

# Tribal Culture of India



An ITRHD Publication



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Indian Trust for Rural Heritage  
and Development

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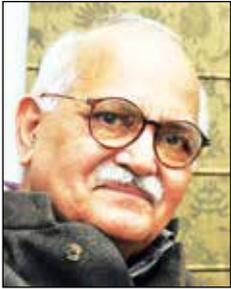
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## Editorial

The General Elections of India are the culmination of the biggest festival of democracy in the world where we, the citizens make the all-important choice about who will govern the country over the next few years. The beauty of the Indian Constitution is in its inclusiveness, its recognition of the fundamental rights available to citizens and its recognition of the fact that various sections of the society and various groups of people in this vast country have had starkly different exposure to opportunities and dignity of life. Our constitution therefore, recognises not only individual rights but also provides for group rights. One such group that can be classified broadly is that of the tribes in India. Although grouping of the vast number of tribes together ought to be merely an academic act since the pluralism of India is what makes the country truly incredible. The history of the origins of the Indian society and its chronological evolution consist of different theories that aim to search for the answers to the 'how' and 'when' of the subject in the absence of written records and an abundance of oral traditions. It can be argued that the epicentre of the pluralism of our society is the famed tolerance of our culture that has imbibed various customs and views.

The tribes of India and their culture, heritage and distinct ethnicity offer us a peek into the history of the Indian society through their oral traditions, beliefs and myths. The areas of the country in which the tribes are settled or have been migrating are also a significant factor to decipher their history and consequently the history of our society and in terms of anthropology. A majority of the tribes are found in a belt that spans from Maharashtra and Rajasthan in the west to North Eastern states in the east passing through Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal and Assam. Additionally, tribes are also found in the Himalayan region and in the southern part of the country. The general structure of the tribal societies has essentially been the key to their survival, subsistence and the sustenance of their culture. The men were invariably warriors and their skill and resilience provided their society protection from the wild and from being arrogated into other established societies, despite the migration that has been an elemental feature of the tribal people.

Scholars have classified tribes in different ways. Zonal classification classifies the tribes on geographical lines while linguistic classification classifies the tribes into four linguistic families viz. Tibeto-Chinese, Indo-European, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian. Some scholars have classified the tribes on the basis of their races such as Mongoloid, Western Brachycephals etc. Some have attempted to classify them as aboriginals and new settlers but it can be argued that this is a very difficult and uncertain manner of classification purely on account of interaction and engagement between the tribes. The articles in this issue give an insight into the different tribes and their way of life, their traditions and culture. As a nation and as a composite society, it is essential that this section of our heritage, heritage of the Indian society must be sustained, but it is even more essential that they are provided with opportunities and infrastructure that is available to the rest of us as they are equal partners in our democracy.

ITRHD, right from its inception, has attempted to work with different aspects of rural heritage through its projects in different states, and the focus has always been the intangible heritage that needs our attention. The idea of the central theme of this publication is to give a fillip to a discourse that would draw attention to the tribes of India and would also draw attention to the importance of sustaining an integral part of the heritage of our society.

Publications are a very integral part of the ITRHD, complimenting both the vision and the programs that execute the vision. Therefore, we proudly present the fourth publication in our series of special editions published by the ITRHD - 'Tribal Culture of India', which follows 'Rural Sports and Games of India', 'Oral Traditions, Myths and Legends of India' and 'Traditional Cuisines of India'. In this publication we have tried to cover a wide range of articles from different states of India, which will help our readers to explore and know more about the tribal culture of our country.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every contributor for their efforts and their contribution to this publication. This has been a very interesting publication to work on and we hope that all our readers would enjoy reading it and that, this in some small way, propagates the importance of the tribes of India and the necessity to be more appreciative, aware and responsible towards our heritage, culture and traditions as they have been the foundations of the cradle of our glorious civilization.

**S.K.Misra**  
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# Warli Painting

## Transformation of a Tradition

*Saryu Doshi*

It was almost forty five years ago that paintings by the tribals of Warli were first exhibited in Mumbai. Executed on paper in white paint against a dark brown ground they portrayed the world of the Warlis – their land, their environment, their divinities, their people, their activities

and their festivities. Densely composed, the depictions included rice fields with reptiles insects and animals, villages with their cluster of huts and people engaged in various daily tasks, the tiger in his lair on the boulder strewn hill, the flowing river with darting fish and clawing

crabs, the exuberant celebratory circular festival dance and trees in the forest beyond their habitations. Each painting was a variation on the theme, including more or less the same elements in the same pictorial idiom and yet each was imaginatively conceived and very different from the others. The animated forms and the spontaneity of expression in these paintings received wide appreciation and aroused curiosity about the Warli tribals that had painted them.

### **The Warlis**

Various tribes, including the Warlis, live in the rough and rugged terrain of the Sahyadri Hills. Physically, they tend to be short and scrawny with dark complexions. They lead a very basic existence which depends primarily on agriculture and forest produce because their deep reverence for nature translates into an unwillingness to take from the mother earth more than what is required. A Warli family hut is built like a square cube – dark and windowless. Within it, is another walled square area which serves as a kitchen. A narrow strip on one side of the hut is demarcated for the cattle. Men, women and animals inhabit the same space.

These tribal communities prefer to live in self-imposed isolation shunning contact with people residing in the plains. And though they have lived for generations in close proximity to the glittering metropolis of Mumbai, their mythic vision and way of life have been centuries apart from the materialistic concerns of the city dwellers. In the last few decades, however, the quality of their life has vastly improved and their reservations towards others except their own have lessened.

The Warlis are vague about how they came to occupy their present location. Their remembered history tells them that after their forceful eviction from their homeland in northern Gujarat, they settled in the hilly areas along the border of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Over time, they have adopted a dialect of Marathi as their language and their dress and ornaments also exhibit the influence of Maharashtrian customs. The most powerful individual in the community is the bhagat or the priest-cum-medicineman whose presence dominates and directs their lives.

The Warli religion glorifies the great mother who is venerated in the form of the Earth Goddess as well as her



emanation as Kansari (the Corn Goddess) and Palghat (the Goddess of Vegetation and Fertility). Interestingly, their songs describe the conflict between the dark naked Mother Goddess and the Vedic God Indra. Her humiliation and his victory are reflected in the absorption of Hindu deities like Narayandev into the Warli pantheon. They all co-exist in harmony. In addition, the Warlis offer worship to the four household gods who look after their small needs and shield them from harm. These household gods are hung from a horizontal pole in the kitchen. Just as the household gods safeguard the Warli home, the family fields are protected by their ancestor god known as Vira, while the chief ancestor Chheda, watches over the entire village. The most awesome among these male gods is the ferocious Vaghdev – the Tiger god who provides security to the area covered by three villages. He has to be propitiated from time to time to avert his wrath. His images are sculpted in low relief on a wooden or a stone slab and placed outside the village boundary.

The cycle of seasons dominates the Warli calendar. The year begins with the sowing of rice, reaches maturity during the harvest and ends when the rice is marketed. The year passes through several phases during each of which the god appropriate to it is worshipped and the occasion is celebrated by dancing and drinking. The end of the year augurs the wedding season -- an invocation to fertility, a prayer for abundance in the coming year.

During the wedding season, when there is a marriage in a family, several savashinis (women whose husbands are still alive) are invited to draw the sacred diagram of the goddess Palghat on the exterior front wall of the inner square of the hut. Using rice flour paste and stick brushes, a square or chowk is outlined and adorned with a series of geometrically designed borders. Goddess Palghat, with a tiny head, four large and long hands and two small feet is drawn within the square. On either side are the sun and the moon and next to her a ladder and a comb. On



one side of her chowk is a smaller dev chowk containing Panchashirya – the five headed god seated on a horse -- and the four household gods hanging from a pole above him. The space surrounding these two chowks is filled by the women with vignettes of village life. Around the tribal settlement is shown the forest with its stylised trees and beyond, in the distance, is a train with people in various compartments.

