

SACH

SOUTH ASIAN COMPOSITE HERITAGE

OCTOBER 2016 - MARCH 2017 ■ VOLUME-1 ■ ISSUE-44-45

Editorial Board

Arshad Karim

*Al-Bilal Falahi Tanzeem Nawjawanwan Regd
Kahber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

Kalipada Sarker

CCDB, Bangladesh

Nobo Kishore Urickhimbam

*Centre for Social Development
Manipur, India*

P. Bala Murugan

India

P. Lalitha Kumari

*Asmita Resource Centre for Women
Secunderabad, India*

Mugilan Perumal

*Institute for Social Democracy
Delhi, India*

Suramya Smriti Kujur

Delhi, India

Coordination by

*Institute for Social Democracy
New Delhi, India*

E-MAIL

notowar.isd@gmail.com

WEBSITE

www.sach.org.in / www.isd.net.in

‘Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high’, these lines of Rabindranath Tagore, raises the question, what makes mind fearless and how are heads held high? What are the prerequisites for such a dream to translate into reality? To live without fear is to live with dignity, to respect others and be respected, to accept others and be accepted, to have the right to choose - for better or for worst, these, to name a few, become the basis for a truly free and democratic society.

What needs to be reflected, is that, is our society ready for such conditions to establish? When we talk about the Northeast region of India, the first images that come to fore are that of conflicts due to state atrocities, armed conflicts, struggles for ownership of resources, impunity enjoyed by army, and so on. What we do not see is the rich cultural heritage of this region, the values of peace and co-existence. When the approach of those in power is that of absolute control, when the most convenient way of ruling is through force instead of consensus, we see a society and its people suffer, as they are in many parts of the sub-continent.

History is witness to several attempts of targeting places and practices that bring people together by fundamentalist forces of all colours. Time and again we have seen restrictions being imposed on festivals, bombing of sufi shrines, banning of cinema, fatwas on celebrations, targeting of mass leaders, restricting movement and interaction. These have resulted in creating and widening gaps between people, shaping prejudices, cementing myths about different communities, legitimising hatred and violence among people. This hatred that reflects in our behaviour is rooted in our fear. Our fear of losing our power to control, fear from things which are different, unseen, new.

Change is a difficult process; it comes with its time. Our fear from change makes us authoritarian, it makes us violent, and it puts us through transition. It builds our insecurity, fear of losing what we have to something which is yet to take shape. Amidst all these uncertainties the mind is not without fear and the head is not held high!

This issue attempts to highlight the shared cultural spaces of Northeast India. Its festivals, ownership of culture rich diversity are things that heal a conflict torn society. What we hear and see in the mainstream media, if at all, are just one side of the coin. There is more to Northeast than blood and fire.

Small Towns and The River

by **Mamang Dai**, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Small towns always remind me of death.
My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees,
it is always the same,
in summer or winter,
with the dust flying,
or the wind howling down the gorge.

Just the other day someone died.
In the dreadful silence we wept
looking at the sad wreath of tuberose.
Life and death, life and death,
only the rituals are permanent.

The river has a soul.
In the summer it cuts through the land
like a torrent of grief. Sometimes,
sometimes, I think it holds its breath
seeking a land of fish and stars

The river has a soul.
It knows, stretching past the town,
from the first drop of rain to dry earth
and mist on the mountaintops,
the river knows
the immortality of water.

A shrine of happy pictures
marks the days of childhood.
Small towns grow with anxiety
for the future.
The dead are placed pointing west.
When the soul rises
it will walk into the golden east,
into the house of the sun.

In the cool bamboo,
restored in sunlight,
life matters, like this.

In small towns by the river
we all want to walk with the gods.

The Hornbill Festival in Nagaland : A Unique Cultural Extravaganza

by MUGILAN PERUMAL, ISD, India



The Indian north eastern state of Nagaland is known for its colorful culture and unparalleled natural beauty. It is a home to different indigenous tribes with their unique culture such as *Angami*, *Ao*, *Chang*, *Konyak*, *Sumi*, and *Lothas* who live in various regions within Nagaland. Naga people have an affection of celebrating their cultures, deeds of their ancient warriors through various festivals. The 'Hornbill Festival' is one of the most widely celebrated festivals by Naga tribes. Although each community celebrates its myriad festivals revolving around the agrarian calendar like *Moatso*, *Sekrenyi*, *Nazu*, *Tuluni* and *Yemshe*, but the Hornbill festival is the most cherished festivals celebrated most grandly by the Nagas.

Some say it as a 'Festival of Festivals' and some say it as a 'Window to Nagaland'. The government of Nagaland has been organizing this festival since 2000 to encourage inter-tribal harmony and promote colorful local culture and traditions, display its unique customs, rituals and practices as well as preserve its heritage.

The festival named with the term 'hornbill', a magnificent bird found in the state whose tail feathers are used by most Naga tribes for traditional purposes, particularly on headgears. Hornbill is collectively revered by all Naga tribes. The bird is enshrined in the cultural ethos of the Nagas. The festival is held every year from 1st to 10th December in

Kisama village (also known as cultural heritage village) which is 12 km away from *Kohima*, the capital city of Nagaland. It is a time where all the tribes gather up to showcase their age-old traditions and come closer to knowing each other. Now the festival celebrations have been extended to three more districts in Nagaland. Although Christianity has taken root in some Naga tribes, but it has not eclipsed traditional Religious beliefs. Nagas still celebrate their traditional festivals and perform folk dances and love their other cultural activities like songs, tales and music. Naga cultural traditions are closely associated with the agriculture seasons like sowing and harvesting and other livelihood aspects.

Cultural Events in the Hornbill Festival :

The Hornbill Festival celebrations are marked with a colorful display of various cultural events such as traditional dances, music, folk songs, which are performed in the first few days during the festival. Simultaneously, the indigenous games are also played during the festival. The tribes with headgear (decorated with hornbill bird's beak, boar ducks and feathers) beat the warrior log drums which make a unique sound to mesmerize the audience. This is performed as a sign of victory after defeating other warriors or killing animals by hunting. The *Konyak Nagas* call this drum as '*Shum*'. According to

the tribal legend, Nagas used to worship the warrior log drum with the animal's blood or human's blood but such practices no longer exist today. The use of log drum is found to be a common practice among all the Naga tribes. Both men and women wear their traditional dresses. Men wear local shawl which is known as *Tsungkotepsu* among *Ao* tribes and women wear blue or red or white plain cloth with marginal bands and sing, shout and dance to thank the natural (especially forest) resources.

The festival is marked by various other events like King Chilly Eating contest (also called as '*Kedi Chusi* or *Chudi* among *Angami* tribes), Port Fat Eating, Piglet Catching (it is to show the way of hunting), Greased Bamboo Pole Climbing, Traditional Wrestling Competition and fire making contest which are conducted to showcase their rich cultural traditions. Festival also serves as an occasion to exhibit and share their traditional cultural products such as paintings, ornaments and handicrafts which are made by tribal groups.

The *Nagas'* traditionally inherited food habits such as smoked pork and beef, boiled vegetables, fermented dry fish, chicken stew, rice beer which is also known as '*zutho*', etc that are placed and consumed by everyone in the *Murungs* (it is a traditional Naga hut) throughout the festival.



Modernized Events in the Festival :

Although the festival showcases traditional songs, dance and music, food habits, paintings and handicrafts, but it also includes modern-day popular events such as rock music and fashion shows. The young educated members of Naga tribes seem to have developed strong liking for music and rock shows with the passage of time. The biggest Rock Festival of the country is hosted at Kohima every year during this festival. Naga youths have been exposed with the mixed cultures (educated in different parts of the country). As a result traditional values are gradually becoming less popular among the youth. Critics say that modernized events in the festival seem to be winning over the traditionally inherited cultural values and customs.

People's Voices about the Festival :

Non-Nagas see the festival as an important cultural event full of enjoyment or entertainment. But the local Nagas have mixed views with discomfiture over the cultural extravaganza. Many shared their feelings which are as below:

"No matter what the differences are, all the Naga tribes come together during the festival with full spirit and showcase their local cultures, customs and traditions.

Festivals in other regions of Nagaland : The Naga tribes demanded to celebrate the festival in all the eleven districts of Nagaland state. In 2016, the government started the Hornbill festival in three districts such as *Mokokchung, Phek and Dimapur* to exhibit their culture at the wider level.

Political-Economic Aspect : The government of Nagaland is investing more money to attract the tourists and spread out our rich culture which is good but they do not get back the money (that they invested for festival) in return. The duration of the festival is too long (10 days) and this has to be reduced into 5 or 6 days to cut down the festival cost. In my opinion, this can be utilized for the poorest of the poor people in improving their basic amenities, education and health care.

Armed and Insurgency Groups :

Although there are countless tensions/conflicts occurring in Nagaland and other Northeast states due to armed insurgency groups, no violence will take place during the Hornbill festival especially in Kohima district. The armed group would officially participate and insurgency groups would participate unofficially (without any arms). No harm would be done to the common people even though the security forces remains deployed throughout during the festival".

—**Mr. Azeu Nancyn Hau**
from Kohima, Nagaland

"The Hornbill festival has mixed reviews among the *Nagas*. Some see it as an evil which is draining the good from the people and some eagerly wait for it to come so they can go out with friends and have a good time. The hornbill festival in a nutshell is a convention of the various cultures in Nagaland, where the people come to showcase the rich traditions passed down through generations. The festival brings in a good number of tourists and that brings in money for the government. But what the festival fails to show is who we as a people really are".

—**Ms. Ajabu Tungoe,**
Social Worker from Nagaland

"The severest criticism of Hornbill Festival is perhaps not what happens during the 10 days festival period but what 'does not happen' during the remaining 355 days of the year. Nagas celebrate many festivals and many of them are related to work. For example, there are sowing and harvest festivals. Sowing festival is celebrated during sowing season, and harvest festival is celebrated for harvest. But if sowing or harvest festivals are celebrated without sowing or harvesting, something is wrong.

If the State carries out cosmetic works on the eve of Hornbill Festival, it is unlikely that people who suffer throughout the year for its inaction will suddenly cheer up on December 1, forget everything and join in the festivities. Nagaland needs to work much

harder to deserve to celebrate the festival of festivals. We do not want to travel in roads painted black or splashed with water to avoid dust during Hornbill, we want the real stuff and we want it all through the year. We don't want band-aid treatments and white-washed walls; we want real cures and real solid development works. We do not want to live in a temporary make-believe world for 10 days; we want things to be better in our everyday lives.

For the tourists and first time visitors who may be reading the State newspapers in their hotel rooms or traveling in the interior parts of Nagaland, it is clear that things are not as they are projected. Reality is harsh here in Nagaland. The journey of the so-called Naga caravan has been bumpy for as long as we can remember and our backs are sore. In our road of progress and development, the State and its machineries have a knack for getting it wrong. Be it recruitment/ appointment and disbursement of salaries, development projects and construction works, delivering of services and justice, or way of public dealings and behavior, we seem to have the habit of getting it wrong. Hardly any State-run machinery, institution, or project is operating at optimum level. Our development projects are often 'in the pipeline' and 'file' is under processes; the standard government replies for non-performance. Once a construction project is made, it is constructed in the wrong location (to be occupied by ghosts and wild animals), walls start to wear off before inauguration, or there is low performance and zero maintenance. When criticized, there is no shortage of responses, one being that people should not have negative attitude.

Most importantly, to let people warm up to Hornbill Festival, we need to see real work during the remaining 355 days. To celebrate the festival, we need to keep our house (State) in order and get things right. We need to earn the right to celebrate Hornbill Festival."

—**Dr. Sao Tunyi**
from Kohima, Nagaland

The person from other state recently took

part in the festival shared that,

"I attended the festival for the first time and enjoyed every bit of time that I spent there. I loved to see the various colourful events especially the dance and it was also time for relieving the stress. I didn't know how the ten days were moved and spent the days with only happiness and excitement. My friends and I have decided to take part in the festival in the future as well".

—**Mr. Thangsianlal**,
a visitor from Manipur

"This is the festival exclusively for the tourists who can relish to the hospitality of Naga tribes. This is also an important festival for Naga youths to celebrate as the youth festival because of the entertaining events such as fashion show, rock music concert, adventurous bike rally and other such competitions. Apart from these, the festival is mainly represented by few tribes particularly Angami from Kohima among 16 tribes in Nagaland".

—**Mr. Jagat Okram**
from Manipur

Collections of Cultural Components :

There are several cultural heritage components such as the traditional dance forms, songs, music, dresses, food, arts (paintings), handicrafts, customs, rituals, etc to share to others through the festival. The aim of the Hornbill festival is to revive and protect the rich culture of Nagaland and display its traditions. Surprisingly there are also some challenges to the Naga traditions in the face of adverse impacts of modern life style and culture entering into the lives of Naga people. Despite all, the hornbill festival remains a symbol of their rich and unique tradition and it is marked as an event aimed to preserving, promoting and enriching Naga cultural heritage and identity.

