When the sweets or 'Sinni's are offered in the name of Gajipir, then all the Hindus and Muslims sing:

"Gājimiyār hājot sinni sampurna holo,

Hindugone bolo Hori muslmine Allāh bolo."⁶⁰

(meaning : The 'Sinni' of Gajimiya is completed. The Hindus say 'Hori' and the Muslims say 'Allah').

In the Hindu societies, Gajipir was known as 'Tiger God' *Dakhina Ray*⁶¹. In the Santali societies, the Satyapir or Satyanarayana is known as 'Satok pir' who can fulfil the desire of anybody. According to religious belief, if any body dishonour the 'Sato:k Pir', then he may fall on danger.

A typical song 'Palagan', basically known as *Ramayani palagan*, *Krishnalila palagan*, *Ramlila palagan*, *Karbalar palgon*, *Rahim-Rupbaner Palagan*, also highlights the communal harmony. The 'Boyati' of *palagan* starts the 'sabha bandana' approaching the Hindus and Muslims as:

60. Ismail Hossain-Asomor Char-Chapori Lokasahitya, Banalata, 2002, p.43.

61. Amisujjaman-Muslim-manash O'Englia Sahitya, p.-26, ref. to foot note-60.

"Sabhā koirā bolcho bhāltre Hindu-Musalmān,
Sabār Charane āmi jānāilām sālām."⁶²

(meaning : You are sitting in the meeting, oh my Hindu-Muslim, brothers; I wish well all of you).

After the 'sabha bandane', 'Boyati' performs the song mentioning the 'Ram' and 'Hari' of Hindus and 'Rasul' and Rahman' of Muslims as :

"Hindu ār Musalmān ekkoī pinder deri
Keh bole Allāh Rasul keh bole Hari.
Bismilah ar giribistu ekkoī geyān
Dophāk kari diye parbhu Ram-Rahmān."⁶³

(meaning : The Hindus and Muslims are bound by same rope, only one call the creators Allah and other call 'Hari', 'bismillah' and 'giribistu' means something, it only separates the two names 'Ram' and 'Rahman')

The 'Palagan' has a local characteristic which is related to the Bodos of earlier East Bengal where the tribals lived, specially in the Mymonsinha district. Therefore, the influence of 'palagan' is observed amongst the folk songs of Garo, Hajong and Rajbangshi of Bodo race.⁶⁴

Another popular secular folk song of char-chapori areas is 'Kabigan' which is performed two groups expressing some folk tales of Hindu and Islam. The similar form of folk-songs of char-chapori and riverine land areas is 'Nao Khelar geet' or Boat-race songs where

62. Hemanga Biswas - Asom aru Bongor Loka-Sangit Samikshya, p. 83.

63. Ibid. p. 83

64. Habibur Rahman-Bangladesher Loka-Sangit o' Bhogolik paribesh. Ref. from-'Asomor Char-chaporir Lokasahitya-Ismail Hossain, P. 40.

Saraswati, Narayan, Rasul, Mecca, Masjid, Sadhu Sadagar and other religious characters and places appears together as a symbol of communal harmony for example :

- **BONDANA**

Pada : Emā bandem Saraswati Devanārayana.

Bāisās : Ea devenārayana Nārāyana Nārāyanare.

Pradhān Bāisā: Pahelābandanā Kori prābhu Niranjan,

Bāisās: Ahābesh besh besh.

Pradhan Baisā: Dwitiyā bandana kori Rasuler charan.

Bāisās: Sakhire ca hare O' o're

Pradhān Baisa: Pashime bandana kori Mecca Masjid ghar

Baisas: aha besh besh besh

Pradhan. Baisa; Dekhore sei jāgāte nāmāj joto rajigan,

Baisas: Ema bandem Saraswati Devanarayana,
Ea Devanarayana Narayana Narayanare,
Sakhire ea hāre o' o're'.⁶⁵

(meaning : Oh mother Saraswati and deity 'Devanarayana'; at first pray to God and secondly I pray on the foot of Rasul I pray to Mecca and mosque of west where the Muslim priests pray to God. Oh friends, pray to God and sound joy, joy and joy.)

In the Char -chapor and reiverain land areas Muslims and Hindu societies, specially in the Barpeta district, one assimilated form of friend-making festival "Sakhipota Utsav" is observed at the time of 'Bhogali Bihu' and the two friends of each society perform

the 'Sakhipota geet' driving the boat on river. This song comprises the two forms of folk-songs of char areas Assamese Muslims and the Local Hindus. For example:

"O' āmār prāner sakhi, āryo āmār bāri
Dhān kaita bārit anchi, khāimo dhāner muri
sakhire,

O; prāner sakhire, tumār bāri āmār bāri ekoi
nadir pare

Tumiami nāo bāiyā jhai,

Tumi gaiba Bongeet, āmi Bhatiyali sakhire.

O' prāner sakhire, kail tumi āiyo dupur belāre,
Tomār lāigā raibo nadir ghāte;

Ei nodije tomār amār pranero āponsakhire.

O'praner sakhire, tomār āmār rakie bonā ei
mātir dhān

Ei matite ache o'hai moder desher man;

Sei mām rakhite bolo mor ārou pholār dhān."⁶⁶

(meaning : Oh, my heartiest friend, come to my home;
after cutting the paddy-crops, we will eat
the muri.

Oh, my heartiest friend, your and our
home is situated on the bank of same river.
We row and go forward. You sing *Bongeet*
and, I will sing *Bhatiyali*.

Oh, my heartiest friend, this paddy is
sowed by our's blood. We acquire the
prestige of our country from this land.
Come to restore this prestige and sow
more paddy).

The 'Goalpariya Lokageet' is one of the most
popular folk-song of lower Assam. These folk-songs

65. Ismail Hossain-Asomor char-chaporir Lokasahitya, P. 66-67.

66. Ismail Hossain-Asomor Jatiya Jivan Aru Abhibashi Asomiya
Musalman. 1998. p.65

are the love-lost songs like *Oi-ni-tom* of Mising community. But, sometime, these songs appeal to embrace the all communities. For example :

"O' āmra ekoi māyer santān, O'jemon Hindu-Musalmān

Ekoi nadir pāni khāiya bāchāi āmār prān."⁶⁷

In the Barak Valley, the 'Gajigan' and the 'Jarigan' are most popular song of Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims of Barak Valley performs the 'Gajigan' mentioning the name of Srikrishna.⁶⁸ The 'Jarigeet' of Brahmaputra Valley and 'Jarigan' of Barak Valley are similar in theme. Their stories are mainly religious.

Thus the whole society of Assam had been going to more fertile and fruitful since ancient days by its colourful culture of different communities. At present, some communal force and political groups are trying to destroy the traditions of communal harmony for their self-interest; But the day-long rich communal harmony of Assam can not be defeated by evil forces. Only the cultural and social unity, integration and assimilation can resist all the demons and the evil forces from the societies and then we can restore our communal harmony forever.

"Ahā, ene eti muhrtar bābe āmi pārthanā karo,
Jhot mandir-masjidor dbandai nebhangē eta brihat
jati;

Aha, ene eti abasthānor bābe āmi sangrām karo,
Jhot pratijon manohei ekotā sbādhin prajati'.

(meaning : come, we pray for that moment, where the conflict of temple and mosque cannot break a great nation; Come, we struggle for that location, where each man is an independent species).

67. Ismail Hossain - Ismail Hossain-Hindu-Musalman Prashna; Samannay Aru Sanghat, 1994, p. 74

68. Medini Choudhury-Luit Barak Aru Islam. P. 70.

COMMUNAL HARMONY IN THE FOLK SONGS OF ABHIBASHI MUSLIM PEOPLE OF ASSAM,

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Migration is a natural phenomena in the history of human civilisation. Generally, the causes of migration are natural, social, economical and political. Like other parts of the world, India is also not opposite in the migrational point of view. The tribes like Aryan, the Drabidian, the Kokechian. etc. were migrated to India in different times. The varied Indian culture have been formed with the mixing of different tribes, their cultural activities, etc. Likewise Assamese culture is also varied for so many religious people, tribal communities., the Hindu-Bengalis, Nepalis, Muslims, Rabhas, Hajongs, Bodos, Dewris, Missisngs etc, live in Assam with their own cultural heritage. For these, Assamese culture becomes a mixed culture. In this paper, discussion is restricted only upon the culture of Aabhibasi Muslim people who live in the char-capori area of Assam.

In reality nobody can say when Muslim people first came to Assam. But it is no doubt that in 1205-06 Bakhtier Khaizi the ruler of Bengal, attacked Assam and from then the living of Muslim people started. From then up to landabu pact (1826) the relationship of Hindus and

Muslims in Assam were friendly. Like chihabuddin (1662-63), E.A. Gait (History of Assam, P-151) wrote -"the Muslims of Assam were only by name but in works and activities they were as like-as the native Assamese." In the famous Saraighat War, Bagh Hazarika (Ismail Siddiki) taught Lachit Barphukan about the war tactics how to win over the Mughals. Observing the softness for the Muslims of the Ahom kings Dr. Surya Kr. Bhuyan says.

Tume Asomt thaka, taat amar apatti nai,
Kinto iatay bea-baru kari, iar dhaar-dastur
maani aroo aie dekhari maat katha loi,
Rajar Kusal banchya kari amar ajan hoi thaka.
Toomar aroo desasta pooratan prajar
vitarat vinvab, vin shar thya arroo vin
Uddeshya haba nalagay."
(Shargadeo Rajeshwar Singh, page-170-71).

In the 13th century, Hazrat Ghiasuddin Aulia established the monument 'Poamecca' at Hajo which becomes a remarkable holy place for all communities. Another great man known as Azan Fakir who composed Zikir and Jari which are also great wealth of Assamese literature. Most of the Zikirs and Jaris are secular in character. One of them is -

Moor manat ann vab nya O'Allah
Moor manat nye ann vab
Hinduki Musalman akay Allar Pharman
Akherat akay Allahar nam.

So many examples are there in Assam like these for the Hindu-Muslim relationship. Observing such friendship the Divide and Rule policy maker Britishers became

mad and started pouring poisons to the people. For hence perhaps, Bengal was divided into two parts -West and East Bengal. The population of West Bengal was Hindu dominated and East Bengal Muslim dominated. Assam was amalgamated with East Bengal. In the meantime finding a large uncultivated land in Assam and observing Assamese peoples slothfulness in cultivation, the British Govt. took 'Grow more food scheme' by the skilled poor cultivators of Bengal at the time of Sir Sadulla's premiership in Assam. There are some other economical and socio-political reasons for the migration of Bengali people to Assam and most of them settled in chars and riverine land of Assam. For the great contribution of the Abhibashi Muslim people Assamese remained as the state administrative language in 1931.

Most of the people of char-chapori area in lower Assam belong to Abhibashi Muslim community. As their forefathers were migrated from Bengal in the last part of 19th and 1st part of 20th century their socio-cultural activities were also derived from that Bengali culture. But in Assam it becomes a mixed culture. In most cases in their practical life the influence of Assamese culture are innumerable. Assamese becomes their mother tongue and medium of education.

There are various types of songs, jaris found in the cultural field of Abhibashi Muslim community. Songs like Bhatiali, Bhowaiya, Palligeet, Murshidigeet. Dhuiya geet, palagaan or Kabigaan, Barashay geet, Daria pirar geet, Gazi Pirar geet, Bichyod geet, Magon geet, Chashigeet, Bengbia geet, Bia geet, Jarigan, Shakhipata geet, Nao khelar geet (songs of boat race), Lathibasi geet, etc. are prevalent in char-chapori area particularly of the Abhibashi Muslim community.

The culture of Abhibashi Muslim people is based upon agriculture. Most of the songs, jaris are secular in character. The themes of the songs are generally of human love, devotional-song for the gurus, Iswar, Allah, gods and goddesses, gratification and sorrows of life, nature, river, its activities, etc.

PALLIGEET.

Bhatiali, Bhowalya, Bichyed geet are part of palligeet. The Bhatiali songs are the symbol of humanism, happiness and sorrowfulness of the people. These geets are not only prevalent in the river area but also circulated over to the poor Abhibashi farmers of Assam. There are so many Bhatiali songs which reflect the activities of river. Some of these are-

- (1) A kul O'kul bhaira nadi
Uthal pathal dhewray
Baitha hatay aami eka
Shathery nai moor.....
- (ii) Aamai bhashailiray aamai dubailiray
Akul dariar buzhi kul nairay.....
- (iii) Mazhi baiya jaoray akula dariar mazhay
Amar bhanga nao ray mazhi baiya jaoray.....
Nadir kul nai kinar nairay
O' aami kun kul hotay kun kulay jabo.....

In some Bhatiali social lives are picturised. In this Bhatiali a newly married girl sends news through a boat rider to her mother's home-

Naiyaray nyer baam toila
Koon dooray jao choila

Achina shaiyerer majhey amai jaio loiya

There are some palligeets in which pictures of migration from Bengal to Assam are also reflected. One of them is -

'Padma hoitay ilam aami Assamer Char

Baraham putrayi bhanglo amaar shaina shonar ghar'.

BHOWAIYA

Some palligeets are called Bhowaiya also known as Doiara geet reflect the love, affections of the youths of this region. At night while the Bullock cart rider starts its journey to a distant place, hearing the sound of the wheels of the cart the beloved sings with sorrow.

'Oki gadial bhai keto rabo aami
Panther dikay chaiyaray.....

MURSHIDI

The song Murshidi or Marfti like Assamese Bargeet are particularly sung in mela or urush mobarak of some pirs or gurus. These Murshidi geets come from Sophibad of Iran. Though the songs are devotional but in the songs boat, river nature, home, etc. are used as symbol. Such songs are-

- Gurur paday prem bhakti
Huluna mansabar kalay.....
- Daya koray ashoe dayal
Esho ale adhiner.....