This painting is an example of group activity, with each woman contributing to it according to her ability. It is executed totally in white colour except for red (kumkum) and yellow (haldi) dots which denote as also enhance its sacredness. After the painting is completed, the priestesses sing songs which infuse life into it. This magico-religious wall painting is an integral part of the wedding ceremony. The bride and groom sit in front of it while the wedding rituals are being performed. Once the marriage is solemnised the painting is considered to have served its purpose and loses its meaning. It is allowed to fade away.

Despite the symbolic significance of these marriage paintings, considerable differences and variations are encountered in their portrayals – in the iconography of

the goddess, in the number and type of motifs comprising the village scene and in the complexity of the composition. Devoid of concepts of space, time and scale, these paintings have to be understood as depictions and not narratives.

### **Art of the Warlis**

The appeal of Warli marriage painting lies in its simplicity, directness and economy of forms which are essentially geometrical and linear. Despite their triangular bodies, the human figures with their stick like limbs and small round heads display vitality and energy. The same is the case with animals with their triangular or rectangular forms. The trees appear static and even stilted: their upright trunks have symmetrically placed branches on either side with circular flowers having dots and lines for petals. In many ways, these forms are reminiscent of renderings found in Neolithic cave art.

Warli art received recognition when it was freed of its hieratic connotations and presented as an art form on paper. In its new dispensation its forms became varied, animated and expressive and even slightly naturalistic. Interestingly, the works that received high acclaim were by Jivya Soma – a male member of the community and not by the women who regarded the art form as their traditional forte. In fact, several male artists continue to enact in white paint on paper, vivacious portrayals of the life they lead and the world they experience. Jivya Soma has exhibited his works internationally and is able to sell them at high prices – sometimes as much as Rs. five lacs for one painting.

Even though, the forms and the monochromatic palette in these paper paintings have their origins in the magico-religious marriage wall paintings, the connection between the two ends at this point. In fact, these paintings signal their departure from the earlier practice by completely eliminating the ritualistic aspect from their works. Not

only have they changed the format but also the content by enlarging it to include the quotidian and the mundane. The intent, thus, is no longer religious : it is secular. It is important to note that these changes have effected a transformation in the tradition, but not replaced it. The paintings on paper represent a differing version of the same pictorial expression: the two versions run parallel to each other – each relevant and meaningful in its own framework.

In the past forty years Warli art has captured popular imagination and the fact that it is extremely easy to replicate has led to its appropriation for all sorts of decorative purposes. Warli motifs appear in weave, print and embroidery on textiles, as etchings on pottery and on household articles such as flower pots, ash trays and coasters. As framed works of art, they adorn the walls of restaurants and bus stations. It is lamentable that in the process of moving from the sacred to the profane, Warli art has lost its aura.

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## Gavri - The Dance of the Bhils

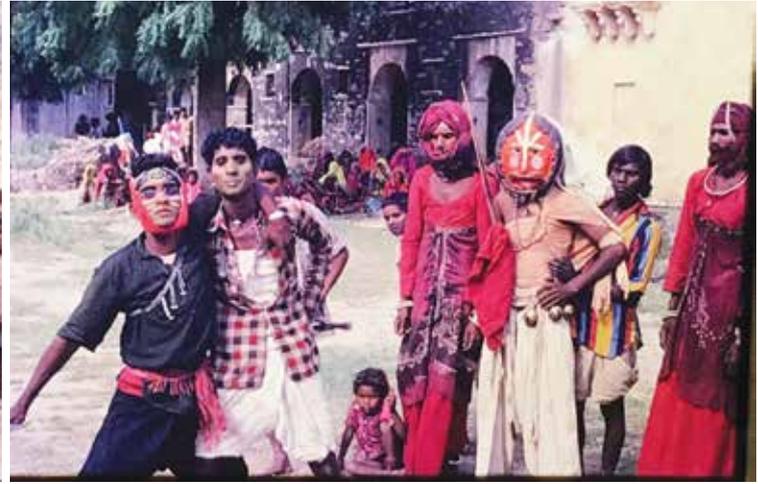
*Dharmendra Kanwar*

The legend behind Gavri – the dance drama of the Bhils is interesting. Ancient Hindu scriptures abound in the various legends surrounding the all-powerful triumvirate of Brahma- the Creator, Vishnu- the Preserver and Shiva- the Destroyer. Of the three, Shiva is one around whom there exist countless interesting myths and legends.

One legend is of the demon Vrakasur, or Bhasmasur and incidents relating to him appear, with slight variations,

in different ancient texts but one of the most popular and widely believed episode is the one related here.

Vrakasur wanted the power of turning all living objects into ashes when he would place his hand on the object's head. To obtain this power from Shiva he sat in penance before the sacrificial fire for six days and offered parts of his own body as *aahuti* (offering). On the seventh day he grew desperate and decided to offer his head as a



final sacrifice. Shiva appeared before he could do so and granted him a boon. Vrakasur immediately asked for the powerful and destructive boon and Shiva had no choice but to grant it to him.

Vrakasur, now as the mighty Bhasmasur, decided to try his new found power on Shiva himself. He intended to reduce Shiva to ashes and then entice his consort Parvati. Shiva fled taking Parvati with him - Parvati had turned herself into a bee and hid in Shiva's *jatta* (hair). Bhasmasur followed Shiva to the ends of the earth until there was no place left for Shiva to run. The *Devas* had followed the chase with great concern and when they saw Shiva's predicament, they rushed to Vishnu and pleaded with him to rescue Shiva and Parvati. Vishnu then took on the form of Parvati and appeared before Bhasmasur. Deceived by the *mohini swaroop* of Vishnu, Bhasmasur stopped the chase and proposed to 'her'. Vishnu as 'Parvati' agreed but put forward a condition - she said that Bhasmasur would first have to dance like Shiva. Bhasmasur, not realizing where it would lead him, readily agreed. During the dance he got quite carried away and Vishnu (as Parvati) climbed onto his shoulders and encouraged him to strike different postures. One posture led him to put his hand on his own head.

Vishnu the preserver had succeeded, but before Bhasmasur turned into a pile of ashes he implored Vishnu and Shiva to at least ensure that his name remain immortal. Both readily granted him his final wish and assured him that henceforth both of them would participate in a dance-drama to commemorate this event. The main character of this dance would be Bhasmasur but he would have the combined powers of Vishnu and Shiva.

The auspicious time chosen for this dance were the Indian months of Bhadrapada and Ashwin and the task of organising this commemorative event fell upon the Bhils. The Bhils were the favourite attendants of Shiva who not only trusted them but also shared a special kinship with them. On their part the Bhils have lived up to the trust placed in them and for centuries now these tribals of Mewar region (which covers Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur and Chittorgarh ) have been religiously performing this dance which came to be known as Gavri.

Gavri, or Gauri, is another name for Parvati and since the dance highlights this and various other episodes in Shiva's life this name has prevailed through the years. Not only the name, Gavri has also retained most of its purity of form and is, without doubt, a unique performance held by

the tribals - unusual, interesting and quite unpredictable. There are no rehearsals, no fixed number of characters who may perform at one time, the number can vary from fifty to one hundred and fifty, there are no seating arrangements made for the spectators and no efforts are made to attract them nor is there a desire for monetary gain. In fact, unlike other folk performances, Gavri is never performed at other fairs and festivals. The right to perform Gavri was given to the Bhils and in keeping with the sanctimonious nature of the dance they are duty bound to keep the tradition alive. Gavri is held sacred by every Bhil.

During the forty-day period of Gavri the lives of the performers revolve totally around the dance and there is no place for any other activity, nor is there a desire to lead normal lives. More so because there is a strong belief that once the costume is worn each character assumes special powers, he is no longer an ordinary mortal but an instrument of their beloved Shiva. Unlike other dance dramas where the performers return to their daily routine at the end of the day, the Gavri dancer will only go back to his family after the entire period of the dance is over.

All Gavri dancers are men but Bhil women consider it a matter of great honour to have the Gavri performed in their village and they welcome the troupe with traditional gifts. There is much jubilation among the village folk upon the troupe's arrival because there is also a belief that if Gavri is not performed in their village then it may lead to famine, earthquakes, floods or other natural calamities. It is therefore an auspicious occasion for the entire village - more so for the Bhils of the village who consider it their religious duty to participate, either directly or indirectly, in Gavri. The nature of the dance is such that hundreds can actually participate in it.