References:

1. <http://reviewne.com/the-hornbill-festival-nagaland>
2. <http://www.explorenagaland.com/festivals-of-nagaland/hornbill-festival-the-festival-of-festivals/>
3. <http://morungexpress.com/hornbill-festival-the-need-to-get-it-right/>

Bihu



*Young boys and girls
performing Bihu Dacnce*

The National Festival of Assam

by **RAMENDRA K MECH**, Assam, India

INTRODUCTION

Assam is the gateway to the North Eastern states of India. The Assamese society is heterogenous in nature which is represented by caste people and good number of tribal communities. Irrespective of the caste and creed all the Assamese people i.e. people belongs to the different race or culture who live in Assam permanently as their home celebrate *Bihu* with great pomp and gaiety. *Bihu* is a seasonal festival and its celebration is connected with the significant points of a cultivator's life over a yearly cycle. The three festivals of the agricultural cycle e.g. *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu*, *Kati Bihu* or *Kongali Bihu* and *Magh Bihu* or *Bhogali Bihu* comprise the *Bihu* festival. A more explanation of these three *Bihus* of the year will explain how they are signifact to the people of Assam.

BOHAG BIHU:

Bohag Bihu is celebrated in the month of *Bohag* (first month of Assamese calender) and it indicates the advent of the agricultural cycle. It

is a spring time *Bihu*. It is associated with vernal or spring equinox and generally falls in the month of April when the sweet voice of the cuckoo, the sentinel of *Bohag Bihu* is heard everywhere in Assam. Spring is the time that symbolises the rebirth of life and spirit, youth and fertility, vigour and rejuvenation. Its romantic backgroung in the context of *Bohag Bihu* is well described by P. Goswami in his book *Festivals of Assam*:

"Trees like coral, palas and the mango are in blossom. Leaves are sprouting on most trees, the birds are tuning in, the first showers are falling and there is a fragrance in the air...songs seems to spring to one's lips unburden and if one is young, the heart flutters a little."

The explanation of *Bohag Bihu* is incomplete if it not associated with the most popular Assamese myth of *Bordoisila*, which is regarded as a female spirit and visits her mother's home once a year at the advent of springtime *Bihu*. The people of Assam experience two strong gales

just before and after the month of *Bohag*, preceeding gale of Bihu reminds the people of Assam of the visit of *Bordoisila* heralding *Bihu* and the after gale which is often devastating reminds of her return.

At this time the farmers prepare the fields for cultivation of paddy and there is a feeling of joy around. So, it is also known as *Rangali Bihu* or *bihu that cheers*. The preparation for this *Bihu* gets started prior to this month with the women make *pitha*, *larus* (traditional food made of rice and coconut) and *Jolpan* which gives the real essence of the season further women weavers keep themselves busy with weaving of *Bihuwans*. *Bihuwans* are respect to the elders in terms of bihu presents. These presents are chiefly cloth gifts like *gamucha* (traditional towel), *chelang* (shoulder cloth), *dhoti* (men's wear), *hachati* (betelnut carrier cloth) etc.

The first day of the Bihu is called *Goru Bihu* or the Bihu of cattle, where the cattles are washed and worshipped, which falls on the last day of the previous year. This is followed by *Manuh Bihu* or Bihu for human, the New Year Day. This is the day of getting cleaned up, wearing new cloths and be ready with fresh vigor. Following that people pay respect to their elders' with *Bihuwans*. People go about visiting friends and relatives, greet one another and refresh themselves with *Pitha*, *Jolpan* etc. *Huchari* (a performance of Bihu song) carol singing starts on this day, beginning from the community prayer hall known as *Namgha* and *Kirtanghar*.

The day after the *Manuh Bihu* is *Gosain bihu* and this day is dedicated to religious functions. Congregational prayers are held on the day at *Namghar* and *Kirtanghar*. The fourth, fifth and sixth days of the seven day long bihu is known as *Tatar bihu*, *Nangalar bihu* and *Jiwajantur bihu*. No special functions are assigned to these days except cleaning of handlooms by the womenfolk, cleaning of ploughs and tending domestic animals by the menfolk respectively.

During this period, in the evening people in group move from house to house singing *Huchari* carol songs and bless the household for the well being throughout the year. Bihu dance is also performed by young boys and girls, characterised by brisk steps, flinging and flipping

of hands and elegant swaying of hips represents youthful passion. These song and dance styles characterising the spirit of the season had become a vehicle of exchanging hearts for the young boys and girls in the subsequent ages; therefore, the Bohag bihu was an occasion for choice of life partners and the Bihu ground was a convenient place for elopement of young couple.

The costume used for Bihu dance is composed of *muga* (golden silk) *mekhela sador* (the traditional dress of Assam comprising of two pieces) besides Assamese jewellery that consists of *dhul-biri*, *joon-biri*, *gaam-kharu* and the kopou (foxtail orchid) flower, that adorns the dancer's hair-bun. Men wear *muga dhuti-kurta* and tie the *gamusa* (traditional towel) on their head. Musical instruments used during performance of Bihu dance include the *dhol* (traditional drums), the *tal* (traditional cymbals), the *pepa* (traditional wind pipe made out of buffalo horn) and the *gagana* (a delicate but simple instrument made out of bamboo).

The formal part of Bohag bihu is concluded on the seventh day and this day is known as *Sat Bihu* or *Chera Bihu*. On this day seven herbs are customarily eaten and these are natural herbs which normally grow after the first showers have fallen on earth. The *Huchari* carol singing is also concluded on the day in Bihu Thowa or putting Bihu away ceremony.

KATI BIHU :

The *Kati Bihu* is the second phase of the Bihu festival is observed on the day of *Asvin Sankranti* the last day of *Ahin* (sixth month of the Assamese calender) which falls in the month of October. Unlike Bohag bihu, *Kati Bihu* is not a flamboyant festival and the festivities are more sombre in nature. This Bihu is a one day domestic affair. The time of its observance generally coincides with the Autumnal Equinox. This *Bihu* marks the completion of sowing and transplanting of paddies. It is also known as *Kangali Bihu* or *beggar's bihu* as the foodgrains of the peasants are almost exhausted.

During this Bihu the *Tulsi* (Basil) sapling is planted at the courtyard of every house. The *Tulsi* sapling is cleaned and planted on a specially designed earth platform known as *Tulasi Bheti*. In the evening earthen lamps are placed at the

foot of the Tulasi plant and worshipped in a traditional way by offering *Nivedya* (soaked gram, mug, pulse, rice, banana, sugar cane, betel nut etc.) for the wellbeing of the family and for a good harvest. Lighting a *Akash-banti*, a ritual of *Kati bihu*, is seen in the yards of few household throughout the months. The ritual is performed by putting an earthen lamp to the tip of a tall bamboo with the belief that the fire will preserve the paddy from the depredations of the locusts and other evil spirits such as hail, thunder and lightening and thus to keep the crops remain healthy.

MAGH BIHU:

After the hard labour by the peasants in the field it is the time for the harvest. The peasants celebrate this *Bihu* in *Magh* (tenth month of the Assamese calendar) to relieve themselves from the tiredness of hard labour they have put forth during all this time and enjoy their produce from the field. The *Magh bihu* is therefore called the post harvesting festival of Assam. It falls in the month of January. It is also known as *Bhogali bihu* or *bihu* that enjoys with feasting.

The burning of *Meji* is an important feature of the *Mag Bihu*. As such, all preparations of construction of *Meji* are completed well in advance. *Meji* is usually a temple like structure made with green bamboo, wood, dried banana leaves or thatch of paddy.

On the eve of the *Bihu* day, called *Uruka* i.e. last day of *Puh* (ninth month of Assamese calendar), women clean the household clothes and keep themselves busy in baking various types of pithas, making *larus* etc. These sweet dishes are kept ready for the family members and guests for the *bihu*. In the night of *uruka* at an open ground community feast is held, it is a conspicuous feature of this *bihu*. Bonfire is set up and people warm up themselves in this fire and they cheer with every bursting of the

cracking sound from bamboo. It is common belief that this bamboo cracking sound drive away the evil spirit and increase in number of the bamboo crackers is believed to increase fruit bearing capacity of tree. At night the young people steal fruits, vegetables, poultry and fire wood to keep their feast and bonfire going.

Next day is the *Magh bihu* day and in the morning after the purifying bath people proceed to the community *Meji* remaining on fast. In a forepart of plantain leaf, they offer flower, basil leaf, coins, couch grass, betel-vine, nut and earthen lamp fuelled with ghee etc. are offered for *Agni* (God of fire). The attenders then set fire to *Meji* before sunrise. Then the Assamese delicacies pithas, *jalpan* and *larus* are enjoyed to break the fast. Following this recreational contests like egg breaking contests, cock fight and Nightingale fighting, pot breaking contests etc. are organised. Besides these, bull fighting is also hugely popular in many areas of Assam. No lunch is cooked on the *Bihu* day as a custom. The entire month of *Magh Bihu* is a period of leisure for the agricultural people since the following cycle is yet to commence.

Conclusions:

The infinite importance of *Bihu* festival in the social life of Assam is evident from the people enthusiastically involvement in it. People of multi-ethnic and poly-cultural region take part in this festival manifesting a distinct oneness of the Assamese society. It provides the opportunity not only to introduce an individual to his or her culture and tradition which results in the feelings of oneness but also promote unity and solidarity among the peoples of the society. It is a symbol of secularism and an inspiration of the social life. That is why *Bihu* is called as the national festival of Assam. This festival truly celebrates the spirit of "Unity in diversity", the core essence of Indian culture and heritage.

References :

- https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-1-3_035.pdf
- <https://www.scribd.com/document/53076654/Bihu-the-festivity-of-Assam>
- <http://indianfolklore.org/journals/index.php/IFL/article/viewFile/48/50>
- https://books.google.co.in/books?id=pjVdJMBexU8C&pg=PA40&lpg=PA40&dq=kati+bihu+offering+nevedya&source=bl&ots=gVigqCalw&sig=k2c75jGBfuVZ3Q9PtvKA15N0YY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiYzZ_KoKPRAhVEqI8KHdGhCXIQ6AEIQTAJ#v=onepage&q=kati%20bihu%20offering%20nevedya&f=false
- http://rupkatha.com/V6/n2/08_Bihu_Dance_Assam.pdf
- http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/69700/7/07_chapter%203.pdf
- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meji_at_bharalu.JPG
- Bihu festival of Assam a study of the change in tradition*, Baishya, Alakesh

Garos of Meghalaya :

Wangala - Hundred Drums Festival

by SUNIL KUKSAL, India

NORTH EAST region of India is known for its unique, rich tribal cultural tradition, colourful festivals, music and dances. Fair and Festivals are the integral part of tribal culture along with traditional dance and folk music. There are numbers of festivals celebrated by various tribes of different states throughout the year. The Wangala Festival also known as Hundred Drums Festival or Wanna, is an annual festival of Garo tribes living in north-eastern Indian state of Meghalaya. Wangala is also known as 'Wanna' and 'Wanna Rongchuwa' that literally means 'hundred drums'. The festival is celebrated in the honor of Saljong, the Sun-god of fertility by the Garos after harvesting. The festival signifies the onset of winter as well as it marks the end of a period of toil, which brings good output of the fields. The annual festival was first started in the year 1976 at Asananggre (about 15 km from Tura town of Meghalaya, the largest town in the Garo hills and the cultural capital of the A'chik people) and since then it is being held every year in the second week of November. The Garos however call themselves 'Achik Mande' which literally means 'hill man's'.

The Garos are indigenous people in Meghalaya, India and neighbouring areas of Bangladesh like Mymensingh, Netrokona, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Sylhet. According to some historians Garos are of the stock known as Tibeto-Burman, which drifted into Eastern



India and Burma across the plateaux of Tibet. Their language and few of their ideas still retain some similarity with Tibetans. Technically the traditional religion of the Garos may be termed as 'animistic' and those Garos who are still following the old faith are known

as Songsarek. A large part of the Garo community follow Christianity, with some rural pockets still following traditional animist religion and practices. However, today it is their traditions that make them unique and many of their customs are still practiced. Christian influences are visible amongst the Garo, but they have managed to remain a matrilineal tribe, meaning that the land they live on belongs to the women, while the men govern the society, giving the woman more rights than in most tribes.