LIKEWISE.....

Dayal Guru Bhkter pran

Tumi deikha jao go
Ogo dyal chan.....

The songs are also known as Bowal geet and its origin is undivided Bengal. The Hindu bowls are known as Vaisnav Bowl, and the Muslim bowls are known as Fakir. The Bowlgeets are symbol of amity. Such bowl geets are also popular in char and chapori of Assam -

Jater bodai ki
Ehakalay parakaley jatay karay ki
Moor monay koi.....

Similarly, there are some Boul geets of Lalan Fakir also popular in char chapori area which are important example of amity -

Morlay manosh hoibay maati
Akoi;

The Boulds are symbol of communal harmony; as they are not believer of Mondir-Masjid type of religious doctrine. Rather they prefer humanism like Kabir, Daadu, Mirabye, Sankardeva.

DHUIYA JARI OR GEET

There are another type of jari song mostly popular in the char-chapori area of Assam known as Dhuiya geet. It is generally presented in the paddy or jute field by the labours or by the peasants. The Dhuiya geets are similar to the jari song of Azan Fakir. The themes are same as jari. It may be taken from any historical fact from any religion like the story of Karbala, the life story of Prophet Mohammd. it may be the story of Ram-Sita's marriage, the story of Radha-Krishna, or such. Such songs are -

'Ekdin Jiad morey fakidia nissay
Nabir Rowza chairay karbalatay eray.....

Then we have song like this in which tale of Ram -
Sita's marriage tale is presented

O'ray janak puray ki ghatona ghotloray
Lakshmaner bhye Ram shay ashilo
Ou, Janakpuray dhanuk bhangiaray
Ramay bia korilo shita devikray.....

Mysticism is also found in some Dhuiya song.....

Aray Kaam naditay namoray amaar mon
Karlana tar annyashan
Shunaa shuna nadir bibaran.....

PALAGAN

There are some songs called 'Palagan' also known as 'Kabigaan' are also a part of Dhuiya gaan. The origin of this type of song is 'Maimansingh' of Bangladesh where once Bodo people lived and it was first started by the Bodos of that region. Though the Bodos once migrated from that region but the palagaan influenced the Muslims and Hindus of that region. It is now popular in the char-chapori area of Assam also. There are 'Ramayani Palagaan' Krishnalila palagaan. Ramlila palagaan particular prevalent in Bengal. Like that palagaan of Karbala, palagaan of Rahim-Rubban; Palagaan of the life story of Prophet Mohammed, etc. are popular in the char and riverine land of Assam. In one of the Ramayani palagaans Ramchandra weeps like a child while Lakshman was wounded.

'Mata galay mata pabo
konnya kulay kari

Pita galay pita pabo Putra kulay Kari
 Sita galay Sita pabo
 Bibah korla
 Kinto bhai galay bhai
 Arna ashay firia.

There is 'Bandana' in which we find the communal harmony as Hindu-Muslim meet together in meetings -

Pubatay bandana kori puber Bhanushwar
 Ekdikay udoiray Bhanu choudikay pashar
 Sabha kaira boisa bhairay Hindu-Musalman
 Saber charanay ammi janailam salam.....

After completion of the 'Bandana' the Boyati starts with a song which is a great example of amity -

Hedu ar Musalmaan akoi pinder dori
 Keha bolay Allah Rasul keha bolay Hari
 Bismilla are Sribisto akoi gian
 Dufak kari.....

DARIA PIR'S SONG

The god 'Varun' (according to Hinduism) is known as Daria Pir to the people of Char-Chapori area of Assam. The people use to devote the Pir distributing 'shinni' - prasad' like the followers of Sankardeva. There is a song in which a Boat rider sings -

O'darie saria day amai
 Ami Pirer deshay jaboray hai
 Saria day amai
 Ami deshay ghuria berai
 Kul kinara napai

Amar pirer shathay hoilay dekha
 Jabo Medinai.....

GAZIPIR'S GEET

According to Hinduism there is god of tiger known as Dakhinrai. The same is known by the Muslim people as Gazipir who is a remarkable symbol of amity -

Gazimiar Hajot shinni hoiloray
 Hindu ganey bolo Hari
 Musalmanay bolo Allah.

SATYAPIR'S SONG

Like gazi pir there was Satya pir who was a great example of amity to the people of Assam, mostly popular among Abhibashi Muslim community.

" Hindur devata
 Muslmaner pir
 Amaar naam Satyapir.....
 " Satyapir boley Raja hunaha bachan
 Hindur devota Musalmaner pir
 Gharay Gharay more naamay bhasila Zikir'.

SHAKHIPATA GEET

Shakhipata utsav (friend making) is very much popular in the char-chapori area of Assam. The young people (boys or girls) make friendship-shakhi formally with great happiness and it remains till death. There is no bar to make friendship/shakhi only to their own community but it is made to another community people also. There is a popular song in which social and agricultural activities of riverine people is picturised -

O' amaar praner shakhi
 lo amaar bari
 Dhan kaita barit anchi
 Khaimo Dhaner moori Shakhiray.....

BIAGEET

The The most popular utsav to the human being is marriage utsav. Similarly, the people of char-chapori area of Assam also celebrate this utsav. In connection with this celebration there are so many songs sung like other communities particularly Assamese community of Assam. Like the biageets of Assamese community there are biageets also popular in Abhibashi community while the bridegroom is bathed with 'Ma- halodhi' with a traditional process.

Haldhi gondhairaj babar gaon
 Ati aichyray baba kalo nadi
 Doi ana phalao baba jabay gaiyer Haidhi.....
 (popular in Goaalpara)

Maiya kunday Alkhay parey
 Bapay kaday maiya toray
 Are sonar bhai kaday
 Mukhay gamsa diaray.....(in Kamrup, Goalpara).

There are some ironical biageets also -

Moriam bibi banaisay paan
 Khalya jaray Manik chan
 Are pabina Moriam bibi hater pan.....
 Sorta kata goiya, Keski kata paan
 Naushaar myiray daikha ailam
 Khopar tolay tolay rung.....
 (prevatent in Nagaon, Kamrup, Barpeta, Nalbari)

There are some biageets sung by the friends, sister and ioti.....

" Aij boozhi toray jabay loiya to bubujan
 Aij booji toray jabay Loiya.....
 Agay jodi jantam to maina
 Toray nibo paray ki sundar maina lo.....

These songs are similar in character with the biageets prevalent to the Assamese community, Bengali community of Assam.

Like other communities, there are some songs on Magon, Rakhal get (servant song). Bhashan geet (i.e. Bewla Lakhinder's tale). Bishchyed geet (the sorrowful story of Hassan-Hussain, love story of Laila Maznu, Eusuf-lulekha, etc. very much popular in Abhibashi Muslim community.

NAOKHELOE GEET (SONGS OF BOAT RACE)

In connection with sports like Nao khel (boat race), Lathi bari khel (stick playing) oldum -dudum, etc. are some jari songs very much popular to the riverine people which are important examples of amity.

In the Nao-khel there is 'Bandana' in which the Boyati-singer (like the 'sutradhar' of Ankia naat) remembers to all the powers from all religion after the Boat is dressed up with Dhan (rice), Dubla (tiny fresh leaf) with a traditional process by the owner of the boat. The Bandana

Pad- Ema Bandan Saraswati Devenarayan
 Devanarayana.....
 Pahela bandana kori prabhu niranjan

Aha besh besh.....

Ditio bandana kori rassuler chanran

Aha besh besh.....

There are various types of songs prevalent to the char-chapori of Assam in which goddess saraswati, kali, Rasul, Mecca, Radha-Krishna, Nimai chand, etc. are also taken place. There are devotional jari also sung through which the Boyati appeals their 'Guru' to help them to win the race.

One of such jari is -

Bhabay kul nai akulay pari

Daki shakha toomaray

Haray o'kul doo kul doo amaray.....

There is a jari song remembering goddess 'kali'

Kali bunay thako ma kali toomar naam

Kali ma nidoya hoiyona.....

Sakalkay karlen doya

Amak kori bamhay.....

ON RADHA KRISHNA -

Jaler ghatay ami kena ailamray

Darun kanai amaar kul mojailo.....

There are ironical jari also -

Boitha taan dioray jaba karum khasi

Tarabarin haatya jaiya kinbo dater meshi.....

In Goalpara, Dhubri, there is a popular jari of famous 'Goalpara Lokageet Silpi' - Pratima Pandey which is also very much popular all over Assam.

Baitha maro

O' baichya bhaiya ray

Jharia boitha mariya jao ray.....

In this way the Boyati sings various types of 'Jari' from starting point to return home participating in the race.

Now a days Assamese Bihugeet, Kamrupia lookgeet, Goalpara lookgeet, Zikir and jari, Bargeet, etc. are also popular in the char-chapori of Assam which are displayed by the Abhibashi people in correct way.

The char-chapori area of Assam can be recognised as the rich field particularly of Lookageet. As most of the people of the char-chapori area of Assam were migrated from Bengal hence the influence of that Bengali culture are innumerable. The language Assamese is taken as their mother tongue though they use to speak colloquial Bengali at home, They have been educating in Assamese, establishing Assamese medium schools, colleges in the area. And hence their culture becomes a mixed culture and now the influence of Assamese culture have been found enormous.

From the above discussion, it has been found that though there are influence of Bengali culture in the songs of Abhibashi people are innumerable but in most cases the songs are found secular in character which might be a great help for communal harmony to the people of this region and it would be a great help to us if such culture, songs are sought discussed and glanced deeply to preserve to form 'Brihattar Asomiya Jati' in Assam.

THE LIFE AND CULTURE OF MEGHALAYA AND ITS INTEGRATION WITH THE NORTH-EAST

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Talking about communal harmony among tribals and non-tribals of north-east India comes to mind the formation, transformation and transcreation of the region through the ages. An integral part of independent India, the region had been maintaining its own culture, its own heritage and of course its own way of life distinct and specialized to itself since its very civilization. The region which had its own identity as a cohesive whole till the other day got bifurcated into seven states divided on the basis of the people, their lingua franca and sub-origin. The region which enjoys the culmination of both the tribals, hills and plains and the non-tribals has unfortunately been subjected to be a mute witness of ethnic upheavals on several occasions since the creation of the seven sister states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the parent state Assam; and even before that which accentuated the creation of these independent states.

But no matter how divided the region is, perfect harmony still exists in the Nature of the North east, its air, water, hills and valleys, mountains and plateaus. Looking at the North-east, one cannot just avoid from being getting the feel of Mother Nature bestowing her bounty in abundance. And the State of Meghalaya basks in the glory of the lion's share with its grandeur, splendour and beauty of a landscape where nature paints its pristine colours. If then harmony is in nature, it has to descend on the mind and soul of its inhabitants. Meghalaya, the 'abode of clouds', has been the seat of three tribes; the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos who bear the harmonious chord in their own unique way through their culture, heritage and tradition which have strong semblance with not only the other tribes and communities of the North-East, but also with the mainland India if viewed in the right perspective.

An overview then on this platform of the cultural life of the tribals of Meghalaya which definitely can adorn the role of the indomitable highway to bridge the gulf not only with the other tribal groups and the non-tribal communities of the North-east, but also can carve a towering place for Meghalaya in the national geography. Culture again is a comprehensive term. It defines the mode of behaviour and thinking particular to a group of people under the influence of their history and tradition. Culture then is such vast a topic that is not feasible to delve at length within the space constraints of this paper.

In Meghalaya, those who inhabit the central plateau, known as the Khasi hills, are commonly called the Khasis; the tribe occupying the eastern part called the Jaintia Hills are known as Pnars or Jaintias; and those residing in the western part, the Garo Hills are the Garos. Generally the

people belonging to the Austroloid and the Mongoloid groups are called tribals. The well-known Khasi scholar Homewell Lyngdoh is of the opinion that the Khasis migrated from north-easterly direction through Nagaon, Lumding and Haflong (in Assam) across the Kulpi river. According to him, the Khasis have their home of origin some-where in western China. The most accepted theory today is that the Khasis came from Burma. The Garos belonging to the Mongoloid stock came from China.

The Khasis have their own rich collection of folk-tales and stories which like any tales of the human civilization through the ages speak of life, its beauty, romance and correlation with nature. These tales which reflect the life, their beliefs and customs which on many occasions bear strong resemblance with many other tribes of the region. This reflects the underlying idea that harmony lies in nature, human lives their feelings, aspirations, dreams, endeavours and achievements which are so very common and similar to the basic human predicament.

The Khasis also have numerous folk songs with distinct characteristic of their own. These songs reflect the life and customs practised by the people. These folk songs abound in genuine and universal human sentiments of joy and sadness, pleasure and pain, hope and anxiety of life. Their dances which are in abundance, both religious and festive, though unique and distinct within themselves bear strong affinity to other dance forms of the region. In fact, obsessed expressions through dancing run a common chord among the entire humanity and the Khasis are no different.

Any tribe, community or people at large are

recognized by their attachment with the soil. The Khasis also have a very close affinity with nature and the soil they are rooted to. They call Nature as '*Ka Meirilung-Pisan*' which means the mother who maintains freshness and tenderness in everything within her and one who gives growth and life to all living creatures. The Khasis pray and implore Nature at the beginning of cultivation which is universal to human civilization since it took to agriculture in its history of evolution into the modern being of today. Even before cutting a tree, they seek permission from Mother Earth.

Culture and its manifestations stem out from these basic roots of being indebted and grateful to the soil. In many cultures all over the world, dance has originated from man's limitation of the movements of animals and birds. Among the Khasis too, many dances have originated in similar manner. Dances among the Khasis are closely associated with various natural phenomena.