Bhils are the second largest Scheduled Tribe in Rajasthan after the Meenas and have a rich historical background. They are best remembered as the major military force behind the Sisodia rulers of Mewar, specially the heroic



Maharana Pratap. And it is in acknowledgement to their contribution that the Bhil warrior, bow in hand, figures prominently on the Mewar coat-of-arms.

### **Gavri - The Dance**

At the start of Bhadrapada and on the second day following Rakshabandhan, the Bhils, amidst much singing



and dancing, head for the Devi's temple in their village to seek permission from the consort of Shiva. "*Padharo Aainath*", "*Padharo Jogmaya*", "*Padharo Andaata*" is how the Bhils invoke the Goddess. After a while the Devi "enters" the *Bhopa* (priest) and through him gives the Bhils permission to perform the Gavri. The first act is the *gaba perba ro mahurat*, or the formal donning of the Gavri costumes. At this time all the Gavri characters also pledge to abstain from wine and women for the next forty days and concentrate only on Shiva and his *leelas*.

The first day begins at dawn with *trishul-sthapana* wherein the trident, again symbolic of Shiva, is installed with due ceremony. The spot where this is done is important because this is where the first day's dance is performed and where the troupe must return on two other occasions - *Bhadwa Beej*, *Dol Gyaras* and the final two days of the dance known as *Ghadawan* and *Vallawan*. Though the first day's dance is always at the place where the trident is installed, the next two days dance can be performed at any other place but in the same village. After which it's time to move on to the neighbouring villages where daughters of their tribe have been given in marriage.

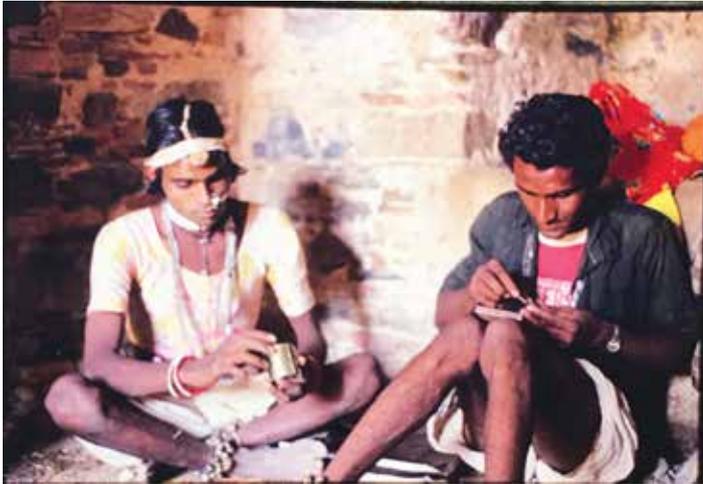
As the Gavri characters move from one spot to the other, so do the spectators. Despite the lack of a set pattern the

rhythm is smooth and flows spontaneously. There are no rehearsals yet each episode is performed flawlessly, an element of surprise and suspense is always present as the crowds wait for the unfolding of events. The characters are not bound down by a script nor a stage where they must perform, there is also no time limit because Gavri starts early in the morning and continues right up to dusk. Freedom of movement allows the group to move around at will - if half an episode is performed at a village marketplace then the other half may be several yards away, in front of a totally new crowd. They can also invite the crowds to join in for any scene that may require a large number of people. Though there is never an intention to deliberately amuse or entertain the crowds the drama provides moments of enjoyment when the bad characters are chased and beaten up by the good characters.

Among the character *Buddiya* is symbolic of *Bhasmasur* and has the combined powers of Shiva and Vishnu, he is the only character who wears a mask and carries stick in his hand. While other characters move normally, *Buddiya* is special, he walks in a haphazard way and moves backwards. He is treated respectfully by the other characters. Similarly, the two *Rais* are symbolic of *Parvati* and the *mohini swaroop* of Vishnu. They wear the traditional *odhni* of Mewar and keep their faces partially covered.

After the two *Rais* and *Buddiya* there are two other characters who together form the *maaji* or the main performers, of Gavri around whom the entire drama revolves - the *Kutkadiya*, or *sutradhar* and the *Bhopa*, or priest.

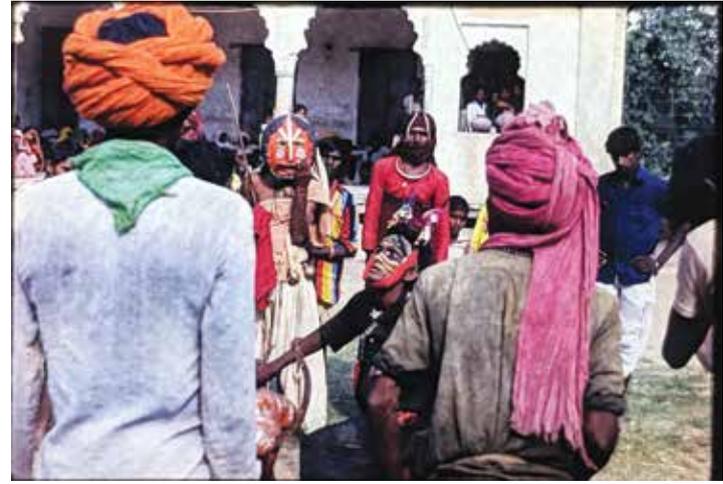
All other character, and there are over a hundred of them, are called *kheleyas* and they fall into the basic categories of Human, Divine, Demon and Animal. All *maaji* are human characters and some other prominent humans are *Meena*, *Nat*, *Khetudi*, *Jogi*, *Banjara-Banjari*, *Kalbeliya*, *Bhopa* and some thirty other' characters. *Kalka* or *Kali* and *Shiva-Parvati*



are divine characters who make their appearance in Gavri. Evil and egoistic characters are represented by *Bhanwara* (bee), *Khadaliya Bhoot*, *Hattiya* and *Bhinyawad*. Animals also play an important part in the drama and the *Soor* (pig), *Reenchhdi* (female bear), *Naar* (lion) are present in most of the episodes.

The costumes worn by the characters are simple but unusual. Black is the colour worn by evil characters and they often have two horns and heavily painted faces. Some characters like Mahishasur and Hattiya also carry swords. While evil characters are black, demons are painted blue, good human characters are yellow and divine characters are red and yellow. Other than the use of colour the Bhils adopt several interesting methods to make the Gavri performers stand out.

After the dressing-up it is time to begin the first episode of Gavri. First to make his appearance is the *sutradhar* - the *Kutkadiya*, accompanied by a couple of musicians he gives a brief introduction of the episodes to follow and also introduces the characters. This is done in a question-answer form known as *bharat*. After the *bharat* the *Kutkadiya* recedes into the background and allows the main actors to proceed with the drama. There is great excitement as



each character makes his appearance and is recognised by the crowds. While the show is in progress: the performers get more and more involved, emotions run high and they have to be physically restrained from getting too carried away and harming the bad characters. Each *natika* calls for a display of emotions like anger, fear, valour, humour and a rather debased form of shringar. Each episode marks the victory of good over evil and this is celebrated with loud music and dancing. The musical interludes between each episode provide light comic relief and also give the Gavri dancers a breather.

While the other characters come and go freely, the divine characters like the Devis are brought to the venue under cover, escorted by a couple of attendants. When the Devis do appear there is a respectful silence among the spectators and it is quite common to see the womenfolk in a state of trance when the Devis destroy the demons.

Whatever their personal difference, Gavri is the time when all the Bhils not only perform together but even live together for over a month without any problems and move from village to village. In fact so perfect is their understanding that the Gavri dancers never turn up at a village where Gavri is being performed by another group.

Should a visiting troupe find itself in such a situation then there is no hesitation in joining the first group and giving a joint performance. But the rule that no two groups can perform in one village is adhered to very strictly.