Garo people do not use any agricultural products before thanking God of fertility Misi-Saljong in Wangala through dancing, drinking chu, singing for three day and nights. The presiding deity of Song sarek (unconverted) Garos is Tatara Rabuga, described in the oral tradition as "one so high that he cannot be reached". His deputy is Misi Saljong, to whom peasants give thanks and ask for blessings during the Rugala for the next jhum or cultivation cycle. For Garos the Wangala is meant to evoke the goodwill and blessings of the gods and goddesses of heaven and earth, one of them being Misi Saljong or the Sun God. Garos believe that

Misi Saljong had instructed mankind not to eat the new crop without first offering some to Minima Kiri Rokkime, the mother goddess of all crops. It is believed that the goddess comes to earth once every year to shower her blessings on mankind. The jhum or slash-and-burn method is the traditional method of cultivation in these parts. The Garo tribes have been performing religious ceremonies every season so as to invoke Okamdoa Rimdosala or the Great Mother Goddess to come to the jhum field and bless the crops. This belief, which is closely associated with socio-cultural and economic lifestyle of the people of Garo Hills, made them perform the Wangala festival. The Wangala festival is therefore a grand Carnival to celebrate the harvest season.

There is no image of the God and offerings are made in commemoration of the God Sun. During the festival, Garos— offer produce from the first harvest to Misi Saljong, the giver or the Sun God, in a ritual called Rugala. The Rugala takes place in front of the house of head of the village called as Nokma or in a stilted bamboo shed built for this purpose. An undistilled rice brew known as Chu is given in offering along with cooked rice from the periphery of the field. These symbolise rain and hail and are an offering to Rokkime, the mother of rice. Rugala and Sasat Sowa are celebrated on the first day. Along with music, the Wangala also features A'chik sports like climbing oiled bamboo poles and carrying boulders. It is also a fair for selling weaves, floral decorations made of fish scales, woodwork and farm implements. The main attraction of the festival is the music and orchestra being played by men in a rhythmic fashion. People of all age groups young and old dress in colourful attractive costumes with feathered head gears dance to the tune of music played on long oval-shaped drums. The men and women dance in mirthful gaiety with the beating of drums, blowing of the buffalo horn trumpets and bamboo flutes. The men wear dhotis, half-jackets and turbans with feathers. The women wear colourful dresses

made of silk, blouses and a head-wrap with feathers.

The highlight of the festival is when 300 dancers and 100 drums descend on the field in their entire splendour in celebration. The name "Hundred Drums Wangala" was derived from the 10 participating troupes chosen every year from different settlements. Each troupe has 10 drummers, wearing feathered turbans called Kotips and colourful cotton scarves called Pandras. The oblong drums they play, called Damas, are made of wood from the Gambare tree (*Gmelina arborea*) and the membrane and chords are of cow hide. The Nokma leading them bears a Milam or Garo dagger and a shield. His dance is aggressive with war cries and celebratory yells to boost the morale of his troupe and clan. Katta Doka (talking in a singing style), Ajea, Dani Doka (describing Wangala by singing), Chambil Mesaa or the Pomelo Dances are performed during these days. According to the legend, Wangala was the dance of the inhabitants of water bodies. Humans were invited but they did not know how to dance. So the crabs showed them how to dance on land. The original styles and moves are inspired by the movements made by the crabs and the girls swaying and waving their hands symbolise plants rejoicing in the rain.

The Wangala, the age-old festival of Garos has withstood the trials and turbulence. With the passage of time foreign cultures and religions have been making their impact on the traditional customs and practices of Garos to the extent that today they are virtually fighting a battle for survival with the risk of disappearing. The people of Garo Hills are at the crossroads. They are divided between culture, religion and a fast-blowing Western influence. Despite the adverse influences Garos are tied sentimentally to their culture and trying to preserve their cultural bonds associated with the Wangala. Garos celebrate the festival every year to showcase the "beauty and richness" of the Wangala and preserve it as one of the symbols of unique colourful tribal culture.

The Indigenous Festivals of The Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur

by Dr. NINHORLA ZIMIK, Manipur, India

The land of Tangkhul is the abode of the world fame lonely mystic beauty 'Shirui Lily'. It is the land of colourful dances and festivals endowed with rich flora and fauna. The festivals of the Tangkhuls are agricultural oriented. There are more than 12 festivals which are observed in a year round. Celebration of different festival is a part and parcel of every Naga society. Luira festival (seed sowing festival) is one of the biggest and most elaborately observed festivals. Laa Khaganui (beauty contest) is the main feature of this festival. Yarra festival is the festival of youths. It is the month of jubilation and many songs are composed in praise of nature, love etc. Mangkhap Phanit is observed after the completion of rice transplantation and seeding in the jhum. Others are Manei Phanit (festival of tools and equipments), Chumphu (harvest festival), Thisam festival (parting festival to the spirit of dead) and many more. In the present day, there is gradual decline in the observation of traditional festivals. We need to revive and rediscover the dying culture of the Tangkhuls and thus sustain it. The government of India should give equal importance to preserve the diverse and myriad cultures of India.

Introduction

Manipur and North East India as a whole is a land of colourful dances and festivals. The Tangkhuls are one of the indigenous tribes of Manipur. They are settled in the Ukhrul District of Manipur and the Somra tract in the Sagaing division of Myanmar. It is a land of natural beauty endowed with rare flora and fauna. The world famed 'Shirui Lily' which is grown only in the Shirui Mountain is located in the centre of the district. It is land of the colourful Tangkhul Naga tribe with a rich culture and tradition which are in the form of songs, legends, myths, folklores, religious beliefs, superstitions, etc. They are deeply religious and observes gennas and taboos strictly.

Their beautiful arts and crafts speak volumes of their cultural heritage which stands the test of time and reflects the cultures and lives of the people. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people.

The mystic blue mountain ranges, hills and dales adorned with lush green forests and spotted with several flowers throughout the seasons vibrates and echoes with the sound of music, songs, dances, festivals and agricultural activities thus harmonising with the tune of nature and making the land vibrant and lively. From the beginning of the year till December, they are engaged in various field works and festivals. Tangkhul Naga festivals and songs are mostly agricultural oriented. Music and dance are the two main features and events of every festival. It is the time of singing and composing songs of various themes and notes. The festivals were also the time of telling folktales to the children and youngsters as it was the only time available amidst their hectic agricultural oriented lives. Folk songs are one of the most reliable sources of oral history and literature of the Tangkhul Nagas, e.g. the story narrates that after their long sojourns from China they took their last migration from "Thuangdut" Samsok (Burma) is supported by a popular Tangkhul folk songs which runs thus

"Oh! Milung kathui kaleida thuithoilo? (Oh! Whence cometh thou originally?) Oh! Samsok marok luda thuithoi (Oh! We originate from Samsok in Myanmar)"

Celebration of different festivals is a part and parcel of the Naga lives. There are more than 12 festivals which are observed in a year. In this paper, an attempt is made to present some of the common festivals of the Tangkhuls. The Tangkhuls have their own Lunar calendar and four seasons and twelve months in a year.

Luira Festival (Seed Sowing Festival)

Luira festival is observed in the month of

Marun (Feb) and is one of the biggest festival of the year. Before the festival, the housewife of every household prepares rice beer, sticky rice and other delicacies for the festival. This festival opens the beginning of the year. On the eve of the festival, all the village wells are cleaned up thoroughly by draining out water from the well.

The water that has been purified over the night is considered pure and a lady of high moral character and status should first draw out the water and thereafter the whole locality can start using the water. In the evening, the shredded bamboos which are to be used for the performance of bamboo divination and for striking out fire would be thrown up on the roof top of the house. Signifying the new year, the fire of the past year would be extinguished and a new fire would be lighted up to mark the new year by striking two halves of dried bamboo stripes which are broken in the middle and pulled by a string repeatedly till the fire ignites. Any widow of the village is allowed to light the fire from any family that has already ignited fire and have started burning in the family hearth. The male members of the family gets up only early in the morning and kills the pig, buffalo etc. for the festival. It is to be noted that these animals are domesticated in almost every Naga household. After having done this, a big mat will be spread out on the courtyard and the rituals of bamboo and cock's divination for prosperity and bumper harvest in the year are performed. In case the divination indicates any kind of misfortune on any members of the family, 'mangla hokasang' (invocation of the spirit) is done. Then a live chicken will be let loose on the outskirts of the village as a symbol of sending away the evil spirit for evading any danger that may befall on the family during the ensuing year.

The second day is called 'vamkashok' which means taking out. This is the day of cooking the biggest size of pork meat. On this day, pork is cooked in a very special way. The size of the meat is that of a grown man's fist. It will be cooked in a very big 'Lungpi ham' (Lungpi pot). Red hot chili powder is used to redden the meat and then cooked until the meat is softened. The meat is then placed on a big Tangkhul wooden plate which is to be taken outside the house along with the rice beer. Guests and friends would be invited and on this day, the family who can invite many friends as guests is considered fortunate and this

signifies his position in the society. With meat, they enjoy drinking rice beer as 'zam' (filtered wine). Till date, the festival is observed elaborately. It is customary to kill at least one pig by every family of the village. The significance of eating at the outdoor called 'vamkashok' is to solicit God's blessings abundantly through the seeds to be sown.

From the third day of the festival, travellers and traders are not allowed to enter the village for fear of bringing in evil spirit and any ill luck. This taboo is known as 'khasit'. This restriction is made known to outside people by burning bonfire around the fields and gardens. The village gates are locked and flagged with branches of twigs over the gate. Seeing the smoke from a distance, the other villagers will understand that the village is going to celebrate 'Luira' and that nobody could go to that village until 'khasho'.

On the fourth day, the village 'Awunga' (king) goes to his paddy field along with his wife and performs the first seed sowing sacrifice by killing a chicken. A handful of cleaned paddy is placed on a leaf and warm chicken's blood would be sprinkled over the paddy and the seed is sown in one corner of the paddy field. The chief will then pronounce as 'Oh! Kameo mawon, theila chukmilo' (Oh! Goddess of wealth, bless the seeds for bumper harvest). Then chicken feather would be protruded around the place where the seeds are sown. This is the declaration of the beginning of seed sowing of the year. This is called 'Awungshi kharuk'. It is followed by 'Shangrei kharuk' on the next day. On this day, every household of the village will perform chicken sacrifice as done by the village chief for bountiful blessings and bumper crops to the goddess of wealth 'Phunghui Philava'. According to Tangkhul tradition, no villager can start sowing seeds before it is done by the village king. If anyone violates this practice, it is believed that the crop production of the year would be very low.

Laa khangnui (Virgin beauty contest as virginity test) of Luira Phanit is one of the most outstanding features of the festival where the virgin dance is performed. In this particular dance, only virgins can participate. On that auspicious day, women of different age groups, after taking a good bath, oiled their hair and body and finally get dressed and adorns

themselves with the best traditional dance costumes and ornaments. The girls put on 'Phangyai kashan' (wrap around) which is a combination in red and black with colourful designs, a pair of brass bangles, one set of 'kongsang' (Naga broad necklace) over her breast and other set of 'kongsang' over the head dangling at the ends over the ears. To bring the adornment to perfection, a long chain in golden colour is fastened to the neck and two bells dangles at the end of the two extremes. The bells tinkle as they move in circular motion turning their backs on the spectators. Moving like the rock bees (Shireng) over beehives when disturbed, the girls with thier most graceful movements beacons the spectators. Young and old alike gathers around the place much before the competition starts. Like 'Pahuwon' (type of flower found along the river banks), the girls in uniformity, moved their hands, legs and figures gracefully according to the tune of the song sung by themselves and young people then starts judging the figures, the curves and bosoms (R. R. Shimray).

If a virgin refuses to join the dance, her character is questioned and suspected. She is no more considered as a virgin and after investigating and interrogating, a penalty is paid by her in the form of one live pig, if found guilty. But one discriminatory attitude is that such a kind of treatment was never imposed on men. On the other hand, if she joins the dance for fear of punishment and to conceal her immorality from the public, it is believed that some insects would disturb her while dancing and it did happen according to their beliefs. Such an unfaithful girl is fined according to the customary laws and in case of her denial, physical check-up would be conducted and if it is proved to be true, twice the penalty has to be paid by her. Thus 'laa khangnui' or virgin dance is "the secret declaration of virginity". Among the dancers, the most beautiful girl is made the hostess of the ensuing feast called 'Yarra' (youth festival) which would be shortly followed after Luira festival.

Yarra (Youth Festival)

Yarra as youth festival is a special festival for young people. It is celebrated in April, when the month is adorned with colourful flowers and fresh green leaves. Usually, the festival is celebrated in groups and young folks organise a grand feast in the house of their respective 'beauty

queen' selected during the festival. It is the month of merry making and jubilation, many songs are sung during this festival by the youths in praise of the beauty of nature and many impromptu songs are composed by sighing lovers, and as such this is a season of poetry, song and dance. As Prof. M. Horam wrote, "For every Naga, singing comes as breathing". A Yarra Laa (song) runs thus,

"O katang kara kumlo (O, when shall the season change?) Kapaiwon sahar won wonaya (Pink flowers, cherry flowers bloom) Iyar, maosei jikei, (In order to pluck)

Iya semiya semvaya (I run hither and thither)"

The song above indicates that man and woman longed for the arrival of Yarra Phanit (festival) for its many pleasures and merry making. Even the married person and children join in the feasting. First of all, they will search for a house to host the feast. After finding the house for feasting, they would collect rice for brewing rice beer in advance for the ensuing festival.