One of the most prominent among the dance forms of the Khasis is the '*Ka shad Suk Mynsiem*', the virginity dance which can go long way in identifying them with many other tribes and communities of the region. This dance is performed only by unmarried girls and boys. It is also commonly known as *Shad Weiking* because of the name of the location where this dance traditionally takes place i.e. at the Weiking ground on the bank of Wahunkhrah river. This dance also has a close connection with fertility of the soil. The queen of all seasons, the Spring has been playing a pivotal role in shaping up culture of many a civilizations and in the process weaving a common chord of harmony among different linguistic and cultural sub-nationalists. Spring time is also festival time in the Khasi land of Ri Hynniewtrep in east Meghalaya. The hills and

dales reverberate with the sound of music from the beating of the drums, cymbals and the tune of the wind instrument *tangmuri*, floating in the air. The common mood is upbeat keeping in harmony-with nature, the flowers and varied orchid, some budding while some already blooming in a riot of colours, drenched in April showers and swaying gently in the breeze. At such a time, this *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, meaning 'dance with a joyous heart' is celebrated.

The Khasis are an agrarian community and their lives are centred around the agricultural activities. Among the Bhoi people residing in the Ri Bhoi district, the culminating land between Assam and Meghalaya, there is the popular harvest dance known as '*Ka Shad Kba bad Shad Langhie*', a thanks giving dance for peace and prosperity of the whole community and to pray for a good harvest. Another known harvest dance of the same nature is '*ka Shad Kynlher*' originating from Nongkhalai, a religious dance where the people invoke God, the creator for a good harvest. Another dance of this type is '*Ka shad Raid Shabong*' held in Pyneusla, which is a thanks giving dance to God for the good harvest and prosperous year. All these speak about their close affinity to other tribes and communities of the region among which harvest festivals are common. Differences lie only in the way of performance but all these aspects reflect that there is perfect harmony that exist among the linguistic and culturally heterogeneous people of the North-east. Spring festivities are also abundantly found among the Jaintia tribe. '*Shad Nohsakyriat*' or the Nohsakyriat dance is a type of dance typical to the people of the Jaintia Hills of the Raid lalong. This dance is performed during the spring season. It is performed by the womenfolk who spin themselves as a traditional pole balanced on an erect

pole fixed to the ground, something like a sea-saw. Young men and women come in their traditional attires to take part in the festival. The people invoke the deities to bless their cultivating land so that they may reap a rich harvest.

However, the *Behdeinkhlam* festival is the most popular festival in the Jaintia Hills. It is celebrated in the month of July. As a prelude to the festival, a sacrifice called '*Kania Pyrthar*' is performed by the priests. Every *dong* (locality) prepares their own *rots* (*raths*) and bring them through a colourful procession to lawmusiang, the meeting ground where they are immersed and destroyed. This festival also bears strong resemblance to many similar rath-festivals of the mainstream India which can in introspect be a strong medium to communicate the message of harmony.

In a discussion about the traditional dance forms of Meghalaya, it is also imperative to mention about the *Nongkrem* dance which is performed ritualistically at Smit, 30 km from capital Shillong at the vicinity of *Kalingsad-Lingsunon* (the ancestral palace of Queen Mother), which though unique and distinct in its own way but in retrospect speaks volumes about a common chord that it can strike with similar such festival of other communities thus winding within its ambit the essence of harmony. This is a type of religious dance in which the Queen mother inaugurates the dance herself. The king also takes part in the dance and together with him, all his ministers and heads of *raids* (regions) and *shnog* (villages) join in the dance. This dance is also an expression of invoking the blessing of Good or Mother Earth.

The northeastern region is a meeting place of many cultures, languages, races and religions. Each of the

communities are unique from their individual standpoint. There are differences in Indian folklore, but all the folklore of both the tribals and the non-tribals reflect the expression of life, wherein the sustenance of harmony lies.

Though dissimilarities dissipate through the individual way of life of different tribes and communities of the region, culture has been playing and will continue to play as the pivotal congregation ground where tribals and non-tribals can meet each other without any prejudices or inhibitions for an exchange-exchange of ideas through culture. Shedding of inhibitions and egos from the non-tribal and complexities from the tribal groups are what the clarion calls ringing the air. Embracing each other through healthy cultural exchange would undoubtedly go a long way in building up a strong region of which not only the Indian mainstream can be proud of but can itself be a pulsating force to reckon with in the entire South-east Asia.

(Srabani Kar Purkayastha)

ON THE FACETS OF HARMONY BETWEEN TRIBALS AND NON-TRIBALS OF TRIPURA

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INTRODUCTION

The apprehension of the identity crisis of a group of backward people happens to be the major impediments to the communal harmony between this group and the remaining people in Tripura. The former is traditionally called as 'Upajati' or 'Tribals' while remaining people is known as 'Jati' or 'Non-tribals'. It is perhaps known to all that there is a lack of consensus among the scholars, writers and administrators as to : why they should be called as tribal? Who can be identified as tribal? what are the characteristics common to identify a tribal? This is of course an old but living debate and it can form a subject matter for separate discussion. The present discussion for its obvious objective should avoid this route. But at the same time it can not be devied that the use of the term tribe itself bears the mark of ethnic identity and their continuing backwardness and distress. But in the recent times another term 'indigenous' is being found

to replace the term 'tribe'. It reflects a sense of growing consciousness; sharpens the distinctness and carries the apprehensions of identity crisis to an extremity. And an attempt to push ahead the right to self-determination. Such attempts may create difference further between two groups of people in north-eastern region of the country. In Tripura one political party has been formed-- Indigenous People Front of Tripura, which has got the majority seats in the election of *Autonomous District Council* of Tripura at its first appearance. This is purely a political issue in isolation and attempt to dub the backward ethnic identities in an extreme manner to identify the tribes from other settlers. This may cause to encourage the growing elites of the tribal society and give rise of the conflicts and disharmony between tribals and non-tribals. If this identity question is taken to an extreme to press hard ignoring the changing reality of globalization and the concept of global panchayat, the world is to be divided into pieces just for political reason while the majority of the backward and oppressed masses of the tribal society would remain there where they were.

POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

In many tribal concentrated areas of the country as well as in North-eastern region, district council has been in existence over nearly 50 years. Many of the to-day's state of North-eastern region has its virtual origin in district council. Even predominantly tribal states have been formed where in most of the district councils have dissolved. In Tripura autonomous district council has been formed in 1982 as a result of prolonged movement with a lot of hopes and aspiration of general tribal people for their development and protection. All these have not

ensured the upliftment of the backward tribal people. On the contrary, two most backward states of the country belong to this NE- region as per the composite infrastructural index of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. In many instances, the self-government have become more a political institutions than a creative constitutional and democratic machinery towards solving the deep rooted poverty and problems of inequality. It may not be out of place to mention that in most cases backwardness of the tribals, their way of life, level of education and lack of capabilities and primitive occupational practices perhaps sufficiently justify the absence of adequate 'material on which to base political institution'. It may not be proved justified that for upliftment of tribal people, protecting their institution and to save them from exploitation, the creation of political institution is the only way. If so, there would have been no or less problems of the tribals or no question of discord would have been there, at least, in the predominantly tribal states of the country. Rather what is necessary is the political good will and amity which merely one but of course an important means to be activated for development of the tribals.

AN ANALYSIS OF BACKDROP

From 1940s to date a number of tribal organizations such as Sangerack, Paharia Union, Adibasi samitim, Tripura Rajya Adibasi sangha (subsequently Adibasi samsad), Tripura Rajya Gana Mukti Parisad, Tripura Upajati Juba Samaj, Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti, Tripura National Volunteer Force, All Tripura Tiger force, National Liberational Front of Tripura etc. have come into existence. Despite their differences as to the matter of

choosing ways, means and ideology they adopted they had their unity in their over all objective, i.e., tribal development and protection of identity. Through the passage of time, the question of identity came ahead of the question of development. The major reason for that was ; (1) Illegal transfer of land; (2) Problem of socio-economic development; (3) Problem of protection of tribal language and culture. Apart from these, the issue which is and has repeatedly been discussed and referred to is that the tribal communities in Tripura have been reduced to a minority group due to influx from erstwhile East Pakistan consequent upon communal disturbance and partition of India. As a result of prolong tribal movement on these issues Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous district council was formed in 1982. Despite that it cannot be claimed clearly that the development of tribals in true and comparative sense have taken place. Rather a majority of the tribals have been pushed far below the standard enjoyed by the non-tribals. Mere establishment of right over land never automatically generates income and development. Pre-condition of development is the proper and productive use of land and application of resources. Use of land facilitate exchange between nature and labour power for crop. Thereafter require marketing of surplus generated from that exchange. Here in this relation comes the role of trade and business.

On the other hand there are many instances dearth of proper of proper and qualified candidates for Job, Training and Education. Although, the right of the Tribals in these areas have been reserved. The reason for this, besides other is the high rate of 'drop out'. At the same time it is also to be mentioned here that a section of tribal youth are also interested to take up non- farm based

activity in order to reduce their dependence on land based activity. Unfortunately, they are failing to penetrate in such activities of their interest due to a number of compelling factors.

In view of the above, what is urgently required is to develop infrastructure, i.e, education, Human resource development, health, irrigation, road, transport, communication in the tribal areas in the one hand and initiate participatory process of development, strengthen the democratic process and institutions, ensure mobilisation of resources and microcredit along with welfare measure and bring about allocative efficiency on the other. Otherwise, peace and harmony is not possible any chance or by any politics of accord. A number of Tribal organization whose name have already been mentioned came into being by capitalizing the poverty and distress of tribal people. If the agenda of development is pushed to back step, more organization or out fit of such nature may come gain in future. Main objective should be to enhance the human capabilities of the tribals so that they can take the advantages and benefits and have the access to advancement of science, information and technology with the prime objective to bring them to the main stream of the country. Otherwise, the apprehension of identity crisis which is now talked about for a group of communities will to-day or tomorrow reach to its extreme and be capitalised by individual communities even by two section of same communities. A section of Reang and Tripuris who like to mark themselves as Brus has launched the concept of Borok Nation although the Kokbarak speaking reangs of Tripura has been opposing the same. Towards this, development of the tribals would the main concern under the tribal situation of Tripura for maintaining its peace and harmony.

PROPOSITION

It may clearly be observed from the above analysis the question of development has to be much stressed and valued than anything else for greater harmony, interest and partnership between tribals and non-tribals in particular and peace for the state as a whole in general. Moreover, the propositions which comes up from the above analysis may be as under -

- * Underdevelopment and poverty directly and indirectly contributes to social tension and discord and/or forces the youths to be misguided.
- * The present status and way of living in tribal society obviously justify the demand for development first.
- * Development may cause to build up confidence and help them to self reliant as well as to think themselves as the equal partner in process of development.
- * Development may help them to be associated with the main stream at their own initiatives.
- * Development indeed may cause to extend and strengthen tribal economy and market to establish a linkage with the economy and market of the plains

A Test

Now, in the light of some empirical evidences the above proposition may be examined. The need for development is stressed here in the above with objective of poverty alleviation. Poverty may be understood as a state of resourcelessness which in turn may signify the situation

of income deprivation, malnutrition. Illiteracy and lack of education and so on. In view of the *limit* of the present discussion here we will only take *up education*.

Association of Indian Universities conducted a study to analysis the influence of education variables on economic development. The statistical analysis of the study confirmed that the nexus between *literacy* and indicators of economic growth is strong. Let us now examine the pattern of literacy of tribes of Tripura to understand the growth indicators.

From the Table No.- I, it is clear that Tribal literacy rate is much lower than the over all literacy of the state and case of female literacy is also more deplorable. Urban tribals literacy rate appear higher when total literacy is further divided in terms rural and urban area (Table No.- 2). From the Table No.-3. it is clear that literacy in ADC/TSP areas is lower than the Tribal literacy rate of the state as a whole. Because, the urban literacy which is very high (86.27%) has been excluded from TSP/ADC Areas. Real literacy rate of the tribals under TSP/ADC areas would be much lower if non-tribal literates are excluded. (In TSP areas tribal population represent only 71.62%). However, on the whole, low literacy rate sufficiently projects low growth indicators of tribal dominated TSP/ADC areas.

It may also transpire from the Table No.-3 that the education infrastructure and facilities in TSP areas are insignificant in comparison to state as a whole. 168 Higher Secondary Schools are in the state- of which only 30 Higher Secondary schools are in TSP areas. One degree college out of 14 is located in the TSP areas. From these, it may be inferred that urban tribals comparative enjoys

better infrastructure and facilities in comparison to tribals in the rural areas. Even they are likely to have better access to the benefits of reservations etc.

Let us now examine issue from the stand point of students enrolment at different levels of education in the state. Table No.-4 shows that there was 1,65,799, Nos. ST students enrolled in Primary/JB shools; out of which only 1101 students were able to enter at graduate level. Of these ST students at Graduate level a good number of ST students originated from urban areas. At every level from primary stage to graduation level a large number students are found to be missing. So the obvious question that arises here is what happens to these large number of students. The answer is that it is the consequences of high rate of drop out; which is not only shocking but also alarming indeed from the stand point of concurrent tribal situation in Tripura. It reveals from the survey conducted jointly by the Directorate of School Education, Govt. of Tripura and Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India that the drop out rate at class X stage is 90% in case of Tribal students and their rate of passing in class X examination is only 15%. At every higher stage of education rate of drop out increases. Female drop out in ST students appear higher than the rate of drop out in male students (Table-5) If this situation continues it may be difficult to social tension. Drop out unemployed are likely to be misguided by the misleading swings of extremism.