After the dance has been performed for over a month in different villages, it is time for the Bhils to return to the village from where they started. The final two days are known as Ghadawan and Vallawan and these are carried out as per their religious beliefs. According to the Indian calendar these days fall on the *Ashwin Vadi Chathurth*

*Dashmi*. On this day the Bhils, having almost reached the end of their religious duty are in a state of feverish excitement, they carry unsheathed swords and attack the crop fields on their way home, this is called *Sathya-Khelna*. All Gavri performers head for a potter's house to a traditional welcome. From here they take black decorated clay elephants and escort them amidst much devotional song' and dancing and immerse them with due religious rites. Their duty done, the Bhils head home and return to their normal routine.

# Appreciation of a Non-Artist

*Dr. Bhupinder Singh*

‘Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes[STs] as those communities, numbering over 700, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution and declared as such by the President through public notifications . These communities live in different topographical, ecological and climatic conditions. Also called *adivasis*, most of them used to inhabit remote mountains, hills, slopes and forests till recently. Communications having eased of late, some of them have continued to live in the same habitat while others have occupied plains areas’.

## **Diversity among Tribal Communities**

Of hugely varying numerical strengths ranging from Sentinelese just 15 souls to Gonds, Bhils, Santals having population running into tens of lakhs, tribal communities are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. Considering the three parameters, a few tribal groups at one end of the spectrum have almost reached levels close to the mainstream population groups. A majority of the Schedule Tribe (ST) communities occupy intermediate positions, more towards the right of centre of the spectrum. Lagging behind badly, at the other extreme end there are about 75 very backward small ST groups known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) officially defined as those who are characterised by pre-agriculture level of technology, a stagnant or declining population, extremely low literacy and subsistence level of economy. Odisha boasts of hosting the largest number of tribal communities in any state, 62, listed as STs. Of the 5 PVTGs of Andaman & Nicobar (A&N) islands, the Sentinelese group has been the most atypical of the atypical

PVTGs among the Indian population. While other four groups have been officially befriended, Sentinelese still stand out. Presently, the group has shot into public gaze because of the American John Allen Chau’s killing by its members. Despite numerous reports of anthropologists, sociologists, experienced governments experts (I being one among them) over decades, a viable cogent policy has not been evolved for not only PVTGs but also the other ST groups. In 1988, I had cruised for reconnaissance at one-and-a-half arrow distance from the shore under their threat.

## **Culture**

Quite often, one comes across “culture” being interpreted narrowly as art and crafts merely. But I would rather go by an extract of broad understanding of culture, as defined by Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopaedia:

“Culture...consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies and symbols. Variations among cultures is attributable to such factors as differing physical habitats and resources; the range of possibilities inherent in areas such as language, ritual and social organisation; and historical phenomena such as development of links with other cultures.....”

The definition above is fairly elaborate. But when we consider tribal culture, I feel it is desirable to include ethnicity also as a factor of variations not only between

non-tribal and tribal cultures, as also among many groups of tribal communities. Nevertheless, the extract appears to be sufficiently comprehensive though it might not cover all the vast spectral quality features of human life. In any event, one would like to go by holistic route to appreciate culture of a community.

The habitat and natural resources endowment determine the choice of occupations and avocations of the concerned group. Even now quite a large number of tribal clans and communities live in forested and hill areas though a larger number used to in the past. Their occupations have been linked to hunting, employment in forestry (logging etc.), collection and value-addition of varied items of forest produce and, wherever and whatever land was available, farming. Some other communities having moved to valleys and plain areas took mainly to farming. The forest-hill-dwellers needed to be living close together to be able to meet the hazards of animal and human predators. That infused into them the spirit of communitarianism, of looking after one another, helping each other, of living together harmoniously. The total ecologic setting influenced their style of living in contrast to the individualism of modern man.

The two contrasting sets of life lived for centuries hundreds or thousands of miles apart from each other created a gulf of alienation from each other. The plains people advanced ahead of the remote hills-forest dwelling tribes owing mainly to better infrastructure and means of communication in the plains enabling continual effervescent cultural contacts. The stigmatised latter were pushed to the bottom of the caste heap.

Dependent a great deal on environment for their existential and spiritual needs, the tribal people have been reverent towards forest and ecology. They draw from nature as per their need abjuring greed, adhering to the principle of sustainable development. Spiritually, their deities and

ancestral spirits reside in the environment all around, accessible to the living through their priests and shaman. Having adopted a life-style in consonance with the given ecologic conditions, the wider society should accept them as equal and respected citizens.

One instance among a legion- the Jarawa tribe of A&N Isles, a PVTG, which avoided for generations contact with the society around, has nevertheless been looked after the A&N administration. An official party of Delhi visitors were outraged to see an officer of the Administration not only reprimanding a member of the Jarawa tribe for chewing tobacco but also rummaging his bag to collect and throw away into bushes the entire quantity of tobacco it contained. Tobacco is not grown by them-the habit would likely have been picked up from a government official. The act hit the self-respect writ large on the face of that tribal individual. A culture marinated in superiority needs to be replaced by one kneaded in equality.

### **Education - The Prime Requisite**

Most tribal communities in India and indeed the world over led remote, cloistered existence in hilly areas. Dependent on land and forest, their needs were limited and languages did not have to stretch too much, constraining expansion. Even today, relatively speaking, tribal languages lag behind.

Education promotes all-round development. There was a time, not long ago, when many of the tribal communities had a system of rounded training of youth in dormitories which went by different names like 'Ghotul' among the Muria in the erstwhile undivided Bastar district in MP, 'Dhumkuria' among the Oraon in Jharkhand, 'Ghitora' among the Munda and 'Ho' also in Jharkhand, 'Morung' among the Naga etc. Notable sociologists like SC Roy, Sachchidananda and F.V Haimendorf have recorded and done work on these dormitories.

Independent India's first Education Commission, chaired Prof. DS Kothari [1964-66], observed that one of the important objectives of education is to equalise opportunity enabling backward and under-privileged classes to use education as a lever for improvement of their condition. It is the firm belief of the present writer, and he has emphasised it in various reports and writings, that in planning for tribal development, education should have the first priority. In reality, tribal areas have failed to attract commensurate fiscal, personnel and infrastructural resources not only for education but also overall.

It is well known that education is a part of and is embedded in culture and culture burgeons through education and knowledge. Sometimes rank western education is rightly faulted on the ground that an average Indian child and even his teacher may not comprehend what an elm tree looks like or what a fiord is. Similarly, an average *adivasi* child may be lost when his teacher talks of A for apple or E for escalator. In applying this test, one realises that since independence, with a few exceptions education being imparted to tribal children across the country has been presented in the dough of an alien culture. The insipidity of such a learning process does not inspire learning, impeding educational growth.

Two Commissions set up in 1960 and 2002 under Article 339 (1) of the constitution to look into issues concerning STs and scheduled areas made, inter alia, strong recommendations (a) for creating adequate infrastructure for schools and other educational establishments in tribal areas (b) tribal dialects should be the medium of instruction in the lower primary classes while regional languages could be adopted in higher classes in tribal area schools and (c) the teachers should invariably know the concerned tribal language. Incidentally, I was a member of the latter Commission. The Planning Commission's successive working groups made similar recommendations.

## **Tribal Art and Crafts**

The more than 700 tribal communities in India are heterogeneous, in howsoever small or big measure, in respect of their habitats, occupations and avocations, beliefs, culture, language etc. A conspicuous feature among them is a creative urge running as a common strand in the make-up of individual tribal men and women manifest in forms like plastic and performing arts as well as crafts. In tribal arts and crafts, we sense projection of power and vigour in the products created. The same power and vigour is in evidence abundantly in the dances at the end of the day when tribal men and women gyrate together in unison to the tune of songs and drum-beats.

An article written by J. Swaminathan in 'Vacham Adivasi', July 1992 encapsulates what some genuine artists have felt about tribal art. An extract from his essay: "The power and vitality of tribal art was discovered by Picasso and a number of European artists in the beginning of this century [twentieth] and as William Rubin puts it, they found 'affinity' with it. Whether it was a matter of affinity or they were directly influenced by tribal art does not concern us here. What is of significance is the fact that they realised that tribal art was not to be treated either as curio objects or the art of the people with 'under-developed' minds. They realised that tribal art was not simple but highly economical and reductive rendering of complex concepts". Swaminathan adds that we are concerned with the "vital, expressive, evocative and magical –magical not in the socio-anthropological sense of the term –but in the phenomenal dimension of *adivasi* art".