When the festival arrives, animals are killed for meat and vegetables are collected from the field. Fish, crabs etc are caught and collected for the festival. During the festival, each group would make sticky rice cake. This special boiled rice cake is called 'khamui dalu'. Even now, the festival is observed with great festive mood and gaiety.

Mangkhap Phanit (Festival of the Completion of Rice Transplantation)

Mangkhap festival is observed after the completion of heavy ploughing, rice transplantation, with much eating, drinking, feasting and merry making. This festival falls during the month of July which is more or less the beginning of the lean months. Since Mangkhap festival is a festival of rest after the completion of heavy cultivation, heavy feasts are arranged to replenish the lost energy. On the first day, chicken sacrifice is done. The roasted dressed chicken is cut and boiled in water without salt and spices. The soup of the chicken is drained out in a bowl and is used for cooking rice which is to be used in the chicken sacrifice. When all the cooking is done and necessary items are collected and ready, they go to their respective fields and perform the chicken sacrifice. After the rituals, the feathers of the chicken would be planted around the sacrificial alter and a particular leaf of a plant

called 'khanangna' are planted around the altar. This sacrifice is done to propitiate and invoke the spirits of the field to protect the crops from inundation, storm and other natural calamities. After this the real festive activities started. The best part of the festival is marked by invitation of relatives from other villages and from the local village itself. In this festival, married women are invited by their brothers and are presented with a kilogram to three kilogram at the least, of cooked pork and other food items. This particular gesture holds an important significance in the family and also the society. This is the time of paying a visit to the parental house. This festival is observed in the same old ways even now, but with some modifications and by adding certain Christian norms.

Manei Phanit

(Festivals of Tools and Equipments)

Manei Phanit is observed in the month of April for two days. It is a festival similar to the Vishakarma of the Hindus. On this day, hunting weapons, agricultural implements are oiled with lard and wine and meat is offered to the creator 'varivara' (god) to give more games (animals) in hunting, better progress in cultivation and to protect themselves from the enemies.

Chumpha Festival (Festival of Thanks Giving for the New Harvest)

This festival is meant for the first opening and taking out grain of the new harvest from the granaries. On the eve of Chumpha festival, all the village ponds are cleaned and water from the ponds is drained out thoroughly. The next day i.e. early in the morning, a woman of high moral standing is let to draw water from the well that has been refilled with spring water over the night. One unique tradition of the Tangkhul is that since their known history, they take special care for drinking water and drinks only pure and boiled water. Water from the ponds and streams are cleaned and drained out from time to time. They keep their ponds fenced from animals and no one is allowed to wash clothes in it.

It is taboo to start eating new rice till Chumpha festival is observed and necessary rites and rituals are performed to the goddess of wealth by the women. On this day male members usually stay out of home for two consecutive nights as it is considered as a bad omen to witness her performance of rituals. If her husband happens

to see the performance accidentally, it is believed that the person in the ensuing year will find no success in hunting, fishing or war.

A family that has a new bride will kill animals and make special prayers for her prosperity. They call this 'chumsinsa'. For the young woman as a bride, this would be the first time in her life to enter into the barn as a housewife. After the rituals are performed, with her mother-in-law at the barn, the whole family will sit around the family hearth and her mother-in-law would vacate her stool and let her sit on it. The significance of vacating the stool is that the young bride has been given the charge of every household work and she has become the mistress of the house. With the opening of the granaries, one could start blowing the bugles until the end of the soul separation ceremony after which the use of bugles was strictly forbidden. Having filled the granaries, the most touching duty was to bid farewell to the spirit of the dead.

Thisam Phanit

(Farewell Festival to the Spirit of the Dead)

Thisam festival is observed for twelve days. It takes place during the end of January each year. There is a strong belief that the souls of the dead do not leave the world until a farewell ceremony is performed. From the day of their death till the farewell ceremony, it is believed that the dead soul joins the family at every meal. For that purpose 'Thikhong', meaning plate for the dead is placed with a clean sheet of cloth on the Naga stool as on raised wooden platform. The food that is offered to the dead is then collected and given to children as it is taboo for the elders to taste any portion of it for fear of following their souls with the soul of the dead.

Thisam is marked by killing buffaloes, pigs and other animals which the family can kill according to their economic capacity in the name of their dead family members. The animals that will be killed in their name will become the animal of the dead in the other world according to their beliefs. Some old people get ready with articles, tools, shawls or anything that will be needed in the next world during their lifetime. From the first day of Thisam festival till the seventh day, the preparation for the last rites goes on which includes collecting robes for killing buffaloes, pine resins for using as torch for the rites, making rice cakes, brewing rice beer and hanging of clothes etc.

On the tenth day, all the effigies are brought to a particular place and are arranged in order according to seniority on a big mat. The younger ones and the children are placed in the middle and the stronger ones in front and at the back so that they can protect and lead their way till they reach the land of the dead called 'kazeiram' (land of the dead). The dead persons are believed to reach kazeiram on the same line as arranged on the mat by the living people. Food prepared for them are also displayed and arranged in the same manner. At this function, men and women of the same age personify the dead and acted as the dead person. He is treated as a person who is going to take eternal leave from the family. 'Thikhang kaphunga' (who personify the dead) then takes their seats by the side of their food and effigies which has already been arranged in line. In case of a rich man's death, the Thikhang Kaphunga in full death ceremony attire, dances around the vicinity with the dancing party. With the setting of the sun, Thikhang Kaphunga will once again dance around the courtyard and would pronounce, "Ara zatugei, mawung lui marakho" (Now I'm going away, never to come back home). As he pronounces his farewell words, he would go dancing towards the village gate and put down his 'vakui' (head gear) and hand it over to his wife.

When all these formalities are performed, the dead are seen off known as 'kazei kata' which means down to hades. Thikhang Kaphunga who personifies the dead would go down to a particular place called 'zeiphar', a little way down the village in a group. They would carry with them pine resins torches (meila) to light their way and make a bonfire with all the pine resins torches and come back home. The Tangkhuls in general, believe that the dead souls holding their respective torches move towards the west in groups in a procession. It is seen by people who watch late at night.

Conclusion

There are still many more festivals other than the above mentioned. After Christianization, many festivals are abandoned and only some few festivals with certain changes which do not contradict the Christian faith are still observed. In the present day, we can observe the gradual decline in the charm of traditional festivals as

traditional games, folk songs and dances are no longer given the same importance as in the past. We need to revive and establish good relations between the traditional and modern aspects of society so that the ancient culture is not only preserved but renewed and enriched. A nation is known by its culture and it is her identity. Observance of cultural festivals will take us back to the old humble and peaceful village lives and let us walk down the memory lanes. It enables us to rediscover the beauty, joy and purity of age old traditional lives.

To record the oral history and revive the age old traditional values, we need to revitalise and revive the traditional festivals as it will enable the community to continue to preserve their beautiful rich cultures which will enrich the rich cultural store house of India. The festival should also be made sustainable by promoting tourism festival. This will serve as an income generating source and many youths will start taking interest in cultural activities and reduce anti-social activities as many frustrated unemployed youths of the region will find a way out for living. This will also facilitate to preserve and develop the age old cultures. The government of India should also give equal importance in rediscovering and preserving the diverse cultures of India irrespective of caste and creed and the distance of location. It is noteworthy that DONER Minister, Jitendra Singh is planning to make calendar on the theme of North-East festivals.

References :

- Horam, M.; 'Social and cultural life of the Nagas'
- Lui-Ngai-Ni Souvenir; 1987, 1997
- Shimray, R.R.; 'Origin and culture of the Nagas'
- Zimik, N.; 'Traditional Political Institutions and contemporary and political changes among the Tangkhuls Nagas of Manipur'; Ph. D. Thesis

Persons interviewed :

- R.V. Mingthing (Ex MLA)
- A.V. Shimray
- T. Mingthing
- Stephen Angkang (Ex Tangkhul Long President)

Courtesy : <http://ijellh.com/papers/2015/April/11-109-117-April-2015.pdf?x72302>

Dr. Ninhorla Zimik T. Asso. Professor Pettigrew College, Ukhrul, Manipur, India

CHAPCHAR KUT :

Unifying the Zo People

by **Zoliana Chhakchhuak**, India

The Mizo are a group of people who live in the North Eastern part of India sandwiched between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Basically, the word Mizo simply means “People of the Hills”. There is much debate on the origin of the word Mizo. Some say that we are descended from a person called Mizova. Others say that we came to be known as Mizo after a hunter who had killed a wild boar with a sharpened bamboo composed a song in praise of his deed call himself “I, Mizo man have killed with bamboo....”. Strangely, in the 1901 census, there is no record of any person identifying himself as Mizo. Each one had declared himself by his individual tribe name. However, during the 1961 census, at least two third of the people declared themselves as Mizo. Therefore, the word Mizo itself could be a recent origin, maybe in the early 1800. But what is not debated is the fact that we have come out from a place called Chhinlung (Chhinlung, Sinlung, Khul, etc). Each of the tribes who claim their descent from these ancient people has similar culture, traditions, attire, food, folk tales, etc. They are spread all over the three countries of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Even in India, the “Zohnathlak” as we sometimes call ourselves have settled in the states of Tripura, Meghalaya, Dima Hasao and Manipur.

Although the various tribes have migrated and have settled in different places, far off from each other, the similarities in language, customs, traditions, food and attire, etc. confirm the fact that we were of the same people once upon a time. It is interesting to note that all these varied tribes celebrate the same festivals.

There are three main festivals which are celebrated by the Mizo or “Zohnathlak”. As the Mizo are an agricultural people, all the festivals are related to agriculture. These are Chapchar Kut, Mim Kut and Pawl Kut. (A rough translation of the word “kut” means “festival”). Among these festivals only Mim Kut has any

relation with the old religion. Mim Kut is the time when the Mizo people honoured and remembered their dead. It was believed that during this time the spirits of the dead ones visited their families. So food especially Maize (the word “Mim” means maize), zu (alcoholic drink made from rice), ornaments and clothes were offered to these spirits. There would be general merriment and feasts during the second day of the Mim Kut celebrations. Pawl Kut is a post harvest festival. “Pawl” means straw. It is celebrated in late winter (December January). It is a celebration of thanks giving. All the people ensure that no one goes hungry during this period. Eggs as well as meat are offered to each other. A tale about the origins of this Kut relates the celebration began when after a consecutive famine of 2 years there was a bountiful harvest on the third year. As done in Mim Kut, there is general merriment and feasts with a lot of zu during the second day.

Most of the festivals which were celebrated by the Mizo were prohibited by the Christian missionaries and by the newly converted Christians. Chapchar Kut has evolved and is celebrated even today can be said to be the most important and the most celebrated of the festivals. Chapchar Kut is celebrated during March. In the old ways, this was the time when most villagers did not have much to do. The past year’s harvest has been collected and stored and the forest has been cleared for the next season of planting. This was the time when the men repaired their implements, went out hunting or just lazed around. (origin of the name Chapchar – “chap” is derived from the word “vahchap” which is the area made up of cut down trees and bamboos and the word “char” which means “dry or dried”). This is the only time in year when the people will have what can be said a time of ease.

The most accepted tale of the origin of

Chapchar Kut is told like this : during the course of the migration of the Zo people, they had settled on what is now known as the Chin state of Myanmar in the area between the Run River and the Tiau River. It was during this period which is now celebrated as Chapchar Kut that the men of the village went to hunt. They were not successful and came back empty handed and ashamed of themselves. The village elders saw the shame on the faces of these young hunters and took upon themselves to console them. The elders felt sorry for these shamefaced hunters. "Young men, don't be ashamed. We should surely drink to your efforts." Saying this, they asked the villagers to bring out their zu and everyone had a nice time. The celebration that day was even heartier than if the hunt had been successful. The next year, the people had a similar gathering and the next and since that day, each year Chapchar Kut has been celebrated by the Mizo people.

It was during one of these celebrations that one of the dances of the Zo people evolved. This is the "Chai" dance. As the merry making continued, teenage boys and girls went around pouring zu sometimes directly into the mouths of the merry makers. As intoxication set in, they started holding each other, maybe for support and started singing and dancing. The "chai" is performed with men and women standing alternatively making a circle. The men hold the waist of the women, and the women keep their hand along the shoulders of the men. Then to the beat of the "khuang" (drum) and the "seki" (horns of the mithun or gayal) singing the slow "chai hla" they sway themselves sideways to and fro shuffling along to the right, then to the left and then towards the centre of the circle in a rhythmic swaying motion. The dance is relaxed and unhurried. Many of the "chai hla" (chai songs) are extempore and made up just there and then.

There is a lot of activity before Chapchar Kut. As the harvest has been completed just a few months ago, there is plenty of paddy. Men venture to the deepest forest to hunt for deer, wild boar and other animals for the Chapchar Kut feast. Large pots of zu are being brewed and kept aside for fermentation. Young boys are going around the village collecting the zu (called zu lawm) which is ready. It is a time when everyone in the village is busy ... busy preparing themselves for the ensuing festivities.