Another study was conducted by the Tribal Welfare Department of the Govt. of Tripura to test the contemporary belief that unemployed drop out will become severe problem to their families in particular and law and order of the state in general. The rehabilitation cell of tribal welfare department studies 1635 nos. of surrendered

extremists of ATTF. It has been found that only 2 extremists passed Higher secondary examination and 13 passed Madhyamik. Number of Madhyamik plucked students was 125. Out of these 1635 surrendered extremists, 1495 read upto VI-IX class. This signifies that out of 1635 surrendered extremists of ATTF drop out upto Madhyamik level is 99%. This appears to be a serious threat to the peace of the state.

If any one ask about the reason for such shocking situation the answer he may have from the different quarters is that there is dearth of facilities and infrastructure in tribal areas. Of course it is right. But more real picture lies to the answer to the following questions : What is way of life of the tribal students? What their parents do? How they maintain their children or how the children remains with their parents? Answer to these question perhaps may be had. If we look at the occupational pattern of tribal students.

Table No. 6 shows the occupational pattern of the Tribals of Tripura as a whole. It shows that a large number of tribal persons are engaged in cultivation. They follow the primitive way of cultivation which is locally known as "jhum" (Shifting cultivation) and that is practised mainly in the hill slopes and in the forest areas of the state. There was time when it was possible to cultivate large area under jhumming. However with the decrease in forest cover, strict enforcement of forest regulation and increasing population pressure due cross boarder influx the yield under jhumming has substantially reduced. Moreover, increasing number of Jhumias; scarcity of Jhum land, community land tenure system, lack of infrastructure, remoteness and isolation have been significant in continuance of practice of Jhumming. Govt. inability to provide an acceptable

alternative source of income conducive to the tribal life has also added to the retention of this system in the tribal system. There are 1,70,660 tribal families in the state; of which 55,000 still practising Jhumming either wholly or partly. None of the urban tribals virtually comes in the category of Jhumias. However, Jhum produce is adequate hardly for 6/7 month of the year. For the rest part of the year they virtually remains on hunger and so is the condition of their children. They are forced to go for hunting, fishing and collecting of forest produces. Under the circumstance how long the parents can encourage their children to go to schools. The poverty and its compulsion in the Jhumia families making the boys and girls to work in Jhum fields to help the family at a time when we have enormous productive power and stock of food to give guarantee of food for all.

As per the Human Development Report in South Asia (1997) the rate of drop out at primary level is 34% while the drop out rate in case of tribal students of Tripura is 66.58-- which almost twice the South Asian rate. From the above and in view of the overall backwardness of the state in general and tribal areas in particular one may easily gauge the *magnitude* and *severity* of other deprivations.

OBSERVATION

Getting out of the house don't ask me what is poverty? Rather look at my house and count the holes. Look at my dress and furniture I use- And then minutely look at the things whatever I do have and Write. What you. see that is poverty.

The problem of Tribal society of Tripura is a

problem of deep rooted poverty and inequality. As to the hunger in Tibal society of Tripura there is a contrast between past and present. In the past they were self-sufficient and there were no hunger as such; but now it persists there. From time of the youth in the name sangcrack in 1940 extremist activities have been erupted time and again. When one group is reduced or returns to *main* stream another group rises by capitalizing the support and sympathy of the distressed tribals. So the poverty, hunger and inequality etc. are in many respect the basis of social tension in Tripura. The urgent need is to make the tribal people development capable. In this regard the role of advanced section whether he is tribal or non-tribal, is undeniable. However, non-tribals are the majority in state. So, their role and sacrifices above all must be exemplary. No doubt politics is the art of possible, and that art must be practiced in conquering hunger and poverty nothing else

TABLE No-1

DISTRICTWISE S.T. POPULATION				
SL NO.	Name of District	Total Population	S.T. Population	Percentage of S.T. population to total District Population.
1	2	3	4	5
1.	WEST TRIPURA	1293861	3,25,845	25.18
2.	NORTH TRIPURA	4,67,147	96,463	20.65
3.	SOUTH TRIPURA	7,17,100	2,89,298	40.34
4.	DHALAI DISTRICT	2,79,097	1,41,739	50.73
TOTAL :-		2757205	8,53,345	30.94

Source :- Census data (N.I.C)

TABLE SHOWING THE LITERACY LEVELS AMONG THE SCHEDULED TRIBES

Year	General Literacy			Literacy in Scheduled Tribes		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1961	29.61	10.19	20.24	17.37	2.31	10.01
1971	40.20	21.19	30.93	21.60	6.04	15.03
1981	51.17	32.00	42.12	33.46	12.27	23.07
1991	70.58	49.55	60.44	52.88	27.34	40.37

TABLE NO. 2

PERCENTAGE OF LITERACY IN TRIPURA (1991)

	Rural	Urban	Total
(1) % As A whole Literacy in Tripura	56.08	83.09	60.44
(2) % of SC	55.24	64.06	56.66
(3) % of ST	39.52	86.27	40.37

TABLE NO.-3

FORMATION ON INFRASTRUCTURAL AND OTHER FACILITIES IN TRIBAL SUB PLAN AREAS TRIPURA AS ON 31.12.1995

ITEM	STATE	ADC/TSP/AREA
Area	10.491 sq. k.m	7,132.56 sq. k.m
Population		
Total	27,57,205	9,42,283
Literacy	60.44%	36.26%
Decadal growth rate	34.30%	46.14%
ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP		
Revenue Village	873	462
Police Stations	45	17
EDUCATION		
Primary Schools	2,029	1,245
Middle Stage Schools	434	167
Secondary Schools	350	102
Higher Secondary Schools	168	30
COLLEGES/ INSTITUTES		
Degree Colleges	14	1
ST BOARDING HOUSES		
Girls	11	3
Boys	68	28
Total	97	31

ITEM	STATE	ADC/TSP/AREA
SOCIAL WELFARE		
Balwadi centres	1,224	402
ICDS Centres	2,055	477

TABLE NO. - 4

Number of the Scheduled Tribes Students by Department in Tripura. as on 1999-2000.

District	GRADUATION			POST GRADUATIO		HIGHER SECONDARY		HIGH SCHOOL		MIDDLE/SR. BASIC SCHOOL		PRIMARY/IR BASIC SCHOOL						
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
WEST	603	268	871	NR	NR	NR	1261	646	1907	5932	4712	10644	11803	10145	21948	37946	33950	71902
NORTH	72	27	99	-	-	-	173	74	247	832	523	1355	1573	3615	1084	11084	8299	19140
SOUTH	86	20	106	-	-	-	521	149	670	2601	1645	4246	6127	4022	10149	26200	2188	48081
DHALAI	18	7	25	-	-	-	217	65	282	1040	598	1638	2723	1743	4471	5358	11318	26676
TRIPURA	779	322	1101	-	-	-	2172	934	3106	10405	7478	17883	22695	17488	40183	90345	75454	165799

Source :- Directorate of School Education & Higher Education, Government of Tripura.

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TABLE NO. - 5

SCHOOL DROP OUT RATES FROM CLASSES I-V
FOR THE YEAR 1998-99
(In Percentage)

Category	Boys	Girls	Total
Overall	53.25	52.95	35.11
S.C.	50.57	48.28	49.49
S.T.	65.16	68.29	66.58

SCHOOL DROP OUT RATES FROM CLASSES I-VIII
FOR THE YEAR 1998-99
(In Percentage)

Category	Boys	Girls	Total
Overall	63.12	68.62	63.35
S.C.	65.31	69.22	67.16
S.T.	80.50	80.77	81.54

SCHOOL DROP OUT RATES FROM CLASSES I-X
FOR THE YEAR 1998-99
(In Percentage)

Category	Boys	Girls	Total
Overall	79.67	80.75	80.17
S.C.	79.39	81.56	80.41
S.T.	37.14	39.37	38.14

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TABLE NO.-6

**OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF TRIBALS
IN TRIPURA.**

Occupation \ Year	No. of Persons.			
	1961	1971	1981	1991
1. Cultivation.	80,000	1,07,122	1,35,151	1,57,825
2. Agricultural — Labourer.	4,710	28,626	60,616	82,343
3. Livestock, fishing, Forestry, Hunting & Plantation etc.	147	1,749	3,197	5,106
4. Mining	-	-	92	467
5. Manufacturing, Processing, Repairing etc.	197	575	2,298	2,988
6. Construction.	62	46	483	533
7. Trade & Commerce.	224	261	721	2,134
8. Transport, Storage & communication.	-	215	443	1,134
9. Other Services	2,397	3,538	8,054	22,702
10. Household Industry.	5,629	-	-	-
A. Total Workers.	93,366	1,42,134	2,11,055	2,75,252
B. Marginal Workers.	-	-	29,816	30,284
C. Non-workers.	2,66,704	3,08,410	3,43,049	5,47,809
Total population. (A+B+C).	3,60,070	4,50,544	5,83,920	8,53,345

Source :- Census Reports, Govt. of India.

**INDIA'S NORTH EAST :
NEED TO STRENGTHEN ITS TRIBAL
CHARACTER**

Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed

Long back when the British administrators landed in the North Eastern part of India with their imperialist objectives, they were fascinated by the wide variety of the ethnic composition of the region. Such an expression can be found in the introductory remark of J.B. Fuller written in 1909; "The province of Assam at the far northeastern corner of India is a museum of nationalities".¹ A miniature India, as it is known, North is the home of more than hundred tribes. This colourful landscape drew anthropologists, historians, travelers, missionaries and social activists to the region to explore and understand the unique diversities of the region. The people as a whole, their culture and way of life have remained the central foci of their writings. It is the tribal life, and not the non-tribal living in the plains of the region, that has constituted the center stage of attention of scholars. To state precisely, it is quite natural for then to be thus attracted, for, North East India, barring Assam and Tripura, is basically a tribal region as testified to by the following Table.

Table 1

Tribal Population of North-East India

States	Tribal population in%
Arunachal Pradesh	67.66
Assam	12.82
Manipur	34.41
Meghalaya	85.53
Mizoram	94.75
Nagaland	87.70
Tripura	30.95

Source : Census of India : 1991. Also for details see Ashish Bose et. al. (eds), *Tribal Demography in North East India* (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1990)

Attempts were being made since the advent of the British to preserve the tribal nature of the region by making certain formal steps. Some of such moves like declaring certain tribal areas as excluded and partially excluded areas to keep the traditional system of governance undisturbed may be construed as planned moves to serve the imperialist interests,² but these helped keep the tribal character of the region unaffected by outside interventions. It, however, caused isolation of the tribal communities from the rest of the world, a low-cost device that served the strategic requirement of the British.³ The post-colonial era, however, retained the positive contour of the past provisions through constitutional safeguards

within the framework of Sixth Schedule. This created enormous scope for the promotion of the aspiration of the tribal people of the region. Consequently, new states emerged out of Assam. The dismemberment of the state ignited the aspiration of some sections of the tribal people for which political movements for autonomy or autonomous states or even separate or independent states are going on in the region for a considerable long period of time. All these developments have transformed this paradise of anthropologists to hotbed politics⁴ seeking greater power share in the system.

It will be wrong to argue that tribal life in the North East was always peaceful. There were frequent inter-tribal clash leading to the loss of life. While the inter-tribal relationship in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and to a great extent in Mizoram and Tripura is marked by peace and mutual respect and understanding, the relationship in Manipur, however, is conspicuous by violence and hostility, more particularly, between the Nagas and the Meiteis. The tribal communities in Assam too have a conflict-free relationship. There are historic and cultural factors behind the current spate of violence among certain tribes in the region, but assertion of ethnic identities and the fear being overrun by the contenders constituted the core of the violent relationship. The striking element in the tribal life in the region is not violence but peace and mutual respect. One can take the example of Arunachal Pradesh, where various tribes co-exist despite their enormous differences in religious practices and customs, languages, social norms and values. At the institutional

level, the Kembang is quite different from Buliang or Bugun.⁵ Yet their differences do not breed hatred and violence. For centuries together people have been learning to live together with different style of living and practices. Even there had been harmonious relationship between the tribal and non-tribal population living in the plain areas of Assam.⁶ So is the case of all the communities unless induced awareness with self-regarding political overtones about one's own identity overturns the scenario.

Most of the tribal communities in the North East as in elsewhere live in certain geographically insular areas. The situational factors and the distinctiveness of their culture and tradition instill in certain historical and civilizational context a sense of allegiance in the mind of the tribal communities⁷. But a sense of allegiance cloaked in pernicious political objectives has already disturbed some of the traditionally known peaceful tribal areas of the region. There are genuine grievances of the tribal population of the region. The geographic setting kept them in isolation, and thus, in backwardness. A feeling of relative deprivation compounded by their urge to decide their political fate without any dictates from a centralized authority at New Delhi plunged them into a violent course of political action. It started with Nagaland and then proliferated to Mizoram. Now it is in Manipur and Tripura, where, of course, the content of armed militancy is different. However, peace has returned to Mizoram with the signing of an accord in 1987 between the Government of India and the MNF peace process has taken place in Nagaland with the on-going dialogue

between the representatives of NSCN (I-M) and the Government of India.

The history of the North-East India in the post-Independent period is a record of ethnic conflict as well as reconciliation of differences. Except a few tribes having a past of taking recourse to a violent method of settling differences, the tribal society, in general, tolerant and accommodative⁸. With the ascendancy of modernity over tradition, when the emerging tribal elite started articulating their interests in terms of sharing power and the reluctance of the non-tribal leadership to do so became self-evident, the situation was bound to change. The tribal assertion for identity and their quest for self-governance resulted in the demand and eventual realization of separate states did not, however, close the turbulent phase of political movements. The spillover consequences of the change created other trouble zones and the demand for autonomous districts and autonomous councils in respective tribal dominated areas began to surface. It is argued that the tribal population in the North-East are in search for modernity and in the quest for modernity if they have distaste for diversity the endeavour is bound to doom⁹. But the experiments with reconciliation in Mizoram and the success of the peace efforts in Nagaland at least in terms of bringing all the 38 Naga tribes under one umbrella called Naga Hoho and scaling down the statistics of senseless killings throw the light for a accommodative future.