Our own experience is that a distinct characteristic of tribal life is that arts and crafts form a part and parcel of tribal life. Interwoven, both arts and crafts issue out of life. As in arts, the crafts present a wide range of expression from the primeval force to a degree of sophistication. The tools and implements which some of the tribal communities use e.g.

fishing nets, hunting arrows, war weapons, oil containers, smoking pipes, combs, musical instruments are shaped artistically. The Santal of the eastern region of India, that is in the states of Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar as well as the Saora of Odisha are well known for decoration through painting of their house-walls. Basket-making craft has been adopted by numerous ST communities as in Bengal, Odisha, Gujarat and a number of north-eastern tribes. Mahalis of Bengal and Kotwalias of Gujarat make artistic baskets.

Some tribal communities used to make metal, like bronze, and non-metal figures representing their gods and goddesses symbolising fusion of imagination and invocation. Among the Odishan Saora, it used to be a product made mainly by shamans. One may conjecture the same would have been the case with the Kondh and Bathudi of the same state, the Mudia and Bhatra of Bastar district in Chattisgarh state and some other ST communities. But, gradually, these articles found their way to the markets in India and abroad and attracted customers as decorative items, turning their value from sacred to profane. One cannot help remarking that even to some discerning Indians, the tribal objects of art do not please because they lack refinement, polish, a sense of proportion and attention to details. In a world which is run basically on machine steel-polish, it is the tribal art which infuses one with energy and strength.

### **A Holistic Culture**

Apart from the occupational rhythm of agriculture and allied occupations in common with non-tribal societies, and distinct from arts and crafts of tribal societies, it

is usually assumed that tribal people do not possess adequate scientific temper. This proposition may not be acceptable as true axiomatically. Since generations, tribal shifting cultivation has been made scientific by them, by leavening its cycle with two or three even five years fallow. Secondly, yields of paddy or any other crop have multiplied through terrace cultivation practised by the Saora of Odisha and several tribes in the north-east, on hill slopes which otherwise would have yielded much less. Space does not permit citing other examples.

In contrast to the modern man used to taming nature, since ages most tribal communities have adopted ecologic harmony, sustainable economy and communitarian ethos in their life-style, segueing into their cultural fabric.

The quintessence of the tribal milieu is that tribal life is suffused with holistic daily and seasonal rhythms, unlike the life of vast majority of modern humans for whom the rhythm is more limited like the day comprised of 6-8 hours of work and the balance for the routine activities of upkeep of the body. For the latter, generally, mostly non-participatory entertainment follows at the week-end, breaking the monotonous quotidian routine; the arts, whether performing or plastic, have tended to become the preserve of the professional. On the other hand practise of arts, crafts, music, dance, and specially their spontaneity, cater to joie d'vivre of tribal folks, as a part of their everyday culture. Amazingly, penury and poetry walk hand in hand, encapsulated in a Munda saying: '*Sen ge susung, Kaji ge durung*', meaning to 'walk is to dance, to speak is to sing'.

# Tribals of Tamil Nadu

*MG Devasahayam*

## **The Geography**

From the tribal community perspective Tamil Nadu can be broadly divided into two geographical divisions - the eastern coastline and the mountainous region in the north and west where a large majority of tribal people live. Western Ghats (Sahyadri hills) run southwards along the whole length of the western border of the state until they terminate at Kanyakumari which is the southernmost tip of the state and the country. Eastern Ghats originating in Orissa and passing through Andhra Pradesh enter Tamil Nadu and run across the districts of Thiruvannamalai, Salem and Coimbatore. They finally join the Western Ghats to form the Nilgiri Plateau where primitive tribes like Toda, Kurumba and Kota live.

The important hill groups like the Jawadhu hills and Yelagiri hills of Thiruvannamalai and Vellore districts, the Kalrayan hills of Villupuram and Salem districts, the Pachamalais, the Kollimalais and Yercaud ranges of Salem district, the Anaimalais of Coimbatore district, the Sitteri hills of Dharmapuri district, the Palani of Madurai district are an offshoot of either the Eastern or the Western Ghats. Malayali, Irula and Kurumans are the chief tribes inhabiting these hills.

Coimbatore district is bounded on the north by the arm of Western Ghats over an area of 60 miles towards the east. This area consists of tall hills called Biligiri-Rangam and Hasanur hills on the Karnataka border and Burgur and Palamalai hills on the border of Salem district. On the west are the Velliangiri and Boluvampatti hills, which are an extension of the Western Ghats. On the south, another arm

of the Western Ghats stretches from the Anaimalais on the border of Kerala and the Palani hills in Dindigal district. Irula, Sholaga and Malasar, are the chief tribes inhabiting these hilly areas. The Sitteri hills of Dharmapuri district are inhabited by Malayalis, Irulas and Kurumans. Palliyan, Pulayan and Muduvan tribes are found in the Palani hills of Dindigal district. Deep down south, Kaanikkar tribe live in the Districts of Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli.

The Nilgiris mountains are unique. They are formed at the junction of the ranges of the Eastern and Western Ghats, which run southwards at a converging angle in the state. These mountains which were endowed with thick valuable forests in the early 19th century, are now transformed into tea and coffee plantations and rich cultivation fields for tribes like Toda, Kurumba, Kota, Irula and Paniya. Several non-tribal groups immigrated into the Nilgiri plateau reducing the tribal people to a minority group.

## **Tribal Groups**

Despite such dispersal and wide variety tribals number only 7.95 lakh (1.10 per cent) of total population of 7.21 crore in Tamil Nadu as per 2011 census. Salem district has the largest concentration (15%). Thiruvannamalai district accounts for 11%, Villupuram district 9% and Dharmapuri 7%. Coimbatore district accounts for 3.5% while Erode, Madurai and Tirunelveli district accounts for about 1% each and Tiruchirappalli district 2%. Nilgiris represents 4% of the total tribal population.

There are 36 tribal communities in Tamil Nadu. Out of these the 14 numerically dominant groups form 96.33 per

cent of the total tribal population. Only two tribes, namely, Malayali and Irular have population size of above one Lakh. Together, they form 68.66 per cent of the total tribal population with Malayali constituting a major proportion of 45.6 per cent. Only five other tribes have 10,000 plus population in the state. Sixteen have population size below 2000.

### Primitive Tribes

Although Nilgiris has only 4% of total tribal population in the state, it is described as primitive tribal area because of the presence of ancient and pre-agricultural tribes. Six tribal communities - Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irular, Paniyan and Kattunayakan - have been identified as Primitive Tribal communities. All are natives to the Nilgiris and have distinct characteristics.

### Toda



Found exclusively on the secluded Nilgiri plateau Todas are among the most ancient people in the country who have lived in this particular region for centuries. Ever since the beginning of the 19th century when the Toda tribe made their first contact with Europeans, these people and their simple, yet sophisticated way of life, have captured the attention of both historians and anthropologists from all over the world. However, to date, the question of who

are the Todas and where did they come from continues to be a matter of debate among scientists and researchers. While some claim that their ancestors are the Sumerians, other believe that they are related to Greek Cypriots and the Todas themselves are convinced that they have been living on the Nilgiri hills since the earliest days of their existence. This is supported in the linguistic similarity to other ethnic groups in South India.

Nonetheless, what is known and scientifically proven is that the pastoral community of the Todas consists of nearly 70 settlements known as '*munds*,' each comprised of around five half-barrel shaped huts constructed mostly of natural materials such as reed and bamboo. Additionally, every *mund* has a buffalo herd which is crucial for their prosperity and plays a significant role in Toda lifestyle and religion.



Toda Hut

Todas consider the buffalo to be a sacred animal and believe that God first created the buffalo and man came second. Buffalo is at the center of their religious beliefs which explains why it is often used in numerous religious ceremonies and rituals, including offering it as a sacrifice to gods during funerals and festivities. Although today most of the Todas eat meat, this was not the case in the past when they were strict vegetarians, which means that if a

buffalo was sacrificed in a ritual the Todas would usually leave it to nature.