On the day of the Kut, the young women dress up in their best clothes wearing "vakiria" (headdress) and different necklaces. The men too, dress up as nicely as possible. They all gather in the open ground and with the men and women standing alternatively they start the chai. Throughout the day and the night this singing and dancing will continue. There will be no singing and dancing the next day if it is not continued till daybreak. The singing and dancing and making merry continue as long as there is food and drink which may last up to seven days. It is said that the people of the villages of Chawngtui and Ruallung were so immersed in the festivities that they lost all sense of time. When a parrot flying over their village accidentally dropped an ear of paddy, the merry makers realized that the season for planting was long over and it was harvest season.

Today Chapchar Kut is celebrated all over the world where the Mizo have migrated and settled. This is a festival which all Zo-people irrespective of their tribe have been celebrating. We still celebrate Chapchar Kut. Some during the onset of winter, some during spring. The "chai lam", "chheih lam", the vivacious singing and dancing are still there. The Kut has now evolved into a big cultural meet. The spirit of the festival is still present just as it was long time ago. The Chapchar Kut now takes place in a central place. In Aizawl, it is held on the Lam Mual (Assam Rifles Parade ground). In Tahan (Kalemyo), Myanmar it is usually held in the biggest playground. In Manipur, it is held in Churachandpur. In the US, the Zo people gather together and celebrate Chapchar Kut usually in Maryland. Many other cultural dances like the "cheraw" (commonly known as the Bamboo Dance", "khual lam", "sarlamkai", "solakia" and other have been added. Along with the "chai zai" and the "chheih zai", young and talented singers belt out modern Mizo and Western songs and enthrall the crowd. Young men and women wear their traditional dress and take part in the festivities.

Chapchar Kut has now become a unifying activity for the entire Zo people spread all over the world. Though international boundaries and oceans separate us, the celebration of Chapchar Kut reminds us of our common identity and brotherhood. It unifies us as a people with the same origin, culture and traditions.

The Last Song : These Hills Called Home Stories from War Zone

by **Ms. Tamsula Ao**, Shillong

It seemed the little girl was born to sing. Her mother often recalled that when she was a baby, she would carry her piggyback to community singing events on festival days. As soon as the singers took up a tune and gradually when their collective voices began to swell in volume and harmony, her daughter would twist herself this way and that and start singing her own version of the song, mostly consisting of loud shrieks and screams. Though amusing at first, her daughter's antics irritated the spectators and the singers as well, and often, she had to withdraw from the gathering in embarrassment. What the mother considered unreasonable behaviour in a child barely a year old, was actually the first indication of the singing genius that she had given birth to.

When Apenyo, as the little girl was called, could walk and talk a little, her mother would take her to church on Sundays because she could not be left alone at home. On other days she was left in the care of her grandmother when the mother went to the fields; but on this day there was no one to take care of her as everyone went to church. When the congregation sang together Apenyo would also join, though would begin; Apenyo would try to sing along, much to the embarrassment of the mother. After two or three such mortifying Sunday outings, the mother stopped going to church altogether until Apenyo become older and learnt how to behave.

At home too, Apenyo never kept quiet; she hummed or made up silly songs to sing by herself, which annoyed her mother at times but often made her become pensive. She was by now convinced that her daughter had inherited her love of singing from her father who had died so unexpectedly away from home. The father, whose name was Zhamben, was a gifted singer both of traditional folk songs as well as of

Christian hymns at church. Naga traditional songs consist of polyphonic notes and harmonizing is the dominant feature of such community singing. Perhaps because of his experience and expertise in folk songs, soon became the lead male voice in the church choir. He was a school teacher in the village and at the time of his death was undergoing a teacher-training course in a town in Assam. He was suddenly taken ill and by the time the news reached the village, he was already dead. While his relatives were preparing to go and visit him, his friends from the training school brought his dead body home. Apenyo was only nine months old then. From that time on, it was a lonely struggle for the mother, trying to cultivate a field and bring up a small child on her own. With occasional help from her in-laws and her own relatives, the widow, called Libeni, was slowly building a future for her daughter and herself. Many of the relatives told her to get married again so that she and little Apenyo would have a man to protect and look after them. But Libeni would not listen and when they reportedly told her to think about it seriously, she asked them never to bring up the subject again. So mother and daughter lived alone and survived mainly on what was grown in the field.

At the village school Apenyo did well and became the star pupil. When she was old enough to help her mother in spreading the thread on the loom, she would sit nearby and watch her weave the colourful shawls, which would be sold to bring in additional income. Libeni had the reputation of being one of the the best weavers in the village and her shawls were in great demand. By and by Apenyo too learned the art from her mother and became an excellent weaver like her. In the meantime, her love for singing too was growing. People soon realized that not

only did she love to sing but also that Apenyo had an exquisite singing voice. She was inducted into the church choir where she soon became the lead soprano. Every time the choir sang it was her voice that made even the commonest song sound heavenly. Along with her singing voice, her beauty also blossomed as Apenyo approached her eighteenth birthday. Her natural beauty seemed to be enhanced by her enchanting voice, which earned her the nickname 'singing beauty' in the village. Libeni's joy knew no bounds. She was happy that all those years of loneliness and hardship were well rewarded by God through her beautiful and talented daughter.

One particular year, the villagers were in especially expectant mood because there was a big event coming up in the village church in about six months time: the dedication of the new church building. Every member of the church had contributed towards the building fund by donating in cash and kind and it had taken them nearly three years to complete the new structure of tin roof and wooden frames to replace the old one of bamboo and thatch. In every household the womenfolk were planning new clothes for the family, brand new shawls for the men and new skirts or 'lungis' for the women. The whole village was being spruced up for the occasion as some eminent pastors from neighbouring villages were being invited for the dedication service. Pigs earmarked for the feast were given special food to fatten them up. The service was planned for the first week of December, which would ensure that harvesting of the fields would be over and the special celebration would not interfere with the normal Christmas celebrations of the church. The villagers began the preparations with great enthusiasm, often joking among themselves that this year they would have a double Christmas.

These were, however, troubled times for the Nagas. The Independence movement was gaining momentum by the day and even the remotest villages were getting involved, if not directly in terms of their members joining the underground army, then certainly by paying 'taxes' to the underground 'government'. This particular village was no different. They had been compelled to pay their dues every year, the amount calculated on the number of households

in the village. Curiously enough, the collections would be made just before the Christmas holidays, perhaps because travel for the collectors was easier through the winter forests or perhaps they too wanted to celebrate Christmas! In any case, the villagers were prepared for the annual visit from their brethren of the forests and the transaction was carried out without a hitch.

But this year, it was not as simple as in previous years, a recent raid of an underground hideout yielded records of all such collections of the area and the government forces were determined to 'teach' all those villagers the consequences of 'supporting' the rebel cause by paying 'taxes'. Unknown to them, a sinister plan was being hatched by the forces to demonstrate to the entire Naga people what happens when you 'betray' your own government. It was decided that the army would go to this particular village on the day when they were dedicating the new church building and arrest all the leaders for their 'crime' of paying taxes to the underground forces.

In the meanwhile, the villagers caught up in the hectic activities prior to the appointed day, a Sunday, were happily busy in tidying up their own households, especially the ones where the guests would be lodged. The dedication Sunday dawned bright and cool, it was December after all, and every villager, attired in his or her best, assembled in front of the new church, which was on the same site as the old one. The villagers were undecided about what to do with the old one still standing near the new one. They had postponed any decision until after the dedication. That morning the choir was standing together in the front porch of the new church to lead the congregation in the singing before the formal inauguration, after which they would enter the new building. Apenyo, the lead singer, was standing in the middle of the front row, looking resplendent in her new lungi and shawl. She was going to perform solo on the occasion after the group song of the choir. As the pastor led the congregation in the invocatory prayer, a hush fell on the crowd as though in great expectation: the choir would sing their first number after the prayer. As the song the crowd was waiting to hear began, there was the sound of gunfire in

the distance; it was an ominous sound which meant that the army would certainly disrupt the festivities. But the choir sang on unfazed, though uneasy shuffles could be heard from among the crowd. The pastor too began to look worried; he turned to a deacon and seemed to be consulting with about something. Just as the singing subsided, another sound reverberated throughout the length and breadth of the village: a frightened Dobashi, with fear and trembling in his voice was telling people to stay where they were and not to attempt to run away or fight. There was a stunned silence and the congregation froze in their places unable to believe that their dedication Sunday was going to be desecrated by the arrogant Indian army.

Very soon the approaching soldiers surrounded the crowd, and the pastor was commanded to come forward and identify himself along with the gaonburas. But before they could do anything, Apenyo burst into her solo number, and not to be outdone by the bravery or foolishness of this young girl, and not wishing to leave her thus exposed, the entire choir burst into song. The soldiers were incensed; it was an act of open defiance and proper retaliation had to be made. They pushed and shoved the pastor and the gaonburas, prodding them with the butts of their guns towards the waiting jeeps below the steps of the church. Some of the villagers tried to argue with the soldiers and they too were kicked and assaulted. There was a feeble attempt by the accompanying Dobashi to restore some semblance of order but no one was listening to him and the crowd, by now overcome by fear and anger, began to disperse in every direction. Some members of the choir left their singing and were seen trying to run away to safety. Only Apenyo stood her ground. She sang on, oblivious of the situation as if an unseen presence was guiding her. Her mother, standing with the congregation, saw her daughter singing her heart out as if to withstand the might of the guns with her voice raised to God in heaven. She called out to her to stop but Apenyo did not seem to hear or see anything. In desperation, Libeni rushed forward to pull her daughter away but the leader of the army was quicker. He grabbed Apenyo by the hair and with a bemused look on his face dragged her away

from the crowd towards the old church building. All this while, the girls were heard singing the chorus of her song over and over again.

There was no chaos everywhere. Villagers trying to flee the scene were either shot at or kicked and clubbed by the soldiers who seemed to be everywhere. The pastor and the gaonburas were tied up securely for transportation to army headquarters and whatever fate awaited them there. More people were seen running away desperately, some seeking security in the old church and some even entered the new one hoping that at least the house of God would offer them safety from the soldiers. Libeni was now frantic. Calling out her daughter's name loudly, she began to search for her in the direction where she was last seen being dragged away by the leader. When she upon the scene at last, what she saw turned her stomach: the young Captain was raping Apenyo while a few other soldiers were watching the act and seemed to be waiting for their turn. The mother, crazed by what she was witnessing, rushed forward with an animal-like growl as if to haul the man off her daughter's body but a soldier grabbed her and pinned her down on the ground. He too began to unzip his trousers and when Libeni realized what would follow next, she spat on the soldier's face and tried to twist herself free of his grasp. But this only further aroused him: he bashed her head on the hard ground several times knocking her unconscious and raped her limp body, using the women's new lungi afterwards, which he had flung aside, to whip himself. The small band of soldiers then took their turn, even though by the time the fourth one mounted, the woman was already dead. Apenyo, though terribly bruised and dazed by what was happening to her was still alive, though barely so. Some of the villagers who had entered the old church saw what happened to mother and daughter and after the soldiers were seen going towards the village square, came out to help them. As they were trying to lift the limp bodies, the Captain happened to look back and seeing that there were witnesses to their despicable act, turned to his soldiers and ordered them to open fire on the people who were now lifting up the bodies of the two women. Amid screams and yells the bodies were dropped

as the helpless villagers once again tried to seek shelter inside the church.

Returning towards the scene of their recent orgy, the Captain saw the grotesque figures of the two women, both dead. He shouted an order to his men to dump them on the porch of the old church. He then ordered them to take positions around the church and at his signal they emptied their guns into the building. The cries of the wounded and the dying inside the church proved that even the house of God could not provide them security and save them from the bullets of the crazed soldiers. In the distance too, similar atrocities were taking place. But the savagery was not over yet. Seeing that it would be a waste of time and bullets to kill off all the witnesses inside the church, the order was given to set it on fire. Yelling at the top of his voice, the Captain now appeared to have gone mad. He snatched the box of matches from his adjutant and set to work. But his hands were shaking; he thought that he could still hear the tune the young girl was humming as he was ramming himself into her virgin body, while all throughout, the girl's unseeing eyes were fixed on his face. He slumped down renewed anger he once again gave the order and the old church soon burst into flames reducing the dead and the dying into an unrecognizable black mass. The new church too, standing not so far from the old one, caught the blaze and was badly damaged. Elsewhere in the village, the granaries were the first to go up in flames. The wind carried burning chunks from these structures and scattered them amidst the clusters of houses, which too burnt to the ground.