The history of conflicts in the tribal areas of the

North-East suggests that one of the causes of insurgency is the fear of being overrun by others. The fear has stemmed out of the all pervasiveness concept of territorial state/nation which so far been a basket or a "bundle" into which all nationalities are put together¹⁰. Many of the tribal communities in the North-East have been suffering from a sense of insecurity. The fear is that numerically larger and more economically advanced communities in the region might one day pose a danger to their existence. Now, as nations have entered the 21st century with the massive technological developments in electronics and telecommunications, there has been a remarkable shift in the attention from nation-state governance to a greater role for non-territorial organizations and entities. Consequently, the reverse process has taken place, which may be called "unbundling process". The ethnic affiliations of communities cut across national boundaries of states, just as political slogans like "Workers of world, Unite!" or Pan-Arabism transcend national boundaries. So is the case with trans-national organization of European Union. It is true that unbundling package affects nation-state and national sovereignty. Under this concept, the nation state continues to exist but its encompassing role is likely to be reduced substantially. In such a scenario the original non-political format of tribal life that had existed before the emergence of the state might reemerge. Under such a possible rearrangement in the backdrop of technological advancement, communication and information revolution, the insular life of the tribal communities will be definitely invaded. At the same time, there will be enormous scope

for the tribal communities to get adequate exposure in a wider canvas. This is going to minimize their isolationist and particularistic contour of life. The exposure of their identity, culture and tradition will invariably lead to "cross-pressure" for more interaction rather than isolation and on many occasions conflictual standoff¹¹.

That is why there is the need to create provisions for the preservation of the tribal character of the North-East. The uniqueness of the region must not get lost in the wake of cultural and political invasion of so-called modernity. The Constitutional provisions like the Sixth Schedule are not enough. The process of democratization and gender sensitization in the institutional settings operating in the tribal areas can preserve the tribal character of the region. This can ensure a sense of security among the tribal people of the region who have been suffering from the psyche of insecurity. Living in togetherness is the principal feature of the tribal society in the North-East India. That social element can be institutionalized in a broader context once the components of political modernization are allowed to grow without disturbing the social fabrics of the society, as it is happening in some of the tribal states of the region such as Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. The most striking feature of the political life of the region is that despite political conflict and violence, communal passion with religious overtones has not till now polluted the tribal life of the region. This is most significant hallmark of the society and polity of the region, which has to be preserved and promoted. Even in a state like Manipur where two tribal conflicts have

jeopardized the social life of the people. But such conflicts have not generated religious animosity between Christian Nagas and Hindu Meiteis. Religion has nothing to do with the political movements in the tribal societies in the region. This is a positive part of the socio-political scenario in the tribal life in the North East which itself is an enduring phenomena to be noted by the rest of the world.

NOTES :

1. See J.B. Fuller's introduction in Major A. Playfair, *The Garos* (London : Oxford University Press, 1909) p. xiii.
2. S.K. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North Eastern India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1999) Chapter I.
3. Christoph von Fuer-Haimendrof, *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh : Anthropological Research in North-East India* (New Delhi : Vikas, 1982) p.3.
4. S.K. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North Eastern India*, p.242.
5. Verrier Elwin, *Democracy in NEFA* (Itanagar : Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1988) Chpters 7,8 and 9.
6. Birendranath Dutta, "Contact, Togetherness and commonness among Tribal and Non-Tribal Populations in North East India: As Reflected in

Folklore" in Dilip K. Medhi, *Man and Environment in North East India*, Vol. I (New Delhi : Omson, 1993) pp. 73-87.

7. Mrinal Miri, "Identity and Tribesmen" in his edited *Continuity and Change in Tribal Society* (Shimla : Indian Institute of Advance Study, 1993) pp. 165-174.
8. S.T. Das, *Tribal Life of North-Eastern India* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing, 1986)
9. Mrinal Miri, "Identity and Tribesmen", op. cit, P. 173.
10. Daveid J. Elkins, *Beyond Sovereignty: Territory and Political Economy in the Twenty-first Century* (Toronto: University of Toronoto Press, 1995).
11. P.W. Sperlich, *Conflict and Harmony in Human Affairs : A Study of Cross-Pressures and Political Behavior* (Chicago : Rand Mc Nally, 1971).

AHOM'S RELATION WITH SOME OF THE HILL TRIBES AN OVERVIEW

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The Ahom rulers are praised in history for their Political foresight as well as wisdom specially in relation to some of the hill tribes of the North East. A short overview in this regard has been attempted in this paper.

A glimpse in the Ahom history, however, makes it clear that the policy of the Ahoms towards the hill tribes varied from time to time. For example, Sukapha, the first Ahom ruler who occupies a respectable position in history for his outstanding attempts to ensure unity and integrity among the people of his kingdom dealt with the Nagas very harshly when they tried to prevent his penetration into Assam. It is recorded in history that he went to the extent of killing & roasting the defiant Nagas who stood on his way and compelled their relatives to eat their flesh! However, it is also recorded in history that the same Sukapha followed a very wise and generous policy in his treatment of vanquished enemies. He treated them as equals and encouraged inter-marriage between the Ahoms, Maran and Barahi tribes who submitted to him. He himself married Barahi & Maran brides. So it was obvious

that Sukapha adopted a inhuman policy to terrorise those Nagas only who prevented his advance to the new land.

The relationship between the early Ahom rulers and the hill tribes was not always cordial. But the Ahom very creditably framed out a practical policy to deal with them. The Ahom policy towards the hill tribes therefore had been copied by the British in some respects. In the north of the Ahom Kingdom numerous tribes dwelt in the Lower Himalayan mountain ranges and same was the case with the Patkaimountain in the South East & the Assam ranges in the South. Most of these tribes preferred to live in isolation in their own arrears. They had their own languages, customs, religions beliefs and social habits. But for trade purpose or exchange of their products they had to come down to the plains by some mountain passes. The Jhum cultivation did not yield sufficient food crops for them. So many of them had kept a greedy eye on the villages at the foot hills and made frequent or occasional raids on them to procure food products or other necessities of life. Many of the frontier hill tribes also used to plunder the villages in the plain areas to collect labourers or slaves for personal service or work in the barren land.

To avoid the raids of the hill tribes, therefore, the wise Ahom ruler Pratap Singh adopted a conciliatory policy to the Nagas at the frontiers by allotting some Naga Khats' to supply them grain, cloth & other essentials on condition of their good behaviours & payments of nominal tribute. They were even allotted some beels with free service of the Paiks to have fish. Later on, the Naga Katakis were appointed by the Ahom Governments to look after the Khats. Despite such a well-thought conciliatory policy of the Ahoms as several occasions some tribe

disturbed the Ahom Kingdom by plundering the villages at the foot hills. The Namsangia (Nocte) Nagas, for example, infuriated Gadadhar Singha in 1691 by killing some Assamese people at Mahang. An enraged Gadadhar treated them harshly, ensured their submission and appointed a Lotha Khundao or Chief over them. However, the next year 23 workers were brutally killed by the Nagas at the salt mine near Borhat. It was followed by the insurrection of the Lotha Nagas in the Doyang Valley and the Ahoms despatched a punitive expedition to subdue them. The same scenario was repeated during the reign of Rudra Singha and latter despatched an expedition led by Basang Phukan to bring the wrong-doers to their knees. But by and large, the policy of allotting khats worked successfully.

The tract between the foot hills and the valley where the plains reached out to the hills was very fertile and named as 'Duars'. The frontier tribes were allowed to come down to the Duar areas to exchange products with the plain. Such facilities were offered till they behaved well and in case of any violation of peace the Ahoms used to close these doors or duars. Such a policy of blockading the hill routes and doors, indeed, caused economic distress to the turbulent tribes and made them seek peace with Ahom.

Pratap Singha also introduced a wonderful policy to conciliate Ahom's relations with the tribes through the 'Posa' system. Under this system a number of villages at the foot hills are instructed to pay certain commodities to a particular tribe at some particular period. The tribes would arrive at the allotted villages to collect their 'Posa' & these were smoothly handed over to them. In return, the Ahom monarch exempted those villages from equiva-

lent amount of taxes payable to the Government. The Posa system was successfully practised to deal with the charduaris Bhutias, Akas, Daflas and Miri. The same policy was adopted also for the Lotha, Konyak and Ao Nagas who often plundered the frontier villages of Sibsagar & Lakhimpur.

Despite the Posa system some Miris attacked the house of Sadiakhowa Gohain and killed all his family-members along with two hundred other Assamese men. An infuriated Gadadhar there upon sent a punitive expedition against them. To prevent such raids Gadadhar embanked roads with fortified gateways from the Brahmaputra to Sadiya, raised earthen rampart surrounding Assamese villages & declared Dibong as the boundary with the Miris.

Pratap Singha had to construct a fort at Daflagar to check the Assamese Village at the frontiers from frequent plunder of the Daflas. Even then, the Daflas continued their raids till the days of Rudra Singha who despatched an expedition against them under the Naobaicha Phukan.

The Bhutians had to hand over three passes of Darrang to the Ahom Government from July to November. They also paid an annual tribute to the Ahoms for the tracts of the Darrang district. The Mishmis, Jaintias, Mikirs also recognized the supremacy of Ahoms to enjoy the trading facilities. The Khasi Khyrim also maintained trade relation with the Ahoms.

The Ahoms had trade relations with some far off countries through the neighbouring hill tracts. There were five hill tracts through Sadiya to reach Tibet and China. The hill tract along with the river Dibang and the passes

through the Misimi country and Patkai were used even to reach Bhamo of Burma. Accordingly to the Mughal sources there existed as many as thirty five hill routes between Assam & Tibet. One such route was from Assam to Kabul. This testifies that the Ahoms maintained good relations with the hill tribes to use such hill routes to reach China, Bhutan, Tibet etc. for commercial purposes. Frontier official like Sadiya Khowa Gohain was also appointed to look after maintenance of peace and amity with the hill tribes.

As a matter of fact, the Ahoms deliberately refrained themselves from interfering in the internal affairs of the hill tribes to avoid unnecessary conflict with them. Nor they tried to absorb their land into the Ahom Kingdom. The Khat & Posa system indeed, were wise policy by which some of the hill tribes enjoyed the right to share the essential produce of the foot hills in return of maintaining peace in the frontier areas & refraining from attacking the foothill villages. The punitive measures adopted by the Ahoms in cases of violation of agreements by the hill tribes also worked very effectively.

AWARENESS ON COMMUNAL HARMONY AMONG VARIOUS TRIBES AND NON-TRIBAL PEOPLE OF NEI

Amrit Kumar Goldsmith

POINTS OF UNDERSTANDING :-

PEACE

Dictionary meaning - Quiet, tranquility, mental calm, serenity (peace of mind), freedom from civil disorder.

The condition for peace as defined may perhaps have existed only in the Garden of Eden (Bible).

What is peace - Conceptual understanding therefore peace is an absence of war or a negation of war (conflict) condition. In our context peace has to be contrasted with war. The history of civilization has been a history of wars. Wars have been far more frequent than peace agreements or peaceable settlements. In the Old Testament in the Bible we come across 319 'Wars' occurring while peace only 237 times.

Peace is closely connected with what is known as national interest. When a nation goes to war or negotiates for peace with another nation, the question of national interest becomes paramount.

The Gandhian insistence on non-violence as the only patriotic and legitimate means to achieve Socio-Political change and development on a national scale needs to be reviewed.

NON-VIOLENCE

- (1) Non-violence is a non-doing, both etymologically and chronologically. But in another sense it is doing, a superior or more difficult form of doing though. If resorting to violence is a natural act or reflex action, abstaining from violence is an achievement. Non-violence like renunciation is thus both passive denial and an active abstention from a natural impulse.
- (2) In Upanishad literature, in Buddhist texts and Jain philosophy, non-violence makes its appearance in the form of an injunction or abstention. Ahimsa is the first of the five prohibitions or precepts (Panchasheela) in Buddhism. The Buddhist undertakes to abstain from injuring or destroying as well as from helping to injure or destroy a 'Sentient' being, whether an insect, an animal or a human being and as such, to injure or destroy a sentient being is for him, tantamount to injuring or destroying himself. Like Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism too place non-violence at the top of their list of abstentions.
- (3) In the Bible peace and reconciliation is a core principle. There are several references - Jesus is referred as the 'Prince of Peace'. (Mark 9:50) Jesus said-'Be at peace with one another'.

* (Philippians 2:4)- Let each of you look not only to your own interests but also to the interest of the other.

(Mathew 5:9) - 'Blessed are the Peace makers for they shall be called the children of God'.

COMMUNAL HARMONY

Communal harmony is a situation where commu-

nities belonging to different culture, tradition, language, etc; socialize with each other helping, caring and in sharing relationship. This is an ideal situation. This ideal relationship hangs on very thin lines which, with slightest pressure breaks down. The NEI communities represent this kind of relationship with each other.

PRE-COLONIAL STATUS

The British Govt. tried to isolate the people of the Hills and from the people of the Plains for their interests of governance. They introduced Inner-line Regulations passed in 1873 prohibiting entry of all British subjects to areas thus specified protected without proper pass. This divide between Plain and Hill people did not contribute towards harmony and peace in the Region.

The Church Organizations was becoming a thread of communications between the Plain and Hill people through the efforts of pioneering Christian Missionaries in Assam since 1836 and since 1872 in Mizoram.