When one considers the number of people living in India today it is safe to say that the Toda tribe is nothing more than just a microscopic part of India's various cultures. But the Toda's, culture, religion, customs, music, art, and lifestyle are unique and that is exactly what caught the attention of social anthropologists who undertook numerous study projects about the culture and customs of these pastoral people in the past decades.

Toda men are tall and consider themselves to be dominant in the region and they seem to be recognized as such by the neighbouring people, many of whom work for the Todas. Besides the fact that the Toda people cooperate with other tribes in the area, Toda women are not allowed to marry a non-Toda male. Fraternal polyandry was often practiced in the past, but in recent times, when many technological advances became available for the Todas and they began interacting with other people more frequently this practice seems to be in decline. Fraternal polyandry means that a Toda woman marries all the brothers of a certain family and lives with them in a single hut. What also sets the Toda tribe apart is the fact that biological fatherhood is less important than sociological and the one who proclaims himself the sociological father of the child is considered to be the legitimate father.

By the end of the 20th century, some Toda pasture land was overtaken by outsiders who used it for agriculture. Knowing that buffalo herds are crucial for the existence of the Toda people one can easily conclude that this has endangered Toda society and their culture, as vast buffalo herds have been diminished in the region.

### **Kotas**

The Kotas are a group thought to be indigenous to the Nilgiri Hills. Also known as the Cohatur, Kohatur, Kotar,

Koter and Kothur, they are classified as a Scheduled Tribe and have traditionally lived among the Todas and Kurumbas. Even though they are small in number (around 1,500) they have managed to rise above their traditional roles as servants and consumers of carrion flesh to be bankers, doctors and government servants.



In the old days the Kota lived in wattle and daub houses with thatched roofs. Their villages had special houses for menstruating women but no toilets. They traditionally only grew a few crops themselves and obtained most for their food by trading various goods and services with their neighbours. They have traditionally sacrificed water buffalos and were known as fine musicians and musical instrument makers. The Kotas had a reputation for being a jack of all trades and the provided services such as blacksmithing, music, leatherworking and pottery making for other groups in return for food and clothes. Women have traditionally given birth in special huts. Ten days after birth a child is given a name. The ceremony for this is often regarded as more important than a wedding ceremony. In the ceremony a village elder gives the child his or her name while feeding water and a few crumbs of rice to the child. Afterwards a lock of hair is cut and



Kota Hut

wrapped in cow dung and leaves and tossed away. At the age of 16, boys and girls undergo a head shaving ritual in which all their hair is shaved off except for one lock and tattooing is also common.

The Kota practice “green” and “dry” funerals. During a normal or green funeral the deceased is honoured in a simple ceremony led by a small boy called the “fire-keeping boy” and is cremated in a special place called the *dav nar* (death region). A piece of the forehead bone is saved for the dry funeral. In the dry funeral the bone is serenaded with special music from double-reed instruments and barrel drums.

### **Kurumbas**

There are seven major Kurumba groups: the Alu (milk)-Kurumbas, Palu (milk)-Kurumbas, Betta (hill)-Kurumbas, Jenu (honey)-Kurumbas, Mulla (net)-Kurumbas, Urali (village)-Kurumbas, and Mudugas. Each group is regarded as a separate ethnic entity, with its own dialect, religious beliefs and other cultural features. There are about 15,000 Kurumbas. About a third of them live in the Nilgiri District. Others are scattered across southern India. They are regarded as the poorest of the Nilgiri Hills groups. The Kurumbas have traditionally been hunters and gatherers.



They forage a variety of foods from the forest and hunted and trapped birds and animals. They lived in rock shelters and caves and grew bananas, mangos and jackfruit in forest gardens. Deforestation had driven them out of their traditional villages into the plains, where they work in tea and coffee plantations.



Kurumba Hut

The Kurumbas have a reputation of being sorcerers because of the knowledge of sorcery Kurumbas were greatly feared. When bad things happened they were often blamed. In the 1800s there were several massacres of Kurumbas in relationship for perceived acts of sorcery.

## Irulas

The Irula are a scheduled tribe that lives in northern Tamil Nadu and the Nilgiri Hills. They are sort of like a cross between tribals and ordinary southern Indians. They have many animist beliefs but have had enough contact with Hindus to embrace many orthodox Hindu beliefs. Their most important sacred objects are kept in a secret cave so they are not polluted by coming in contact with things defiled by humans. Many Irula live near old megalithic sites which has led some to speculate that they are a very old culture and there are around 110,000 of them.



The Irula live in villages with special “pollution hut” for menstruating women, lots of mango and jackfruit trees, and ancestral temples with stones in them that represent the dead. Many live in two-room houses with a separate room with a sacred fire. They are known as collectors of honey and hunt with nets and spears. They harvest millet with small sickles for harvesting individual grain heads. Much of their traditional land is lost to tea and coffee plantations



Irula Huts

The Irula are known for being inspired musicians, They produce their own flutes and drums and are employed by other tribes to perform at their funerals. During Irula funerals a priest goes into trance and is asked by the family of deceased whether the death was natural or the result of sorcery. If the latter is the case a number of rituals are performed before the deceased is buried and after a month a stone is placed in a temple to give the deceased a place to stay.

The Irula marriage process used to be initiated by a trial cohabitation initiated with a delivery of firewood to the bride’s family’s house by the groom but this is no longer practiced. A standard bride price is paid in the presence of elders. The marriage ceremony revolves around the tying of a necklace around the brides neck. If a wife is unable to produce a child the husband is allowed to take a second wife. Some women have tattoos and wear toe rings.

## Paniya

The Paniya are one of the five ancient tribal communities of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They dwell in different hill and forest areas of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Various districts where the Paniya tribes have built their settlements



include Kozhikode and Malappuram. The word 'Paniya' is derived from 'pani' which is a Malayalam word meaning work. The people of this tribal community are mostly labourers and their past history also suggests the same. In fact, the Paniya community is among those tribal peoples who have traditionally worked as bonded labourers. Thick lips, dark complexion and curly hair are the typical physical characteristic of the Paniya people. There is some resemblance between the Paniya people and African natives and some scholars are of the opinion that the Paniyas may be of African origin. According to some scholars, Kapiri (Africa or the Cape) is the land of origin of the Paniya tribes.

The Paniya tribes are mainly concentrated in the northern part of the Western Ghats. Wage labour, small game hunting and collecting forest produce are the main means of living for this community. However, their movement within the forest has also been restricted by legislations designed to protect wildlife and biodiversity. Small scale

traditional mixed millet food farming is practiced which includes exclusive varieties of little millets and maize other than pulses, cereals, greens, vegetables and tubers.

### Kattunayakkan

The Kattunayakan tribe believe they are chiefs of the forest, with "kattu" meaning forest and "nayakan" meaning chief in their language *namma bashe*. At the 2011 census the Kattunayakan population was estimated at 1629 individuals, spread over 452 households. As with many primitive tribes, their origin and early history is a mystery, although they claim to be the indigenous people of the Western Ghats. In Tamil Nadu the Kattunayakans are split into a number of clans and lineages and prefer to live in small settlements of less than ten families.

The Kattunayakans were originally hunter-gatherers, experts in fishing, bird trapping and foraging for forest produce such as honey and fruit. Whilst these activities are still the main form of livelihood for many, some Kattunayakans are now employed in tea estates and spice



plantations. Kattunayakans typically live in clusters of small and very basic mud huts, plastered with charcoal and cow dung and thatched with paddy straw or grass. The community structure is very basic, with families preferring to act as independent units. However there is a traditional tribal council designed to maintain social decorum and tribal elders will be consulted on difficult issues. The Kattunayakan diet is based on forest and local produce, occasionally supplemented by purchases from local markets. Music and dance are very important to the Kattunyakans, acting as the main source of knowledge on their environment, culture and respect for kin. A variety of musical instruments have been fashioned by the tribe; most resemble drums and flutes.

Black magic and sorcery are both practiced by the Kattunayakans and they have a strong belief in the power of herbal medicine, prayer and animal sacrifice as a cure for disease. Kattunayakan women are renowned for their practice of black magic, with members of the Paniyan and Kurumba tribes visiting the Kattunayakan magicians hoping for easy child births, success in love, employment and the ripening of fruits.