By the time the marauding soldiers left the village with their prisoners, it was dark and to compound the misery it rained the whole night. It was impossible to ascertain how many men and women were missing apart from the pastor and the four gaonburas. Mercifully, the visiting pastors were left alone when it became known that they did not belong to his village. But they were ordered to leave immediately and threatened in no uncertain terms that if they carried the news of what had happened here, their own villages would suffer the same fate. The search for the still missing persons began only in the

next morning. They found out that among the missing persons were Apenyo and her mother. When a general tally was taken, it was discovered that many villagers sustain bullet wounds as well as injuries from severe beatings. Also, six members of the choir were not accounted for. An old woman whose house was quite close to the church site told the search party that she saw some people running towards the old church.

When the villagers arrived at the burnt-out site of the old church building, their worst suspicions were confirmed. Among the rain-drenched ashes of the old church they found masses of human bones washed clean by the night's rain. And on what was once the porch of the old church they found a separate mass and through a twist of fate a piece of Apenyo's new shawl was found, still intact beneath the pile of charred bones. Mother and daughter lay together in that pile. The villagers gathered all the bones of the six choir members and put them in a common coffin but those of the mother and daughter, they put in a separate one. After a somber and song-less funeral service, the question arose as to where to bury them. Though the whole village had embraced Christianity long ago, some of the old superstitions and traditions had not been totally abandoned. The death of these unfortunate people was considered to be from unnatural causes and according to tradition they could not be buried in the graveyard, Christianity or no Christianity. Some younger ones protested, 'How can you say that? They were members of our church and sang in the choir'. The old ones countered this by saying, 'So what, we are still Nagas aren't we? And for us some things never change'. The debate went for some time until a sort of compromise was reached: they would be buried just outside the boundary of the graveyard to show that their fellow villagers had not abandoned their remains to a remote forest site. But there was a stipulation: no headstones would be erected for any of them.

Today these gravesites are two tiny grassy knolls on the perimeter of the village graveyard and if one is not familiar with the history of the village, particularly about what happened on that dreadful Sunday thirty odd years ago, one can easily miss these two mounds trying to stay

above ground level. The earth may one day swallow them up or rip them open to reveal the charred bones. No one knows what will happen to these graves without headstones or even to those with elaborately decorated concrete structures inside the hallowed ground of the proper graveyard, housing masses of bones of those who died 'natural' deaths. But the story of what happened to the ones beneath the grassy knolls without the headstones, especially of the young girl whose last song died with her last breath, lived on in the souls of those who survived the darkest day of the village.

And what about the Captain and his band of rapists who thought that they had burnt all the evidence of their crime? No one knows for sure. But the underground network, which seems able to ferret out the deadliest of secrets, especially about perpetrators of exceptional cruelty on innocent villagers, managed not only to piece together the events of the black Sunday, but also to ascertain the identity of the Captain. After several years of often frustrating intelligence gathering, he was traced to military hospital in a big city where he was being kept in a maximum-security cell of an insane asylum.

P.S. it is a cold night in December and in a remote village, an old storyteller is sitting by the hearth-fire with a group of students who have come home for the winter holidays. They love visiting her to listen to her stories, but tonight granny is not her usual chirpy self; she looks much older and seems to be agitated over something. One of the boys asks her whether she is not feeling well and tells her that if so, they can come back another night. But instead of answering the question, the old woman starts talking and tells them that on certain nights a peculiar wind blows through the village, which seems to start from the region of the graveyard and which sounds like a hymn. She also tells them that tonight is that kind of a night. At first the youngsters are skeptical and tell her that they cannot hear anything and that such things are not possible, but the old woman rebukes them by saying that they are not paying attention to what is happening around them. She tells them that youngsters of today have forgotten how to listen to the voice of earth and the wind. They feel chastised and to their utter surprise, they hear

the beginning of a low hum in the distance. They listen for some time and tell her, almost in triumph, that they can hear only an eerie sound. 'No', the storyteller almost shouts, 'Listen carefully. Tonight is the anniversary of that dreadful Sunday'.

There is a death-like silence in the room and some of them begin to look uneasy because they too had heard vague rumors of army atrocities that took place in the village on a Sunday long before they were born. Storyteller and audience strain to listen more attentively and suddenly a strange thing happens: as the wind whirls past the house, it increases in volume and for the briefest of moments seems to hover above the house. Then it resumes its whirling as though hurrying away to other regions beyond human habitation. The young people are stunned because they hear the new element in the volume and a certain uncanny lilt lingers on in the wake of its departure. The old woman jumps up from her seat and looking at each one in turn asks, 'You heard it, didn't you? Didn't I tell you? It was Apenyo's last song' and she hums a tune softly, almost to herself. The youngsters cannot deny that they heard the note but puzzled because they do not know what she is talking about. As the old woman stands apart humming the tune, they look at her with wonder. There is a peculiar glow on her face and she seems to have changed into a new self, more alive and animated than earlier. After a while a young girl timidly approaches her and asks, 'Grandmother, what are talking about? Whose last song?

The old storyteller whips around and surveys the group as though seeing them for the first time. She then heaves a deep sigh and with infinite sadness in her voice spreads her arms wide and whispers. 'You have not heard about that song? You do not know about Apenyo? Then come and listen carefully...'

Thus on a cold December night in a remote village, an old storyteller gathers the young of the land around the leaping flames of a hearth and squats on the bare earth among them to pass on the story of that Black Sunday when a young and beautiful singer sang last song even as one more Naga village began weeping for her ravaged and ruined children.

Courtesy : This story is taken from the book, "These Hills called Home Stories From A War Zone" by Temsula Ao

Shrinking Green Cover

by A J T JOHNSINGH with KAMAL MEDHI, India

Dense forests, full-flowing rivers and colourful rhododendrons make the landscape of western Arunachal Pradesh stunning, but the State is losing its forest cover to wood extraction.

An incredibly wild stretch of Blue Mountains lay in front of us as we stood at an altitude of 3,352.8 metres and looked eastwards. The mountains appeared to have developed white wings as clouds floated around them. As the clouds cleared, one could see rhododendrons of vibrant hues draping the mountain slopes and the valleys below. In the distance, a slim silvery-white cascade assured us that there must be a

full stream running by. And, surely there was the Nyamjang chu (river), flowing freely from Tibet into India. The cloud-capped mountains of Tibet rose into the sky in the east and the densely forested mountains of Bhutan stood like a fortress in the west. There was a Chinese outpost in the valley along the right bank of the Nyamjang chu, and not far from it, on the mountain slope to the west, was an Indian Army camp.

We were in the higher altitudes of western Arunachal Pradesh to evaluate the three community conservation areas (CCAs) established by the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-India. The major ongoing programmes in the CCAs aim at promoting ecotourism, protecting the black-necked crane and its habitat, safeguarding the future of the red panda and its habitat and introducing Biolite's Home Stove in order to reduce the amount of firewood used in cooking.

Status of Arunachal Forests :

Arunachal Pradesh, spread over 83,743 square kilometres, has nearly 60 per cent of its area under forest cover, that is, 51,540 sq. km. It is situated within the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot, a globally important centre of biodiversity. The population density of the State is just 17 per sq. km. Approximately 60 per

cent of its forest cover is classified as "unclassed state forest, or USF", and is largely under the control of the local communities. Pressures on these ecologically fragile forests were negligible some decades ago. Today, several factors have increased pressures on them. These



range from development of extensive networks of road to connect every nook and cranny of the State, primarily for security reasons, and change in people's lifestyle, from being one that is largely sustainable to one emulating those in developed States. In addition, there is tremendous extraction of wood for various purposes. It is hardly surprising that the State of Forest Report (2011) has recorded a decline of 74 sq. km in the forest cover in the community-owned forest land in the State. Hunting for pot and the wildlife trade has been a serious issue in the State.

Conservation work by WWF - India :

Keeping these facts in mind, WWF-India has been engaging with members of the Monpa community in the western Arunachal landscape (WAL) since 2004-05. The WWF-India WAL covers 7,000 sq. km, including snowbound areas, within Tawang and West Kameng districts, which together have an area of 11,000 sq. km.

Its efforts have resulted in the establishment of the three CCAs—the Thembang Bapu CCA (635 sq. km) in West Kameng district, and the Pangchen Lumpo Muchat CCA in Pangchen Valley (98 sq. km) and the Pangchen Lakhar CCA (85 sq.km), both in Tawang district. The Bugun, Miji and Sherdukpen tribes inhabit West Kameng district while Tawang is largely inhabited by Monpas, who are Buddhists.

We started our journey to western Arunachal Pradesh from Tezpur (Assam) in mid May; the rains had just started.

Rhododendron arboreum was the first variety of the flower we sighted as we drove up the mountains inhaling fresh mountain air. But as we reached human settlements the stench of garbage and the smoke of burning garbage overpowered the atmosphere. A nullah near the Baisakhi Army camp was filled with plastic water bottles, plasticised cardboard cartons and other garbage. One problem associated with the accumulation of garbage was the proliferation of free-ranging dogs, which are a threat to wild ungulates such as the barking deer and the sambar. The dogs are wont to kill the arboreal red panda, the State animal of Sikkim, when the mammal moves from one patch of forest to another. Although a carnivore, the red panda is not agile on the ground. Leopards thrive on dogs but as a result of poisoning of livestock kills and elimination of wild ungulate prey by poaching, both the leopard and the tiger are extremely rare in western Arunachal Pradesh. A solitary stalking predator cannot afford to be injured and, therefore, it is possible that leopards avoid free-ranging dogs when they scavenge in a group at garbage sites.

The garbage problem can be addressed by opening a plastic recycling factory at *Bhalukpong*. Burning of plastic should be banned. The Army's help should be sought to remove the plastic waste from the northern areas to *Bhalukpong* for recycling. The local people should be made aware of the need to segregate garbage. Collaborative efforts with the Army can reduce the scale of the garbage problem.

In the fragile Himalayan terrain, road-building activities can cause landslides. At altitudes above 1,828.8 metres, adder trees, *Alnus nepalensis*,

grow from wind-dispersed seeds and naturally form dense cover on scarred slopes. Rapid revegetation of scarred slopes can be done with the sowing of *A. nepalensis* seeds and by planting species such as the common ringal bamboo (*Arundinaria maling*), Sikkim knotweed (*Polygonum molle*), and broom grass (*Thysanolaena maxima*) in order to give more stability to the slopes. In lower altitudes, species such as false nettle (*Bohemeria macrophylla*), sahyaru (*Debregeasia hypoleuca*), malata (*Macaranga pustulata*), castor (*Ricinus communis*) and sandpaper tree (*Trema politoria*) can be used to revegetate the scarred slopes. Local people should be educated about these plants and encouraged to work with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to reforest the mutilated slopes.

The most disturbing development we saw in West Kameng district was tomato cultivation in the river valleys. In fact, the cultivation was encroaching upon the mountain slopes, destroying the ecologically precious forests. Heavy pesticides and fertilizers are reportedly used to cultivate the tomato crop. Residues of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals eventually drain into the river, decimating the aquatic life and valuable fish such as the snow trout endemic to the region. Organic cultivation of the type attempted in Sikkim should be adopted in West Kameng district. People of the north-eastern region are generally averse to low-paying jobs such as tomato cultivation and so cultivators are forced to import labourers from other States. This migration of labour into Arunachal Pradesh is likely to affect the culture of the mountain people and even lead to poaching of wildlife because of the immigrants' lack of awareness of the mountain ecology.

Beautification of the landscape

The road construction work between *Bhalukpong* and *Tawang* has been going on for decades. Its impact on the roadside vegetation, particularly along the stretch on both the southern and northern slopes of Sela Pass (3,962.4 m), which experiences heavy rain in the summer and heavy snow in the winter, has been disastrous. This is where the *primula species*—*Primula stuarti*, *P. sikkimensis* and *P. calderana*—grow alongside high-altitude rhododendron species such as *R.*

complanatum, *R. campylocarpum*, *R. falconeri*, *R. glaucophyllum*, *R. hodgsoni* and *R. thomsonii*. Wherever the roadwork is complete, the BRO should be persuaded to plant these species on either side of the road to recreate the splendour of the landscape.

Along the route from *Sela Pass* to *Tawang*, there is a memorial for three Army soldiers who fought valiantly against the Chinese in November 1962 at the Battle of *Nuranang* between *Sela* and *Jang*. India is reported to have lost nearly 160 soldiers and China 300 in that battle. The three soldiers were decorated by the President of India—*Jaswant Singh Rawat* was awarded the *Maha Vir Chakra* posthumously; *Trilok Singh Negi* and *Gopal Singh Gusain* were awarded the *Vir Chakra* (*Negi*, posthumously).

Between *Sela Pass* and *Jang*, we came across the government-run trout hatchery on the banks of the *Nuranang* stream. At the entrance, an old and ill-maintained notice board warned against the use of explosives, which was an indication of the dismal scene within. There were many fish tanks but most of them were empty. The few fish found in some tanks were the size of a little finger.