The NEI communities were self-governed village Republics and socially mixed within themselves in market places for barter of essential items like - Salt, Medicine, etc.

There was no period to cite that NEI communities were living harmoniously with each other.

SOCIETAL ORGANISATION

The first Organization of its kind the Naga Club was established in 1918 with Govt. employees. The Naga Hill District Tribal Council was formed in 1945 on the nucleus of Naga Club. It soon got itself transferred into Naga

National Council; these are pioneering bodies of Naga tribes to come under a Naga umbrella.

- These bodies already started voicing their dissentments towards certain administrative arrangements, which eventually become the long drawn struggle for self-determination.

POST COLONIAL-INDIAN UNION

When the question of merger came, many tribes like the Nagas, Khasis, Lushais (Mizos) joined the Union but did not sign the merger Agreement with the Indian Union.

This position is still being raised and questioned now and then by many states (after reorganization) even after 50 years of India's administration. North East was reorganized into several states in the line of Ethnicity, language etc. Autonomous states emerged out of commonly administrated areas under Assam at one time. Many of the states broke away from Assam administration on the complain of step motherly treatment and Assamese chauvinism. This feeling at times disturbs and hardens feelings between communities disallowing harmonious relationship to develop.

In an effort to bring the states under one umbrella the North East Council was formed in early 1970s to bring the NEI states together to work commonly on common interests. For the first time an effort is being made to club the Region together under an administrative umbrella and officially call the Region "North East India".

CONFLICT AREAS

The states were carved out of Administration areas under Assam without properly demarcating the state boundaries. This situation continues to disturb the Inter-state Relationship. The recent border clashes between Assam and Meghalaya, in Khanduli area bordering Hamren sub-division Pillingkata area of Sonapur/Umling Block proves the point. Long outstanding issues between the states are not settled in time are continuously leading to conflict situation. This is one example to cite.

REASONS FOR CONFLICT

1. The traditional worldview still prevalent. There is conflict between folklores, folktales and modernity. There is gap in the world view between the older generation and the new generation.
2. Identity crisis - search for nomenclature, a development of 19th and 20th century. The fear of losing identity, land, power and culture.
3. Feeling of alienation is strong within the Region and with outside the Region.
4. Internal turmoil leading to a state of hopelessness of -
 - Unemployment
 - Under development
 - Poverty
 - Insurgency
5. Mainstream issues are not properly understood and integration of national interest viz-a-viz regional interest are not in harmony. ●●●

Solutions - ?

WOMEN AND SOCIAL HARMONY : ROLE OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTIONS

*Dr. Sunita Changkakati**
*Er Pradipta P. Changkakati***

ABSTRACT

Woman, who are considered to be the backbone of our society, have made immense sacrifices through times immemorial, in keeping our civil society strong, intact and versatile. The present scenario of civil and political unrest in different parts of the world including Assam and the northeast depicts a grim picture. The challenges posed to the indigenous people of the region in the age of open economy by the social and ethnic problems raging across the region needs to be viewed in the right perspective. Revamping the fragmented civil society through understanding each others's needs and value system for harmonious living is of serious concern. Women and Women's institutions both traditional and non-traditional have a major role to play for paving the way for strengthening social harmony which would ultimately lead to social and economic development of the region. This paper highlights the initiatives of such women organisations and groups for bringing in social harmony.

INTRODUCTION

Since pre historic period, both men and women have played equal role in the processes of struggle for food and shelter. With the passage of time people formed a civil society through a evolutionary process. With the growth of civil society, the process of development sowed the seeds of industrialization, mechanization and urbanization, as result disparities between societies started developing alongwith advancement of the communities. The present scenario of civil and political unrest is an area of serious concern for all. Women and women institutions have been found to be the catalysts of social change in such conflict situations of fragmented civil societies. However empowerment of women remains another critical area, which needs special attention.

WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT

The Typical picture of women is reflected in a poster of a newsletter published by United Nations International Research & Training Institution for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)

We are more than half the members
We do more than half the work
We are more than half the poor
We have more than half the love
We have more than half the dreams.

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Bhasin (1992) describes women's empowerment as :

- ❖ Recognizing women's contribution, women's knowledge
- ❖ Helping women tight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
- ❖ Women Enhancing their self respect and self dignity
- ❖ Women controlling their own bodies
- ❖ Women becoming economically independent and self-reliant
- ❖ Women controlling resources like land and property
- ❖ Reducing women's burden of work, specify within the home
- ❖ Creating and strengthening women's groups and organisation.

Women's empowerment includes both a personal strengthening and enhancement of life chances, and collective participation in efforts to achieve equality of opportunity and equity between different genders, ethnic groups, social classes and ethnic groups.

Empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development for many countries of the world today. Our nation has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Though, quite a lot has been done during the last few decades for doing away with gender disparity and related social and economic issues of women, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, Legislation, policies, plans and programs and related mechanisms on one hand and the situational reality on the other.

Equal access to participation in decision making of women in social, political and economic life, equality in power sharing, equal access of women to health care, quality education, employment, mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process are some of the goals to be achieved.

Women's perspective has to be taken care of in designing and implementing economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to the social and economic development more particularly to their contribution to social harmony is to be recognised.

SOCIETY AND DISPARITY

In the present day context, the civil and political unrest of the society has become a critical area of concern. Several aspects have contributed to the contemporary situation of the globe. Cruel and interlocking disparities persist, in all parts of the globe-as recent United Nations Human Development Reports have made clear - in respective areas income and wealth distribution between individual; between urban and rural areas; between regions, within countries and globally; in gender inequalities; in ethnic and group inequalities.

A look at the scenario of Assam and the North East points unquestionably to a clear and evident conclusion. There is historical evidence available to prove that the late interventions of development of the region since the colonial period has led to uneven development of the region bringing in unrest among the people against each other within their own states and people against the nation (popularly known as the Indian mainstream).

Besides the unfavourable geographic location and transportation problems, another cause of social disparity in the region has been the unemployment problem and weak economic interventions from the Indian government since post independence years. The region has remained far behind in the growth scale. Moreover the indigenous groups of the region could not find place to participate actively in the nation building process. The different ethnic communities in the region could not find space to voice their views openly though some small emerging Assamese literary and cultural associations could. Thus a combination of factors have led to disparities in civil society in the region.

There are numerous regional and sub regional movements in parts of the world, which demand a fair distribution of resources and power. Some of such movements have been able to establish social legitimacy and political social legitimacy and political influence through the medium of violence.

Disparity always leads to violence in the society, be it direct acts, which oppose social norms and are performed by an individual against another or a collective. The structural violence, i.e., indirect, is seen as a result of a failure in the society to meet the needs of individuals to provide for an atmosphere for human development process and selfactualization.

CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL DISPARITY

If there is a correlation between the Human Development Index and respect for human rights, so is there an infallible correlation between the quality of governance and the promotion and protection of such rights.

The struggle for promotion and protection of human rights inevitably requires in some measures, a challenging of entrenched attitudes that are inimical to the proper respect of such rights.

In civilizational terms, this means the shedding and denouncing of accretions and aberrations that, over time, have wounded and fractured our society, leaving some more equal than others, in grievous violation of human rights norms and acceptable standards of equality and justices. It is necessary to deal with the prejudices and patriarchal biases that victimize women.

In political terms, it is necessary to guarantee the Fundamental Rights of all --- regardless of caste, creed, gender, place of birth or any other such invidious distinction.

In administrative terms, there is a need for the diligence, will and stamina to reform and restructure those instruments of governance that are in danger of atrophy.

In economic, social and cultural terms, there is a need for equal courage, in order to deal with challenges of our richly pluralistic society, which can no less be a cause of violence and despair.

Uneven distribution of wealth, deprivation, feeling of alienation etc. leads to despair, violence and terrorism. On the other hand, patriarchal supremacy, gender biasness, frustration, unbalanced personal relationship etc. challenges civil society. In an unequal society, fragmented by tribal, class, or other cleavages, "maldevelopment", that is, unequal opportunities in the competition for jobs, services, educational and social facilities and so on, aggravates group and class conflict and accentuates individual frustration. Economic interests and disputes are

politicized when political alliances are formed, resulting in tension, conflict and violence.

In the context of Indian civil society, challenges have been made to counter the disparity and violence in the society. The supreme authority, i.e. the Constitution of India, protects human rights through legitimation. The establishment of the National Human Rights Commission in 1993, based on an Act of Parliament was a step without precedent in the building of institutions of governance in independent India.

WOMEN AND SOCIAL HARMONY

Conflict resolution and social harmony is *sine quo non* to development, both economic and social. It is the duty of the nation to create good governance, through justice, legitimization, welfare activities, and equal distribution of wealth and power, eradication of discrepancies, balancing of patriarchy for a harmonious society. Deprivation and gender biasness are two major issues that should be looked into. Denying the role of women in building the nation is also a kind of gender imbalance, which develops disparity in the society. Inequality between men and women is one of the most pertinent disparities of the society. Women have to play a major role in the harmonization of the society. Women need to be empowered for parity and balancing the society.

A woman is always considered as 'Mother' or 'Shakti', the other name of 'Durga'. 'Shakti' is regarded as the supreme power and a woman derives strength from Her. A woman is regarded as the mother or creator in all the religions. This has relevance in the present day context. To build and regenerate the society and bring

parity she has to be empowered. There is a growing interest throughout the globe to bring women in the forefront in the process of decision-making. The Governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental agencies all are working in this direction for empowering women. The discrepancy; biasness, imbalances, uneven distribution of health, exploitation and deprivation etc. which cause despair and violence in a civil society, can be controlled if women are empowered.

ROLE OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL HARMONY

Civil Society initiatives are to be strengthened in the present day situation in the entire North East. Women's institutions in the North Eastern region have been playing a vital role in putting in efforts for bringing in social harmony in conflict situations. To name a few. The efforts of Naga Mother's Association (NMA), Meira Paibi of Manipur and the Mahila Samities scattered across the state of Assam have been involved in addressing to certain key issues afflicting the society in such conflict situations like drug abuse, alcoholism, terrorism and insurgency, gender disparity et al. There are certain women organisations in the region who are also involved in the peace process and bringing in social harmony, while other though not yet involved has the opportunity to do which should be explored in the right earnest.

Our experience has shown that the Self Help Affinity Group (SAG)s which are primarily non traditional women's organisations contributes to social harmony in a big way. Although such groups are homogenous in nature, a conglomerate or apex body like the Jewari Mahila Committee of ACRD in Naokata area of Kamrup district, has the capability of bringing social harmony ...

an area where different ethnic groups exist, specially in situations of conflict. It may be mentioned that Naokata is a remote area along the Indo Bhutan border where insurgency and violence had been the talk of the day till the recent past.

While working with rural tribal communities in Assam, we have felt that isolation and lack of exposure to the outside world is a major factor contributing to social disharmony. The exposure tours of these SAGs to other parts of the country and the North Eastern region has been able to build the confidence of the people. The SAGs in addition to empowering women, have indirectly helped in wooing away the unemployed young rural people to be engaged in generating income for sustainable living.

ONGOING VIOLENCE AND REPERCUSSIONS

By Ms. Sujata Bordoloi

Violence has diverse causes, roots and symptoms. It is justified and defined at many levels by many people, however it can be unequivocally stated that every act of violence leaves a casualty. The violence of a strike is not the same as the violence of an atomic bomb, neither are the repercussions. The NE case iterates this argument and furthers the fact that an absolute product of violence is cyclical continuance of violence. Where then are the solutions? Who are the beneficiaries and sufferers? It seems strange to deliberate upon beneficiaries of violence, however it would not be wrong to assume that there exists a handful. On the other hand, the sufferers far outnumber this handful in the way violence enters their lives and scars them forever.

This paper presents in a miniscule context of the whole, a glimpse of the potential in violence to damage and devastate. Its [violence] axis spans across every boundary in social and personal life and strikes at the most vulnerable and defenceless spaces in those spheres. Simplistically articulated, in a violent situation, "Weaker" societies and people find themselves precariously exposed to its forms and outcomes. Their vulnerability is further re-enforced by the community they belong to, the region

they live in and the language they speak.

The paper is presented within the parameter of "Extremism and sectionalism" wherein I seek to examine the definitions of those two terms and whether the violence in NE India can be defined as such. A wider scope of the term 'violence' is sought to be presented primarily to analyze its contours in the Northeast. However, the main objective of the paper is to present the repercussions of such a prolonged situation of conflict.

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION :

The most outstanding feature of violence that has baffled researchers and academics is in providing an all-encompassing definition of it. The problem of defining violence comes from the perception of the act arising out of contrary worldviews. Edmund Leach(1977) draws a remarkable parallel on this count between terrorists and authority in society wherein both are, in a sense, 'outsiders' trying to impose their will on the populace; regards the other's acts of physical force as barbarism and considers its own heroic.

Violence for the sake of simplification is said to exist at two levels – direct physical violence where there is a defined actor and actee (Weigart, '99) and indirect physical, emotional, material, intellectual violence where the perpetrator-victim relationship is less easily discernible. These two levels of violence are broadly understood as personal and structural violence. Structural violence, as Schrijvers (1992) suggests, tends to breed reactive or counter-violence on the personal level, leading to chain reactions with successive victims becoming agents of violence. It is perpetrated by conditions and acts that

originate at the institutional and societal level, which are reflected in socially sanctioned practices. Schrijvers (1992) also argues that violence is closely linked to development as its concerns are closely intertwined with political and economic interest. She draws the linkages between them at two levels:

- (1) Institutionalized top down violence legitimized by international agencies and governments are responsible for the implementation of mainstream development policy.
- (2) An equally violent reaction against this top-down violence is in the form of ethnic, religious, terrorist and extremist movements. This sort of violence is an armed protest against the pressures of economic and cultural incorporation into a global community.