### **Literacy**

According to 2011 Census, percentage of tribal literate (those who can read and write with understanding) persons aged 7 years and above is 54.34 per cent in the state, which is much lower than 80.9 per cent reported for the state as a whole. The literacy rate (54.5 per cent) has however increased from 41.5 per cent recorded in 2001 Census.

The major tribes, Konda Reddis, Kammaras, Kanikaranm, Konda, Koppas are reported to have the highest per cent literacy rate with above 80%, followed by Kurumans (61.4 per cent), Kattunayakan (65.7 per cent), Malayali (51.4 per cent) and Irular (34.3 per cent). The female literacy rate of

32.8 per cent among tribal population is lower than 64.4 per cent registered among total female population of the state.

### **Main Occupation**

Of the total 7.95 lakh tribal population in Tamil Nadu about 54,000 are tribes by genetics, but now they do not know which group they belong to. As on date, less than 20 per cent of tribes do their ethnic occupations like rearing sheep, collecting honey, harvesting timber and other forest produce. Another major issue is that large number of Irulas, who no longer catch snakes, have ended up as bonded labour in brick kilns. In the past three years more than 600 Irulas were rescued from brick kilns in Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur and rehabilitated.

Types of occupation of the tribals in Tamil Nadu are:

- a. Collecting and gathering of forest products - Kadukkai, Tamarind, Honey, etc.
- b. Cattle herding
- c. Simple artisans type
- d. Hill and shifting cultivation
- e. Settled agriculture
- f. Agriculture labourers

Tribes offer manual labour unique to them. They go as agriculture labours to work in coffee plantation, spices plantation, and as wood cutters. Their ability to carry wood logs for miles make them valuable and irreplaceable workers and they are lured to smugglings by the city dwellers for this ability. In sum, though in numbers small, the picture of the tribals of Tamil Nadu is a big kaleidoscope.

# The Thrilling Tales of the Tribals of Arunachal Pradesh

Dr. Vinita Kaul Gardner

“Understanding languages and other cultures builds bridges. It is the fastest way to bring the world closer together and to truth. Through understanding, people will be able to see their similarities before differences.”  
‘Suzy Kassem, Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem’

Beautifully ensconced in a quaint corner of India’s vast and wonderful geographical map, far away from the madding crowd and the hustle and bustle of city life, lies the picturesque state of Arunachal Pradesh. In the North-east of India, among lush scenic beauty and fiercely proud native tribes. Situated against a majestic Himalayan backdrop, with soaring waterfalls and pictorial lakes, this “Land of the Rising Sun” as it is popularly called, is known for its ancient culture and finds mention in prominent scriptures of India, such as the Mahabharata and Kalika Purana. Sage Parashurama washed away his sins in Arunachal, then known as the Prabhu Mountains. The famous sage Vyasa meditated in the forests of this region and Lord Krishna is believed to have married Rukmini at this legendary site in India. Sprawling over an area of 83,743 sq kms, the state of Arunachal Pradesh, with its capital at Itanagar, plays host to 26 major tribes and numerous sub-tribes, over 100 approximately, living in its 3,649 scattered villages. Although a number of tribal groups constitute the total population, the density of people living in any given area, is far from crowded. In fact it is definitely on the sparser side. While the people are of Mongoloid stock, each tribe has certain distinct characteristics of language, dress and

costume. Quite content with their rich cultural heritage, the Arunachali tribals are simple, friendly and hospitable folk. And their host of colourful festivals are vibrant manifestations of their devout faith and belief.

## Functioning in a Democratic Environment

The society is primarily patriarchal in nature and follows the practice of primogeniture or inheritance by the first born. However, the fundamental laws of inheritance with variations, are not uncommon. They follow endogamy or the custom of forbidding marriage outside of their own group; and strictly observe the rule of clan exogamy, where you can marry a member of the same clan but not necessarily living in the same place or group at the time. Polygamy is socially sanctioned and widely practiced by a majority of them.

A highly democratic society, each tribe has its own organised institutions that maintain law and order, decide disputes and take responsibility for all activities for the welfare of the tribes and the villages. The people of the tribes select the members comprising such organisations. It is interesting to note that the socio-administrative structure of the society, as evolved over a period of centuries, recognizes democratic partition right down to the level of villages.

## The Three Distinctive Cultural Groups

While each tribe follows its own exclusive traditions and customs, the entire population of the state can be divided into three cultural groups, based on their socio-politico-

religious affinities. The first group is made up of the Monpas and Sherdupens of Tawang and West Kameng districts - they are the followers of the Lamaistic tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. The second group comprises of the Adis, Akas, Apatanis, Bangnis, Mijis, Mishmis, Nishis and Thongsas - these people are the worshippers of the sun and moon Gods. The third group, which comprises of the Octes and Wanchos tribal communities of the Tirap district - they follow the basic tenets of Vaishnavism and maintain a strict village society, which is ruled by a hereditary chief.

It would be interesting to note at this point that the tribals are a skilful people and adept at many arts and crafts. They specialise in making baskets, weaving, smithy work, pottery, wood carving, painting and more. An impressive potpourri of artistic and practical skills, no doubt! In fact, the women play a major role in such art works, while their men till and toil in the fields.

## **The Litany of Tribes**

### **Wanchos**

The Wanchos (also spelt as Vonchos), inhabit the south-western part of the Tirap district, bordering Nagaland. They are known for their fondness for wearing decorative headgear and heavy strings of beads on the neck, arms, legs and ears. Basically hardy people, they are known for their strictly structured village society in which the hereditary village chief plays a vital role.

### **Noctes**

The tribes comprising the Noctes, who inhabit the central part of the Tirap district, to the north of the Wanchos, have a long standing and traditional contact with the people of the neighbouring plains. They practice an elementary form of Vaishnavism.

### **Tangsas**

This is a common name given to a group of people consisting of the Lungchang, Moklong, Yugli, Lungri, Have, Moshong, Rundra, Takhak, Ponhi and Longphi tribes. Each group is subdivided into a number of exogamous clans. These tribes occupy the second most populous district of Arunachal Pradesh – the 4,662 sq kms Changlang district with its rich wildlife and flora and fauna along the Indo-Myanmar front.

### **Singphos**

The Singphos, who are expert blacksmiths turning out high quality iron implements, live on the banks of the Teang and Noa Diking rivers and extend towards the south-east into the land of the Khamptis. This gifted tribe, where the ladies are also deft weavers, are followers of Buddhism.

### **Khamptis**

The Khamptis live to the south of the Lohit district along the Kamlang, Dehing and Tengapani rivers with the Parasuramkund to the north-east and Tirap district of the south. The people of this tribe possess south-east Asian features and are devout followers of Theravada Buddhism. An essentially peace loving people, their houses have a separate prayer room and they pray every morning and evening by offering flowers (*nam taw yongli*) and food (*khao tang som*). The Khamptis are good craftsmen, enterprising traders and skilful agriculturists.

### **Mishmis**

The Mishmi or Deng people of Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh are an ethnic group comprising mainly of three tribes, namely the Idu Mishmi (Idu Lhoba), Digaro tribe (Tarao Darang Deng) and Miju Mishmi (Kaman Deng). Skilled agriculturists and successful traders, the Mishmis occupy the north-eastern tip of Central Arunachal Pradesh in upper and lower Dibang Valley, Lohit and Anjaw

districts. It is interesting to note that the three sub-divisions of the tribe emerged due to their geographical distribution, but racially all the three groups are essentially of the same stock. The Idus, also known as “Chulikatas” by the plains people, are primarily concentrated in the upper Dibang valley and lower Dibang valley district and parts of the northern part of the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. With approximately 25,000 members, the Idu tribe is divided into sections, interestingly each named after the river by the side of which they live.

The Mijis or Kamans, who number less than the Idus, are approximately 18,000 in number and inhabit the Lohit district, east of the Taraons. Unlike the Idus, they wear their hair long and their dress is both colourful and extremely durable. Agriculture forms one of the main occupations of these tribal people, as it does of the Digarus, who also call themselves as Taraon.