Wood Extraction :

What struck us as the main conservation problem in *Tawang* district was the enormous extraction of wood. Oak is the preferred fuel wood as it is believed to generate considerable heat. Wood as fuel has more use in *Tawang* than in *West Kameng* as it is located at a higher altitude. *Tawang* town is located at an altitude of 2,743.2m, while *Dirang*, the main town of *West Kameng*, is at 1,600 m. Government offices also consume enormous amounts of wood for heating rooms in the winter. We learnt that a large amount of wood for *Tawang* district came from areas such as the *Mandala-Naga* grazing grounds in *West Kameng*.

Three steps are urgently needed to reduce the levels of forest destruction caused by wood extraction. One is a dedicated effort involving the local communities to grow trees solely for firewood. People should not hesitate to grow even exotic varieties to generate wood fuel in order to save the oak forests. Oaks are important for water conservation and for keeping the

mountains cool. Oak leaves and acorns are good forage for ungulates. Firewood species that can be planted are earleaf acacia (*Acacia auriculiformis*), brown salwood (*A. mangium*), Siamese cassia (*Cassia siamea*), whistling pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), shisham (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and bluegum (*Eucalyptus globulus*). In the lower altitudes, *D. sissoo* grows well even on barren hills.

The effect of climate change is visible in the Himalaya as snowfall frequently misses even *Bomdila* (2,667 m), the headquarters of *West Kameng* district.

If hydel projects are planned in *Arunachal Pradesh*, the government's priority should be to supply subsidized electricity for cooking and heating purposes to the local people rather than selling electricity to other States so that the State's precious forests can be protected. If *Biolite's* Home Stove withstands the test of time, it should be promoted so that every home in the State has a stove. *WWF-India* must convince companies and corporate offices to promote the programme of "Every home one stove" as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives.

The Black-necked crane's Habitat :

The black-necked crane, declared as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), visits two places in the *WAL* in the winter—*Sangti* valley in *West Kameng* district and the *Pangchen* valley in *Tawang* district. The major threat to its habitat in *Zemithang* in *Pangchen* valley, which is visited by about 10 cranes, is the proposed 700 megawatt hydel power project across the *Nyamjang chu*. Interestingly, the crane habitat in *Zemithang* is probably the only wintering habitat that is still a natural one considering that *Sangti* and the wintering habitat in *Bhutan* (*Phobjikha* valley) are largely paddy fields. Other threats to the habitat in *Zemithang* are boulder collection and erosion caused by the river.

The habitat in *Sangti* valley faces several problems. The local people have stopped cultivating paddy, and in some places they grow maize. This tall and dense crop makes the habitat unsuitable for cranes. There is a power line running through the habitat, which leads to occasional mortality when cranes swooping down

or taking off collide with it. On the slope to the south of the crane habitat, the Horticulture Department has promoted the cultivation of apple trees with excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers. Residues of these chemicals eventually drain into the crane habitat, causing its degradation. As a result water flow along the gullies to the habitat has reduced significantly over the years.

In order to rejuvenate the habitat, water from the *Sangti* river should be used to irrigate the red rice crop, a variety unique to Sangti valley. Riverbed stones from the habitat should be collected to build a rubble wall along the right bank of the river to prevent the incursion of the river into the habitat during rains; the overhead power line should be re-aligned, and the slope to the south of the habitat should be reforested using species such as walnut (*Juglans regia*), oak (for instance, *Quercus griffithii*), and *Alnus nepalensis* so that the water regime on the slope can be improved gradually. The youth of the valley have a crucial role to play in protecting the crane from overenthusiastic birdwatchers and free-ranging dogs that can disturb or kill the birds.

As we left the cool mountains and drove back to the hot and sultry *Tezpur*, we calculated that we had covered 1,146 km within the WAL—606 km in West Kameng district and 539 km in *Tawang* district. We had driven through some magnificent forests, but it was disappointing that we could only see three barking deer, seven gorals, 10 groups of Arunachal macaque and one male *kaleej* pheasant in *Tawang* district and a group of capped *langur* in West Kameng. It is obvious that poaching is still common in the mountains and is reported to be much more aggressive in the *Thembang* area (West Kameng district) dominated by the *Miji* community. In spite of the decades-long unregulated hunting, even now sightings of the taking and the tiger are reported in the *Thembang* area.

(During a visit to West Kameng in December 1982, the writer was told that elephants were regularly spotted near the *Tippi Orchidarium* at *Tippi* near *Bhalukpong*, a border town in the State, on the banks of the *Kameng* river. He saw elephant dung all the way up at an altitude of 2,133.6 m. At one place along the route, he met

a member of the *Sherdukpen* tribe drying the skin of a freshly killed *sambar* stag. There were plenty of great hornbills in the forests around *Tippi*. One evening, while walking along the river, he spotted 350 wreathed and 40 great hornbills flying overhead as they went to roost in the foothill forests. With the decimation of the *Balipara* forests on the Assam side by insurgents and internal migrants and continued hunting on the Arunachal Pradesh side, hornbill numbers have declined drastically.)

The magnificent forests around the Sessa orchid sanctuary (100 sq. km) in the *Bhalukpong* Forest Division seems to be intact, but all along the highway we saw road development works, increase in human population and Army and paramilitary camps—changes that are detrimental to the mountain landscape. Elephant herds have lost the critical *Pakke-Doimara* corridor at *Dezling*, which they used for moving across the *Kameng* from West *Kameng* to East *Kameng* and vice versa. In *Pangchen* valley, the *Tangyom Tsokpa Tawang* (*Tangyom* means equal and *Tsokpa* is a traditional institution formed by a group of villages to address a common cause) has banned the killing of wildlife, including domestic and wild animals. The society, which was established in 2011, has adopted the motto “*Jiyo Aur Jine Do*” (Live and let live). This may help protect the State’s wildlife, but it may not be good for the health of the people who lead a *spartan* life in the mountains where even walking is an exacting exercise and where energy-rich food is a necessity to cope with the extreme cold. In fact, the local people buy meat from Assam now.

It is important to sensitise the local people to realise and protect the forest wealth and biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh as development must not take place at the cost of conservation.

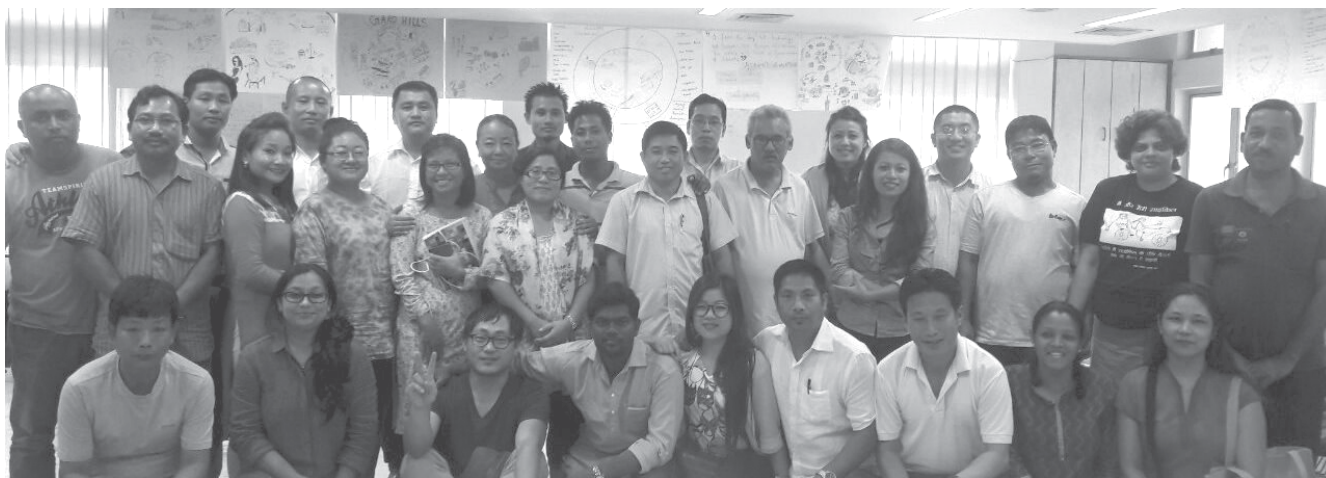
(The writers thank Dr G.S. Rawat, Dean, Wildlife Institute of India, for identifying plant species, and Dr Kashmira Kakati for her help in writing the article.)

A.J.T. Johnsingh is with WWF-India and Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru. Kamal Medhi is with WWF-India.

Courtesy : <http://www.frontline.in/environment/conservation/shrinking-green-cover/article9319062.ece>

ASHA (Advanced Socio Historical Analysis) Workshop at Guwahati, Assam

by ISD



The history of violent conflict in Northeast India is not unknown. The state repression and years of struggle against AFSPA (Armed Forces (Special Power) Act) has always featured as the main issue. More than festivals and rich cultural diversity, clashes, blockades, army atrocities, etc make news. For rest of India, there is little or no interest in what is happening in northeast and why.

To understand better different aspects of Northeast situation, a workshop on ASHA (Advanced Socio Historical Analysis) was conducted by ISD. The participants came from different backgrounds (NGO representatives, grass root level workers and journalist) of dealing with various conflicts. There was representation from five states; Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya in this workshop from 26th July to 30th July 2016 at Guwahati, Assam. The help of tools such as Composite Heritage (CH), Local Capacities for Peace (LCP), Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP), Actors Mapping, Conflict Tree and Camel's Back. Participants were better equipped with analysis and way forward. The major issues were identified and different tools were used during the workshop and the participants found it useful to replicate in their respective working area.

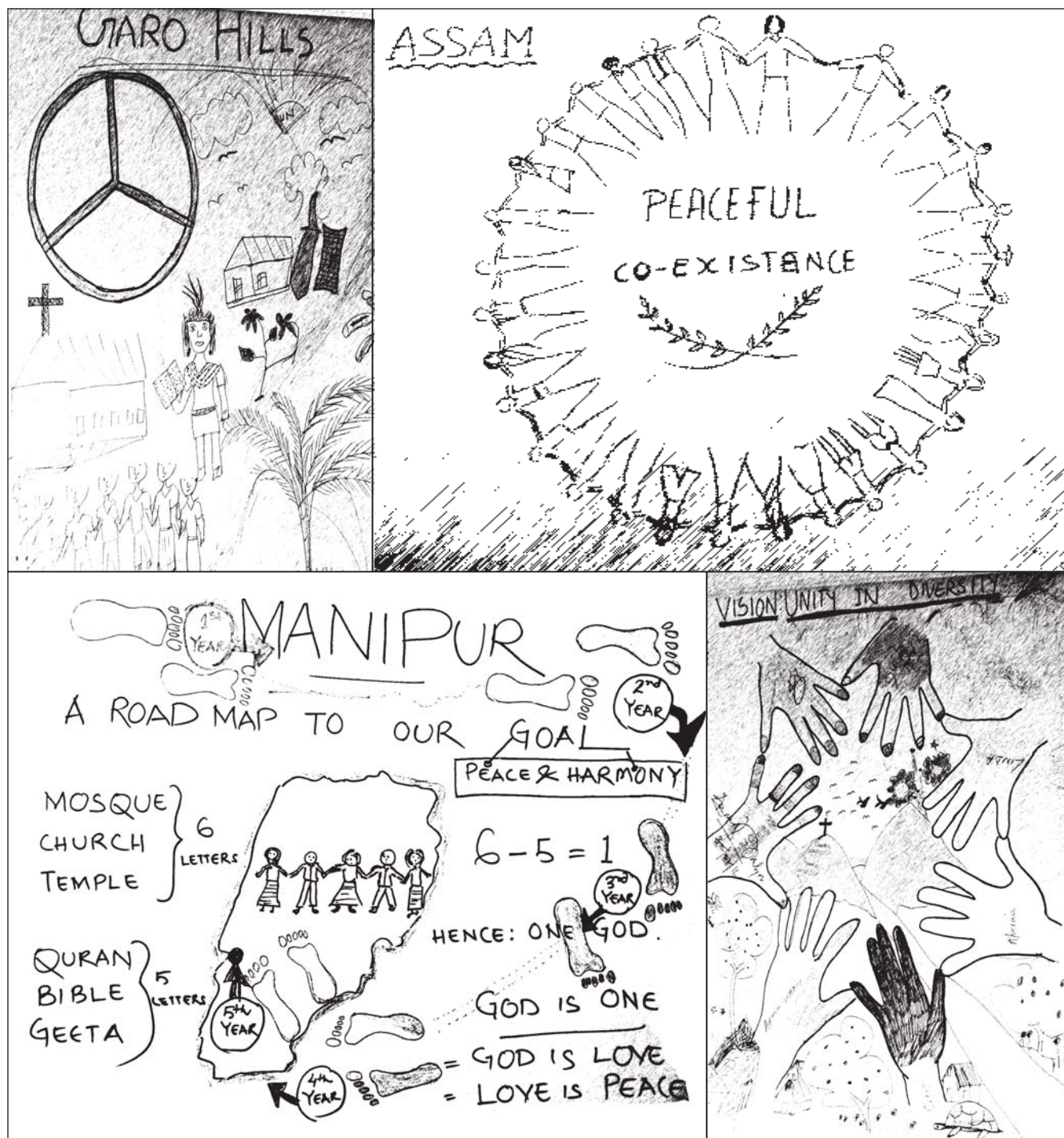
Participants' Views and Future Actions:

- "It would be more helpful if we implement the learnt conflict analyzing tools in our regions. We are always surrounded by the conflicts and hope these would help us to mitigate the conflicts".
—Mr. Jarin Wary, Assam
- "Before six months our team approached to the village where there was conflict between the villages. We couldn't deal with that. Hopefully this time, I am quite confident after this workshop to meet the conflict issues with the help of these tools".
—Ms. Marang Darshim, Manipur
- "I have learnt so much from other states about the culture and conflicting issues through the workshop. I would apply in my village and share the tools to deal with conflict".
—Ms. Gracious Marak, Meghalaya

- “This workshop was conducted at the right time because people were confusing as to how to face or confront conflict. This is going to be very helpful tools for us to minimize the issues around us. The learnt tools indeed are useful to figure out the core issues of the conflict and its effects”.