The Causation of violence has multiple layers and can be rooted in the psychological as well as societal and cultural spheres of an individual. Literature in violence attempts to delimit it to its political and social domains. However, it is being questioned whether all violence (direct/private and indirect/public) is political. Increasingly with the "personal is political" discourse of feminist thought, these nuances of violence are extremely important in the understanding of the concept of violence. Violence in the private domain can therefore be considered to be political at some level though causes, levels and nature may vary.

WHAT IS POLITICAL VIOLENCE?

It is essential to understand violence at this level because political violence is the claimant of the largest number of lives not only in NE India and Southeast Asia

but many other parts of the world. Conflicts based on ethno-religious polarisations are more often termed political violence although the term implies the use of force against a given structure, be it a repressive regime or a state agency that has failed to meet the expectations of a contentious group. Political violence results out of an interaction between structural and personal forces, augmented by a deep-seated resentment against what is seen to be a systematic mal function, which needs over-hauling. According to the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (1986)², political violence has resulted frequently where 'governments rule not in the interest of the nation as a whole, but in order to serve a small ruling elite.' This automatically points toward an inequity in distribution of resources, lop-sided power relations and, consequently, the existence of a discontented group.

One of the major sources of conflict, as seen by Scherrer (1999), is the assertion of all powers by nation states in their relations to what they call minorities i.e., ethnic or tribal entities that do not form a majority in terms of population and mainstream culture. Disputes and conflicts arising from regional disparities and economic imbalances within an administrative state or province especially one that is multi-ethnic in nature, become focal points for militant mobilization (Khan, 1981). The state's failure to ensure equal development and distribution of resources in a uniform manner leads to resentment among those "less privileged" states, as it were. People begin to believe that it is a deliberate attempt at subjugation where the Center is treating the state as a colony rather than an integral part by using its resources but doing little to develop its economic infrastructure. This idea is at

times propagated by separatist groups to initiate mass support like the ULFA in Assam, which contends for Assam's economic development and virtual separation from India. Its bane is that the Center has not been able to provide Assam with the same infrastructure as it has other states and has treated the state like a colony.

There are presently numerous regional and sub-regional movements in parts of the world, which demand a fair distribution of resources and power. A large number of such movements are able to establish social legitimacy and political influence through the medium of violence. Political violence has taken on various forms and movements like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka), the Khalistan Liberation Front (Punjab), the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Nagaland), the United Liberation Front of Assam (Assam), among so many others, which can be perceived as social movements directed at facilitating hegemonic goals. Groups like the ULFA and the LTTE are known to be running virtually parallel governments within its strongholds (Baruah, 2000 & Somasundaram, 1998).

Movements such as the Mohajir Quami Movement in Karachi and many others in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh are examples of armed opposition groups or political movements against the state, aimed at altering their position as a minority group or to assert their ethnic and cultural identity. These movements are 'social' in that they kindle hopes for a new beginning, build bonds of solidarity and reshape identities of the groups in conflict. It becomes problematic to identify such movements with one specific type of political violence. Most of them identify themselves as "freedom fighters", their cause being establish-

ment of an independent identity. However, the acts of violence committed have affected citizens within the state more severely than the target "enemy" group.

The problem of Political violence is that patterns are not easily discernible. It takes various forms and most movements combine various types of political violence. The degree and extent to which violence is used as the means towards the ends determines strategies employed. Revolutions, militancy, civil wars, terrorism et al are forms of political violence wherein the strategies of coercion differ. The most rampant form of political violence that afflicts more than half the nation of the world today is internal strife.

Fragmented civil war or internal strife is the violence that flows from ethno-political conflict and tends to be indiscriminate, vicious and genocidal in proportion. Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Colombia, Afghanistan are some of the countries that have witnessed the worst forms of violent excesses due to ongoing internal conflict. The Indian sub-continent also has not remained unaffected by such political violence after its independence, in fact a large number of the South Asian states bear testimony to numerous low intensity armed conflicts.

Violence in the Northeast is termed as **insurgency**, which is defined as a form of internal or domestic war ongoing at the intrastate level. It is a prolonged low-intensity conflict that succeeds in replacing the incumbents with a regime that initiates a fundamental political, social and economic transformation. It is a form of revolutionary political violence wherein the main players are the state establishment and the challengers of the same. Bhattacharya (1989) defines insurgency as a pro-

tracted armed struggle conducted methodically step by step in order to obtain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order'. Burman (1997) adds a dimension to this definition by saying that insurgency requires the support and sympathy of a sizeable section of the population. In the absence of public support, he writes, insurgency degenerates into sporadic violence even if for a legitimate cause. Secessionism and separatism are objectives or outcomes of sustained insurgency where groups demand territorial break away or partial dissonance from the state establishment on certain issues. Militancy on the other hand does not undermine the foundations of a state's legality. Existing laws are used to mobilize support for a cause and to apply pressure on state agencies. Such movements do not opt out of the political system in that their demands do not undermine the State. They generally seek to maintain public sympathy and allies by keeping violence under reasonable limits. militant action can take a violent turn towards extremism depending on the level of institutionalization in state agencies (UNRISD 1994)³. Low institutionalization and consensus, may generate a propensity to resort to violence as they miscalculate the intentions and capabilities of the State. A case in example is Punjab where the State provoked such a turn of events due to its inability to reach a mutual consensus through dialogues. What escalated the violence were the counter-measures adopted to clamp down on the militants, which resulted in indiscriminate use of force against the civilian population.

Northeast India is at present teeming with insurgent movements claiming the right to selfdetermination. As elaborated earlier on, they are movements against the

established order, which is viewed as an alien entity trying to impose its will upon a dissenting people.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE NORTHEAST AND AFTERMATH :

The dimensions of political violence surrounding the Northeast are often dismissed as ethnic in nature, however a deeper exploration reveals its roots in structural/systemic violence perpetrated over the years. Issues of economic development and exploitation are raised by the various separatist groups, as premises for their armed revolt. There have been many attempts made to tackle the insurgency issues of the region and most of it has been by way of counter operations and the use of force. The failure to understand the abstruse roots of the problem have made itself evident from the fact that it still persists. One of the main flaws in perception has been in attempting to solve the issue by assuming that the region is a homogenous entity.

The region is bound by a similar geographical and physical make up (a long international border) which lends it common problems of drugs and arms trafficking, poor communication, illegal infiltration etc. However, to view the whole from a common perspective would be simplifying the socio-cultural and political histories and the multiplicity of diverse ethnic groups, tribes and languages that are distinct to each state. It implies negating the economic condition in each state, which is at different stages of growth (Misra, 2002). The consequent violence has claimed many lives and left thousands homeless and orphaned since the time of its onset. Ongoing-armed conflict has had an impeding impact on the people of the NE. Its continuance over generations has severely disrupted normal life to the extent that it has

become integral to it.

Increasingly, violence during wars and internal conflict situations are not restricted to opposition groups or armies but spill over to civilian populations as well. Data on the aftermath of wars in the recent years show a larger number of civilian casualties and this in itself is the worst outcome of war - killing, maiming of innocent lives. An internal conflict situation i.e., not between states but within them or the absence of two contending armies makes it a complex affair between contending groups of armed civilians. These are as likely to be fought in an interior village as a suburban street. This situation blurs the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and makes everyone vulnerable. The needs, hopes, aspiration and suffering of the common people become secondary within the scenario of political violence because the state's energies and resources are diverted towards containing violence through its defense forces. This situation prevails in the NE today where one increasingly observes the state's efforts to initiate development processes in the region.

Ongoing violence over an extended period has serious implications on the socio-political, economic, and psychosocial development of individuals and therefore on the overall development of that society. The impact of ongoing violence has had such serious implications that it is being considered a man-made disaster. The devastation caused by violence over an extended period and the processes that communities and individuals adopt to recuperate from the aftermath is seen to be the same as after a natural disaster.

The Northeast is at present faced with such a crises.

Speaking specifically of Assam, the violence of insurgency has impacted upon the state's employment, education and health status adversely. Certain geographical areas within the state are still inaccessible and no initiatives have been made for fear of operating insurgent groups. Affect on transport and communication due to frequent bandhs and outbreak of violence also contribute significantly to the above. According to a recent Northeast Development Finance Corporation (NEDFI) report, Assam suffers an annual loss of Rs.1266.60 crores due to the various bandhs called by democratic and militant organizations.⁴ The overall impact is a debilitated development process, which affects the socio-economic conditions and infrastructure in the state. Children, women and youth remain worst affected because of their vulnerability to such conditions.

In terms of the economy, Assam has witnessed a terrible shrinkage in the last 25 years. There has been a negative growth in the GDP. The productivity of agriculture has fallen and commodities have to be brought in from other states. According to estimates, the price of essential commodities is higher by about 35% in the Northeast than in other states. Another indirect impact is the rising cost of security related expenditure due to which the Assam Government faces a severe cash crunch. This is particularly true in areas severely affected by insurgent activity wherein the state's resources are diverted towards crisis management and maintenance of law and order and investment on development schemes get sidelined. Extortion bids made by insurgent groups also divert some of the funds meant for these schemes. This creates situations for unemployment, as newer opportunities are not created for the youth in the region.

Infrastructure for education remains at a dismal state. Frequently made bandh calls disrupt academic schedules and plant seeds of fear among parents and children. Competent teachers do not wish to risk their lives in interior areas, therefore the standard of teaching remains abominably low where the teachers lack the minimum qualification required for appointment.

According to a study conducted by UNICEF on the "*Impact of insurgency and conflict in Assam*" in 1999:

Due to continued violence since 1993 in Districts of lower Assam :

- About 213 schools are either burnt down or damaged in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon.
- More than 90 schools are either not attended by teachers or guardians do not send their children to schools for fear. Some of the schools have been converted into relief camps.
- Many children drop out of school forever.

Health facilities suffer immensely as :

- A number of Primary Health Centres are not functioning because they have been burnt down or destroyed.
- Doctors refuse to work in violence torn areas at the risk of their lives.
- Basic facilities to treat patients for even common diseases are unavailable because of disruption in transport and communication.
- Schemes like the ICDS and mid-day meal are not implemented properly, making children more vul-

nerable to malnutrition and other diseases. Mortality rates are as high as 81% per thousand live births.

Insurgency has also led to internal displacement of thousands of people forced to stay in relief camps, in Assam. The conditions in these camps are indicative of a worse state of affairs than presented above. Basic facilities are unavailable to a population that has been living in these camps for over five years. The state has been trying desperately to reinstate them into other areas but has proven unsuccessful so far.

Over the years, insurgency has become a big business in terms of extortion, arms and narcotic smuggling with a turnover of worth Rs. 200 Crores. More organizations and groups are springing up around the state claiming to be struggling for some issue or the other. However, their activities point towards acquiring money through ransom, extortion and arms trade. The underlying causes could also lie in the fact that employment opportunities in the state is so poor that more and more young men find themselves left with no alternative but to resort to arms. The consequence of such widespread violence is a rising death toll of innocent people, armed personnel and militants and a situation that has disrupted normal life in both urban and rural areas of the state.

There are no easy solutions to tackle the problem of violence. Conflict resolution in the northeast is going to be a complex affair because of the many threads or factors that are intertwined behind its history of violent revolt. As described by noted journalist, Shekhar Gupta, during the Assam agitation, "it is difficult to club the clashes under any one general term as communal, ethnic or linguistic. They are probably a combination of all

factors".

It is imperative, therefore that civil society initiatives be strengthened. To follow the Naga example where various human rights organizations and women's groups are actively involved in the Peace process. Civil society has a crucial role to play in curbing violence within and between communities as was seen during the Gujarat riots where certain localities were trouble-free because of residents' efforts. It is a small case in example where organized efforts towards peace-building was successful in dispelling political violence. Similar efforts have been initiated in Assam in a small way by the Assam Police, in collaboration with UNICEF, aimed at protection of children against violence perpetrated by insurgency. The requirement is also greater community participation in protecting its own rights in the model of "Peace Committees" which have been formed in some villages in Kamrup district. These Peace Committees are formed to protect villagers from unnecessary harassment from both insurgent outfits and the army.

However, the need of the hour is more concerted effort toward bringing contending parties to the negotiating table and initiating a constructive peace process. This entails the involvement of concerned citizens from all walks of life to be actively involved in initiating debate and dialogue on issues surrounding NE conflict and take on a more proactive role as a pressure group on the government to seek permanent solutions.

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CROSS – CULTURAL CONTOURES OF TRIBAL SOCIETY OF ASSAM : A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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At the threshold of the 21st century and heading towards an "information society" when in the coming times more and more intellectual skills would be in demand with greater mechanization in every area of life and work. Those countries which acted now would be miles ahead of others in the next century with an "intellectually superior human resource" than those who missed the flight. Arrangements would have to be made for providing a better intellectual diet for all children right from the earliest years of life.

There was evidence also demonstrating that growth began almost immediately after a child came into this world.

The cognitive psychologists showed that the children's earliest thoughts could have lasting effects as grave as produced by their feelings and with the child's intelligence growing as much during his first 4 years of life as it would in the next 13 years, any unplanned intellectual diet in the early years could lead to an intellectual handicap in later years.

The term cognitive development refers to the changes that occur in the child's mental skills and abilities between birth and early adulthood, when cognitive growth is essentially complete (David R. Shaffer).

Cognition is essentially the process of knowing. It encompasses thinking, decision making, judging, imagining, problem solving, categorizing and reasoning all the higher mental processes of human beings. They all depend on knowledge that drives from learning and memory.

Cognition development is a gradual, continuous process, resembling the growth of a seedling into a flowering plant. Some other psychologist believe that children pass through a series of Cognitive stages, although each stage of development builds on previous ones, the child's thinking patterns at each stage are radically different from thinking pattern at earlier periods. As children mature and gain experience with the world, their mental function go through a series of reorganizations after each reorganization; the child passes into a more advanced Condition stage.

After all Cognition include perception, thinking, concept formation, abstraction and problem solving. Basic to all these process is the "intelligence".

CHILD REARING PRACTICES AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP:

Child rearing practice can be defined as "ideas, beliefs and attributes widely held in community on how to bring up children. This process of child rearing is greatly influenced by the characteristic way of thinking feeling and acting prevalent in the cultural group to which the family belongs.

Parents show striking differences in their beliefs about the nature of authority and power within their relationships with children. Most parents see themselves as occupying a position with respect to their children. Some parents however, easily respond to child behaviors as interpersonal threat-an interpretation that motivates their establishment or re-establishment of authority and dominance within the relationship.

COMPOSITION OF TRIBES IN ASSAM

Tribes in Assam belong to different ethno lingual groups, possesses divers cultural practices, beliefs values and socio-religious characteristics. These tribes extended along the entire range from the Hinduised section of the Sonowal Kacharis living in the plain areas of Dibrugarh District, the Miris (Missing) and Deoris of river side of Brahmaputra valley with their traditional socio-cultural life. The more advanced section of the Bodo-Kachari of Kamrup and Goalpara Disticts, the tribal communities constitute an important segments of the Assam population. The pattern of concentration and social stratification is such that Tribes, like Bodo-Kachari do not have social, cultural and interpersonal relation with the Sonowal. The typical ethnic clustering and concentration has contributed significantly to the lack of sufficient interaction between the plain tribes and non-tribal components population. It appeared that social change within ethnic groups has been started at a very low pace.

There has been much concern in the literature on tribal affairs about preserving their culture and allowing them to develop according to there own genius. Culture is something which can not be ordered but it is influenced by social and political change taking place in the system.

It is observed that cultural diversities exist between different tribes which creates conflicts and tension among themselves. These conflicts may be resolved if we are enable to ensure them that certain adverse influence which tend to operate in a suitable way are identified and checked.

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOUR AMONG THE TRIBAL FARMERS

The communication behaviour of the farmers is correctly defined as the degree of an individual farmers exposure with the various information sources through which the technologies are transmitted.

There is a great need for a planned and calculated communication strategy for extending agricultural technology to the farmers in order to increase the agricultural production. There are many sources of information through which farmers seek information on farm technology and they also discuss among themselves, with their friends and fellow cultivators and in this process pass on the so received information to other farm fellows. But to what extent the farmers expose themselves to various information sources, both for receiving as well as for passing on the information is crux of the problem and this has been called a communication behaviour.

Communication has always been the basis of human endeavour. It is a process of social interaction. Communication of farm information play an important role for bringing about change in the rural social system. There is a wide gap between knowledge germination and it's utilization. The scientific knowledge accumulated in the field of research, needs to be narrowed down so as to enhance the adoption of specific technology by the farmer.

There is a great need for a planned and calculated communication strategy for extending agricultural technology to the farmers in order to increase the agricultural production. There are many sources of information through which farmers seek information on farm technology and they also discuss among themselves, with their friends and fellow cultivators. After reorganising the Pathar Parichalana Samity (P.P.S) in Assam which constitute important link in the extension chain for dissemination of information to the farming community. It's involved maximum number of farmers and play a vital role in spreading improved agricultural technology among themselves.

In tracing Human history Sigmund Freud suggests that one of the reasons why people first submitted themselves to social control was to gain protection from one-another but this gain leads to the loss of the happiness that could be obtained from unbridled self-indulgence. Thus, the unconscious is continuously at war with civilization controlling rules and values. Because, Freud doubted that this conflict could ever be completely resolved, he suggested civilization must use the process of identification (incorporation of other's values, especially the parent) and sublimation (channeling of instinctual energies into socially desirable activities) to combat basic Human nature.

Skinner (Behaviorist psychologist) draws attention to an obviously important of human life reinforcement. It is significant for controlling over own behaviours, raising children, improving education, getting along with others and most other activities. Also many social problems - delinquency, criminal activities, terrorism, exergencies and so on -- seem to at least partially from the lack of position reinforcement for "diserable behaviour" and

concurrent immediate reinforcement for "undesirable behaviour"

STEPS INVOLVED FOR CREATING NATIONAL HARMONY

- (1) Resolving conflicts between different ethnic Tribal groups and non Tibal society.
- (2) Using the process of identification and sublimation for creating harmony among the social groups of the northeast India.
- (3) Use of effective positive reinforcement for enhancing desirable behaviour.
- (4) To develop congenial communication among the social group to have better Understanding and dialogue.
- (5) To create position felling and opinions about each others values, tradation beliefs and festivities prevailing among the different Tribes of the N.E. India.

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"SOCIAL CHANGE IN TRIBAL SOCIETY AND THE ROLE OF NON-TRIBAL GROUPS TOWARDS CHANGE : A STUDY ON MAJOR TRIBAL GROUPS OF SOUTH KAMRUP AND GOALPARA DISTRICT IN ASSAM".

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INTRODUCTION :

Social change refers to the process in which a marked transformation in the structure and functioning of a particular social system takes place. There is change in social behaviour, social structure and social and cultural values. The society undergoes change in time and space and in the stage of societal level. The tribal society being in a lower hierarchy of development is even more susceptible to change. Though the society of the tribal community is governed by traditional social system having rituals, social beliefs, practices and customs, they are changing due to many reasons.

The tribal societies have been experiencing rapid changes when they come in contact with other ethnic groups having distinctive socio-culture-economic dynamics. This culture contact or acculturation phenomenon is one of the most sensitive factor which the social changes of the major tribal groups – the Rabha and the Boros of South Kamrup and Goalpara district have been experiencing.

It may be noted that the Rabhas, a major tribal community has been inhabiting with moderately high concentration of population particularly in South Kamrup and Goalpara district. In South Kamrup they are mostly confined in Rani, Kulshi, Chhygaon -- Pantan, Bamunigaon, Boko-Bongaon, Hahim, Luki-Bekchi (Singra, Bondapara, Ramgsapara, Khatajuli, Gamorimora, Sakhati, Charaibaha, etc). In Goalpara district they are concentrated especially in Balizona, Lakhipur, Matia, Dudhnai and Rangjuli revenue circle. The Boros also form a large proportion of tribal community in South Kamrup and Goalpara district.

So far the Rabhas are concerned the process of acculturation seems to be more glaring in South Kamrup and the eastern part of Goalpara district (Dudhnai to Dhupdhara) where an endogamous clan (Thal or Khel) of the Rabhas known as the Pati Rabhas are exclusively inhabited. As the region is predominantly represented by other non-tribal ethnic groups like caste Hindus, scheduled castes, Koch, Muslims etc., there has always been high stimulate non-tribal influence. This influence can be assessed from the fact that the pati Rabhas have Aryanised to a great extent and have adopted Assamese as first language even though the community has distinct language of its own. Among the other sections of the Rabhas

like Rangdani, Maitori and Dahuri inhabited in South Western part of Goalpara district the acculturation has been taking place more or less in one form or other. It is pertinent to point out that the non-tribal influence over the Rabhas is significant by the fact that the Rabhas have been experiencing social structural changes over from matriliney to patriliney society (J.E. Friend Pereira, 1911). The Rabhas having matriarchal past has gradually lost in course of culture contact with non-tribal, i.e., greater Assamese society. Another remarkable indication of culture contact continuum of the Rabhas is the deviation from their original culture of exogamous marriage system. The exogamous clan or Baraihuri descends from matriarchal groups but never follow the patriarchal group of clan system. In course of time the traditional marriage system having more maternal uncle's influence become defective and society begins to embrace patriarchal system which appears to be the outcome of culture contact with caste Hindu counterparts.

The acculturation phenomena can also be observed in the fields of traditional social systems of rites and rituals, social beliefs, practices and customs of both the Rabhas and the Boros inhabiting in the study area. The culture contacts have greatly resulted in change of food habits, dress ways of living etc. Besides these, the influence of environment and proximity to different communities led to assimilation of socio-cultural characteristics.

A significant impact of acculturation has been observed in the institution of marriage of the tribal society particularly in the Rabhas and the Boros. In Rabha society the 'marriage by service' and 'marriage by elopement' were

widely prevalent. But with the expansion of education and cultural continuum, one of the most common form of acquiring the mates where bride prices too much, the groom render services to be bride's parents for a particular period which is known as marriage by service and marriage by elopement have ceased to be the forms of marriage in the present day context.

The processes of Modernization, Sanskritization and Christianization have far reaching impact on the process of social change in the tribal society in general and Rabha and Boro society in particular. This phenomena can be observed from the fact that a large proportion of the Rabhas in sporadic areas have been sanskritised and Christianized in the early and middle part of the last century. A sizable proportion of pati Rabhas inhabiting the adjoining areas of South Kamrup and eastern part of Goalpara district have been sanskritized under the influence of Damodoria religious institution which had been established in different parts of Lower Assam. The 'Naokata Satra' at khekapara under Bikali area is one of the glaring example of such kind. a section of Rabha community, specially the Rangdani and Maitory inhabiting in the vicinity of Garo Hills like Naguwa, Besarkona, Fotamati, Joyramkuchi, Chaibari, Paham under Lakhimpur revenue circle have been Christianized. Besides, there has been a constant influence of Chaitanaya Vaishnavite cult in the historically famous Mech para area which happens to be the home land for Rangdani and Maitori. Here, the people of the villages like Mogho, Hatishilla, Amguri, Maladhara, Baida, Bamundoba, Joyramkuchi, Bosengpara, Barjhora have adopted the cult with enthusiasm. It may be mentioned that the Pati Rabhas of Suth Kamrup and Goalpara district have been greatly influenced by

vaishnavism of Sankar-Sangha during the last couple of years. Apart from these, a small proportion of the Rabhas have also embarked on Satsangha and Brahma Samaji cult which have been exerting influence on the tribal society. In case of the Boros too, a sizable proportion of people in this region have Sanskritized into Anukul Vaishnavism, Sankar-Sangha's Vaishnavism, etc. Besides, a few proportion of the Boros have Christianised in South Kamrup and Goalpara district.

CONCLUSION:

In the conclusion it may be said that the social change of the Rabhas and the Boros inhabiting in South Kamrup and Goalpara district have been taking place due to long period of interaction with the non-tribal Assamese composite society. These phenomena have far reaching impact on integration as well as on the process of human and regional development. However, there has been a growing tendency and speculation among the tribal societies to safeguard and keep the socio-cultural heritage intact out of the fear of modernisation and culture contact. Under the above facts and circumstances, the social change of the tribals and the role of non-tribal and related issues need more in-depth study.

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UNITY AMONG DIVERSITY IN NORTH EAST INDIA SOME SUGGESTION

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0.1 : The North-East region is said to be a hive of various ethnic groups and perhaps nowhere India, we cross so contrast like this region. It has a host of experience of past history of sanguinary battle for self determination aspiration----- a series of geographical and administrative reorganisation..... the alleged term "ethnic cleansing" etc. and..... "many such movements are either ongoing or still in the process of emerging..." (Danda : 1992).

In fine, this region is more than what we term as 'miniature India' and thus it is such a region where meet 'unity' among diversity.

0.2 : In the true sense of the term, there was not striking difference among the various ethnic groups, when the Rajas of the region tried to make it 'one', with the acculturation process. Besides plains area, in the hilly areas, the process of proselytising was made in Manipur...."

The Maharaja abolished ancestral worship and dismissed the indigenous priests from the temples of the local deities and superseded them by Brahmans". (Hudson: 1912). Perhaps, this process was adopted due to lack of "scriptures and spiritual aegis..." (Koch: 1989), of Mongoloid ethnic groups. In ancient time, they opted for making flourishing Indo-Aryan literature, instead of their own. As a dire consequence, a ghetto attitude was prevalent among neophyte and the non converts ones. Of course, this process continued long, and it "posed a threat to their identity". (Phungcho: 1996).

0.3 : And today, such realisation of 'identity crisis' is found almost every where : each groups are trying to assert their identity-sometimes slowly, and forcibly, too. Each caste and community had separate socio-economic organisations, and these acted as the catalytic agent for their own self-determination. To name them a few as follows: "Asamiya Sahitya Sanmilani" (26 December, 1917: today's 'Assam Sahitya Sabha), All Assam tribal League (April 17, 1933), Naga Hoho (1918), Boro Chatra Sanmlani (1919), Assam Ahom Association (1993), Garo National Council (1947) and Many others...

0.4 : The above socio-economic organisations are responsible for both all round development of the 'tribe' and 'unity' among them.

In other words, such organisations become reluctant for other fellows. In what factors. We cross such contrasts,

we have to adopt the following suggestive measures for keeping our unity :

(1). LANGUAGE POLICY:

All literary organisations, N.G.Os. and the govt. agencies should undertake an exhaustive study on the language implementation in the region.

(2) SCHEDULING PROCESS :

In the region, Govt. scheduling process was taken up with political motive, but this would create chaos among the people. Recently, the govt. of Assam made it clear that some major people or community would be scheduled into S.T. plains, but without increasing 'quota'. This will create confusion among the tribes.

(3). RELIGION FUSION :

In the real sense of the term, the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic groups are not Hindus. But they have adopted Hinduism with modified rites and rituals. But no religions is to be imposed.

(4) LAND LAW :

Tribal Belt & Blocks are to be retained.

In fine, whatever to be taken as 'scheme'/project or 'accord', there should be a negotiation. Awareness campaign is to be organised by both public and Govt. agencies.

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