—Mr. Jagat Okram, Manipur

[During the workshop, participants expressed their future dreams and wishes through paintings]



The Movement of Bourgeois Poetry

by Christopher Caudwell

...Continued from previous issue

PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION, 1550-1600.

General Characteristics—The Elizabethan Age. – Marlowe, Shakespeare. The dynamic force of individuality, realising itself by smashing all outward forms, is expressed in poetry. Its characteristic hero is the absolute prince, with his splendid public life, which is collective and through which other individualities can therefore realise themselves without negating his.

Technical Characteristics—(a) The iambic rhythm, expressing the heroic nature of the bourgeois illusion in terms of the ancient world, is allowed to flower luxuriantly and naturally; it indicates the free and boundless development of the personal will. It is collective – adapted for declamation; noble – suitable to princely diction: flexible – because the whole life of the prince, even to its intimacies, is lived in easy openness. (b) The lyrics are suitable for group singing (simple metres) but courtly (ornamental stanzas) and polished (bright conceits).

THE TRANSITION, 1600-1625

General Characteristics—The Jacobean Age. – Donne, Herrick, Vaughan, Herbert, Crashaw. The absolute monarch now becomes a force producing corruption and there is a withdrawal from the brilliant public life of the court to the private study and the country.

Technical Characteristics—The Puritan takes the lyric stanzas and makes them elaborate and scholarly. Court poetry becomes learned poetry with a study vocabulary. Blank verse (Webster) portrays the decline of princeliness and loses its noble undertone. The lyric is no longer singable and the conceits become knotted and thoughtful.

THE BOURGEOIS REVOLT, 1625-1650.

General Characteristics—The Puritan Revolution. – Milton. The bourgeoisie feels itself strong enough to revolt against the monarchy, and with the help of “the people,” overthrows the Stuarts. But this realisation of bourgeois freedom proves dangerous: the people demand it too, and there is a dictatorship which isolates the bourgeoisie, followed by a reaction. The noble simplicity of the self-idealised revolutionary (Satan, Samson Agonistes, Christ in the desert) then vanishes in an atmosphere of defeat.

Technical Characteristics—The heroic bourgeois illusion returns in terms of the ancient world but is more self-conscious and not projected into the figure of the prince. It is personal instead of dramatic. The puritan revolt against the court gives it a bare and learned vocabulary; and this conscious restraint is reflected in a stricter rhythm.

THE COUNTER-PURITAN REACTION, 1650-1688.

General Characteristics—The Restoration. – Dryden, Suckling, Lovelace. Poetry forgets its noble sentiments and becomes cynical, measured or rational. There is an alliance of the bourgeoisie with the aristocracy instead of the people; and the court returns, but no longer in the form of the absolute prince. The prince is now subject to “reason.”

Technical Characteristics—Formal rules are imposed to restrain the “spirit” whose violence has proved dangerous. Poetry indicates its readiness to compromise by moving within the bounds of the heroic couplet. Court poetry reappears for the bourgeoisie is allied with the aristocracy, and therefore the simple metres and courtly elegance of Elizabethan lyrics drive out the crabbed scholar’s poems. The vocabulary becomes more conversational and social.

THE ERA OF MERCANTILISM AND MANUFACTURE, 1688-1750.

General Characteristics—The Eighteenth Century. – Pope. The shortage of labour makes the bourgeoisie continue to ally itself with the agricultural capitalist (the Whig “aristocrat”) in order to maintain the laws and restrictions which will keep down the price of labour and enable it to develop through the stage of manufacture. Poetry reflects a belief in the rightness and permanence of forms and restrictions, good taste and an upper-class “tone.”

Technical Characteristics—The outward “rules” are now accepted, not as a compromise but as obvious and rational ingredients of style. Poetry becomes Augustan, idealises style, measure, polish and the antithesis which restrains natural luxuriance. Vocabulary becomes formalised and elegantly fashionable.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE “ANTI-JACOBIN” REACTION, 1750-1825.

General Characteristics—The Romantic Revival. – Byron, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth. The development from manufacture to machine power proletarianises the artisan class and makes the restrictions of mercantilism no longer necessary. The alliance between the landed capitalist and the petty bourgeois ends now that the expansion of the market and the development of machinery causes manufacture to fling off its subjection to the country and emerge as industry, the predominant force in the State. Small capitals now acquire huge expansive powers and the bourgeoisie grow light-headed with power. The forms of the era of manufacture are a check on industry. The “Liberal” capitalist leads the people in a crusade against privilege in the name of freedom. Poetry becomes ardent and full of feeling. It sees in itself a kinship to the Elizabethan era of individualism. It revolts against tradition and yearns for a fuller, freer life. But the alliance of the people with the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution leads to a revolutionary demand for proletarian freedom. The bourgeoisie becomes frightened, retracts its demands, loses its mass basis and enters on a reaction in alliance with the landed aristocracy. Poetry, disillusioned, more and more withdraws into the private world of romance. It is too compromised to make much of social reality except by extreme hypocrisy or empty pompousness. All poets now betray their youth as they mature.

Technical Characteristics—Poetry revolts against the old “forms” by an appeal to the heart and the sentiments. Poetry demands simultaneously the inclusion of natural speech and the romanticising of speech by a return to Elizabethan and Jacobean metres and vocabularies. There is a strong injection of words expressing “abstract” ideas at the same time as sensuous and materially “rich” words come into vogue. Both combine to separate the poetic vocabulary from real life. Rhythm with Elizabethan poetry declamatory, with Jacobean contemplative, with Puritan elevated, with Augustan elegant – becomes with Romantic poetry hypnotic. There is a great advance in the development of poetic technique.

THE DECLINE OF BRITISH CAPITALISM, 1825-1900,

General Characteristics—The Victorians. – Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Swinburne, Rossetti, Patmore, Morris. The first capitalist crisis occurs in 1825. The poet becomes pessimistic or withdraws more and more into a private world, as the poet becomes isolated from society by the conditions of capitalist production.

Technical Characteristics—A general intensification of the technical resources already

discovered in the preceding era.

THE EPOCH OF IMPERIALISM, 1900-1930.

General Characteristics—“Art for Art’s Sake”; the Parnassians; Symbolism; Futurism; Surréalisme. – The poet revolts by extreme individualism, commodity-fetishism and loss of control of social relations. The poem passes, by a series of stages, from the social world to the completely private world. This revolt against bourgeois conditions finally expresses in extreme purity the categories of bourgeois production. It thus negates itself in anarchy, and must necessarily move outside the bourgeois illusion. English poetry now follows behind the rest of Europe in its development, owing to the sheltered conditions of English capitalism. The classic example for development becomes French poetry and (secondarily) Italian, Spanish and Russian. Wilde, Eliot, Flecker and Pound may perhaps be mentioned.

Victorian poetry persists in sheltered areas: the Country (Hardy, Thomas and Davies), Oxford and Cambridge (Housman, Brooke, Squire, etc.). The Great War expresses the insoluble antagonisms of developed capitalism, and the general economic crisis which follows it, 100 years after the first capitalistic crisis, closes this period.

Technical Characteristics—The attempt entirely to separate the world of art from that of society. The rejection of all the specifically social features in poetry as a revolt against convention. Words increasingly used for personal associations. Either the rejection of all rhythm because of its social genesis or its use hypnotically to release associations which will be personal in proportion to their depth and therefore their unconsciousness. Finally, the “completely free” word of surréalisme.

THE FINAL CAPITALISTIC CRISIS, 1930-?

General Characteristics—The People’s Front. – Poetry now expresses a real revolt against bourgeois conditions by an alliance of the bourgeois ideologist or “craftsman” with the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. France still leads: Aragorn, Gide, etc. In England: Lewis, Auden and Spender

Technical Characteristics—An attempt once again to give a social value to all the technical resources, developed by the movement of the preceding stages. This period sees the beginning of a complete change of the whole content of poetry, which by the end of the preceding movement had become contentless and formal. The question of form now tends to take a second place until the problem of social relations has been solved poetically.

to be continued...

Courtesy—Illusion and Reality

*Published by : Institute for Social Democracy, New Delhi
for
Peace in South Asia*

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH :

Al-Bilal Falahi Tanzeem Nawjawan Regd

Palai Khap Thana District Malakand,
Kahber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan PC 23000
Mobile : +92(0)3013017898

Asmita Resource Centre for Women

Teacher's Colony, East Marredpally,
Secunderabad 500026,
Andhra Pradesh, India
Phone : 040-27733251, 27733229, Fax : 040-27733745
E-mail : asmitacollective@sancharnet.in

CNI-Synodical Board of Social Services

CNI Bhawan, 16, Pandit Pant Marg
New Delhi - 110001, India
Phone - 011-23718168
Fax - 011-23712126
Email - cnisbss@cnisbss.org
Website - www.cnisbss.org

Centre for Social Development (CSD)

Palace Compound (west)
Imphal 795001, Manipur, India
Phone : 0385-2230004
E-mail : secycsd@sancharnet.in

Christian Children's Fund of Canada

India Liaison Office
Vinoth Vetri
Flat F2 (First Floor)
New No 37, Old No 73&74
Govindan Street, Ayyavoo Colony,
Aminjikarai, Chennai - 600 029, India.
Tel : +91 44 2374 0742 / Direct: + 91 44 2374 0743
Fax : + 91 44 2374 0741
Email : vmuniyasamy@ccfcandada.ca
Website : www.ccfcandada.ca

Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)

88, Senpara, Parbatta,
Mirpur-10, G.P.O., Box 367
Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh
Phone : +88-02-8011970-3
Email : ccdb@bangla.net, ccdbhope@bangla.net

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA)

4th floor, Rachna building 2,
Rajendra Place, Pusa road,
New Delhi-110008, India,
Phone : 91-11-25730611, 612, 25080758
Fax : 011-25752502, 25733763
Email : indrani@casa-india.org

Cornerstone

31, Teeds Garden IV Street,
Perambur, Chennai-600011, India
Phone : 91-44-45058270
Email : richidev@yahoo.co.in, cornerstonetrust5@gmail.com

Deenbandhu Fellowship

Deenbandhupuram via Vemgal Raja Kuppam
Distt.- Chittoor
Andhra Pradesh - 517599, India

Brot fur die Welt-Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst

Evangelisches Werk fur Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V.
South and Middle Asia Desk
Caroline-Michaelis-Str. 1
10115 Berlin, Germany
Tel.: +49 30 65211-1303
Website : www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de

Institute for Social Democracy (ISD)

110, Numberdar House, 62-A,
Laxmi Market, Munirka
New Dehli 110067, India
Telefax : 91-11-26177904
E-mail : notowar.isd@gmail.com
Website : www.sach.org.in, www.isd.net.in

Maleya Foundation

North Kalindipur
Rangamati - 4500
Bangladesh
Phone : 0351-61109
E-mail : maleyafoundation@yahoo.com

Peoples Action for Development - PAD

No. 4/124, Roachpalayam, VEMBAR - 628 906,
Thoothukudi Dist., Tamilnadu, India
Telephone: 04638 262388
Email : info@padgom.org, padgom@gmail.com
Website : padgom.org

Tariq Zaman

Res. Add : House # 271/B Railway Road Bamus City,
N-W.F.P Pakistan
Phone: 0092-333-9747161, 0092-928-613417
Email: zamantariq@gmail.com

Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha

Marma Samsad Bulding.
Pankhaiya Para
Khagrachari-4400, Bangladesh
Phone: 0371-61179
E-mail : trinamulcht@yahoo.com

United Mission to Nepal

PO Box 126
Kathmandu, Nepal
Phone: (00977 1) 4228 118, 4268 900
Fax : (00977 1) 4225 559
Emails : umn@umn.org.np (General enquiries)

FOR LIMITED DISTRIBUTION ONLY