### **Adis**

The Adis, who comprise one of the populous groups of indigenous peoples in the distant north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, are believed to have come from China in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Inhabiting the temperate and sub-tropical regions within the districts of east Siang, upper Siang, west Siang, lower Dibang valley, Lohit and Namsai in this picturesque state, they are also found in certain areas of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, where they are called Lhobas.

The Adis have different sub-tribes, which differ from each other in many ways and customs. About 500 of the Adi tribe come from a fascinating tribal village called the Adi Pasi. En route to Adi Pasi, you can see the ingeniously crafted cane and bamboo hanging bridge on the Siang river. Two hundred to two hundred and fifty feet long, it connects to the other hill tribes. The people in this remote village necessarily have to be highly self sufficient and villagers

cook fish and rats for dinner. Fishing is a necessary activity here and rats are considered a local delicacy.

Consisting of approximately 2,50,000 Adis in Arunachal Pradesh, the people are skilled in making beautiful cane and bamboo items. Democratic by nature and possessing a unique sense of history, they have well organised village councils called ‘Kebang’. The traditional village Panchayat or Council, which is a judicio-administrative body, is composed of mature and influential elders. It looks after the administration of justice in the society by settling all matters of dispute.

Divided into three main groups called the Galos, Padams and Miwongs, each of which can again be divided into a number of sub-groups, the Adis are exogamous and dances form a vital element of Adi culture. Performed to express joy and zest for life or joie de vivre as the French would put it, the traditional Ponung dance is famous throughout the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Dances are performed on important rituals, during festivals and occasionally also for recreation. They vary from highly stylised religious dance-dramas of the Buddhists to the martial steps and colourful performances of the Noctes and Wanchos. Whereas Popir is the indigenous dance of the Adis.

The Galos weave clothes of highly artistic designs , one of the finest being a beautiful skirt with a central pattern of black yarn netted in regular designs of black and white. Whereas the Hill Miris, inhabiting the lower Kamla valley, look attractive in their costumes. They tie their hair in a knot just above the forehead. Their women wear attractive “crinoline of cane rings”, which serve the purpose of a blouse but now no longer seen in urban areas.

### **Apatamis**

The Apatamis, also known as Apa Tanis, are an amazing group of tribals living in the picturesque Ziro valley in the

Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. This small enterprising group of people is among very few tribes in the world that still worship Nature – the sun and moon Gods to be exact.

They are famous for their unique methods of sustainable farming and social forestry and have beaten modern technological advancements with ease, in terms of environmental conservation. Their wet rice cultivation and ingenious agricultural system are extensive and highly effective even without the use of any farm animals or machines. UNESCO has proposed the Apatani valley for inclusion as a World Heritage Site for its “extremely high productivity” and unique way of preserving the ecology.

They reside in crowded villages called “*bastis*”, grow paddy and millet in abundance and practise pisciculture with confidence. Their farms, which are on flat lands, are uniquely marked with efficient channels and canals for irrigation purposes. It may be noted that, over the centuries the Apatamis have specialized in harvesting two crops of fish, along with each crop of paddy. The extremely eastern location of their habitat resulting in early sunsets, when the family heads home, also invites people to homes where they are served the traditional homemade rice beer with special Apatani salt called *tapyo*. Traditionally *tapyo* is made at home using ashes of certain indigenous plants and is largely instrumental in saving these tribals from the worrisome ailment of *goitre*, which is otherwise a major concern in nearby tribes.

### **Nyishis**

The Nyishis, with the men wearing startling hornbill head dresses and the local population practising both Christianity and Animism, speak the traditional Nishi language. *Nyi* refers to ‘a man’ and the word *shi* denotes ‘a being’, which combined, together refers to a human being. One of the largest ethnic groups in Arunachal Pradesh,

they are spread across seven districts of this north-eastern state namely Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey, East Kameng, West Kameng, Papum Pare and parts of lower Subansiri and Kamle district. They also reside in the Sonitpur and North Lakhimpur districts of Assam.

Polygamy is prevalent among the Nyishi tribals and signifies both one’s social status and economic stability and also proves handy during tough times like clan wars or social huntings and various other social activities. They follow the patrilineal system and are divided into several exogamous clans. The Nyishi men keep their hair long and tie it in a knot just above the forehead and wear cane bands around their waist as a part of their traditional dress.

### **Hrussos**

The Hrussos are commonly called Akas, which means ‘painted’ for they have a custom of painting their faces with black marks. With a small population of less than 10,000 people, the tribals belonging to this community are found in the Thrizino (cultural hub), Bhalukpong (commercial hub), Buragon, Jamiri, Palizi and Khuppi area in West Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh. They have featured frequently in old historical records, their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and like most tribes, they have an elementary caste system, the aristocratic Kutsun and the commoner Kevatsum.

Polygamy is widely practised in this patrilineal society, cross-cousin marriages are accepted and an elected chief dispenses the responsibilities of administration as village headman. Living in elongated houses made of bamboo, wood and cane leaves, they practice shifting cultivation and rear domestic animals such as the Mithun.

### **Khowas or Buguns**

The people of this tribe, numbering a mere 3,000 or so, comprise one of the earliest recognized scheduled tribes of

India. They occupy 7 villages in Teilga and Bichum valley in the neighbourhood of the Sherdukpens. Living in several exogamous clans, the Buguns or Khowas, traditionally their predominant occupation was agriculture, supported by numerous other allied activities such as fishing and hunting, cattle rearing etc. They rear domestic animals such as horse, cow, sheep, goat, pig and hunt wild animals using simple spears, traps, bows and arrows, to enrich their diet. These tribals possess their own folklores, songs, dances, music and rituals. While both sexes adorn themselves generously with silver ornaments, the men wear a very long white garment and a very high hat resembling a Turkish Fez. The women sport a skull cap, sometimes decorated with beautiful patterns. Traditionally followers of the animistic religion, later Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism also impacted upon the people. Pham-Kho is a popular harvesting festival amongst them.

### **Puroiks or Sulungs**

The Puroiks are a tribe of the hill-tracts of Arunachal Pradesh. Speaking the Puroik language, they are found in an estimated 53 villages in the districts of Subansiri and upper Subansiri, Papumpare, Kurung Kumey and East Kameng along the upper reaches of the Par river. Claiming kinship with the Bugun, they are at a transitional stage between the hunter gatherer lifestyle and agriculturism.

### **Sherdukpens**

The Sherdukpen tribals, who are an ethnic group related to both the Aka and Monpa tribes, speak the Sherdukpen language, Tsangla and Assamese. Although they adopted the Geluga sect of Buddhism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as with their northern neighbours the Monpas, they were subjected to the evalengical influence of Mera Lama, they are more inclined to following pre-Buddhist animistic traditions.

The 4,000 odd Sherdukpens are centred mainly in west Kameng in the villages of Rupa, Jigaon, Thongri, Shergaon

in Bomdila. They are divided into two classes the Thongs and the Chao. While they practice monogamy, marriage between castes are considered taboo. The men wear a unique gurdam skull-cap made from yak's hair with tassels jutting down over the face and warriors carry a Tibetan sword supported by a waistband. The women sport a full sleeved embroidered jacket and waist cloth known as mushaik, over the cloak. Good agriculturists and traders, with women as artistic weavers, they have competent self-governing institutions called "Jongs".

### **Monpas**

There are also the gentle and cultured Monpas of West Kameng districts, who received Buddhism from Padma Sambhava. One of the major ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh, they are believed to be the only nomadic tribe of the north-east, being totally dependent on animals like the yak, sheep, cow, goats and horses and had no permanent settlement or attachment to any place. Known for their skills in thangka painting, wood-carving, carpet making and bamboo weaving and they speak various related languages. The principal Monpa festivals include the Choskar harvest festival, during which the Buddhist lamas read religious scriptures at the Gompas; Torgya and Losar festival during which, people fervently offer prayers at the Tawang monastery for the coming of Tibetan New Year. Pantomime dances are the principal feature of the Ajilamu festival.

So the fascinating wheel of tribal life continues to turn, slowly, inexorably, dominated by myths and fiction, bearing the stamp of tribal creativity and imagination, sustained by earnest human endeavour and pride.



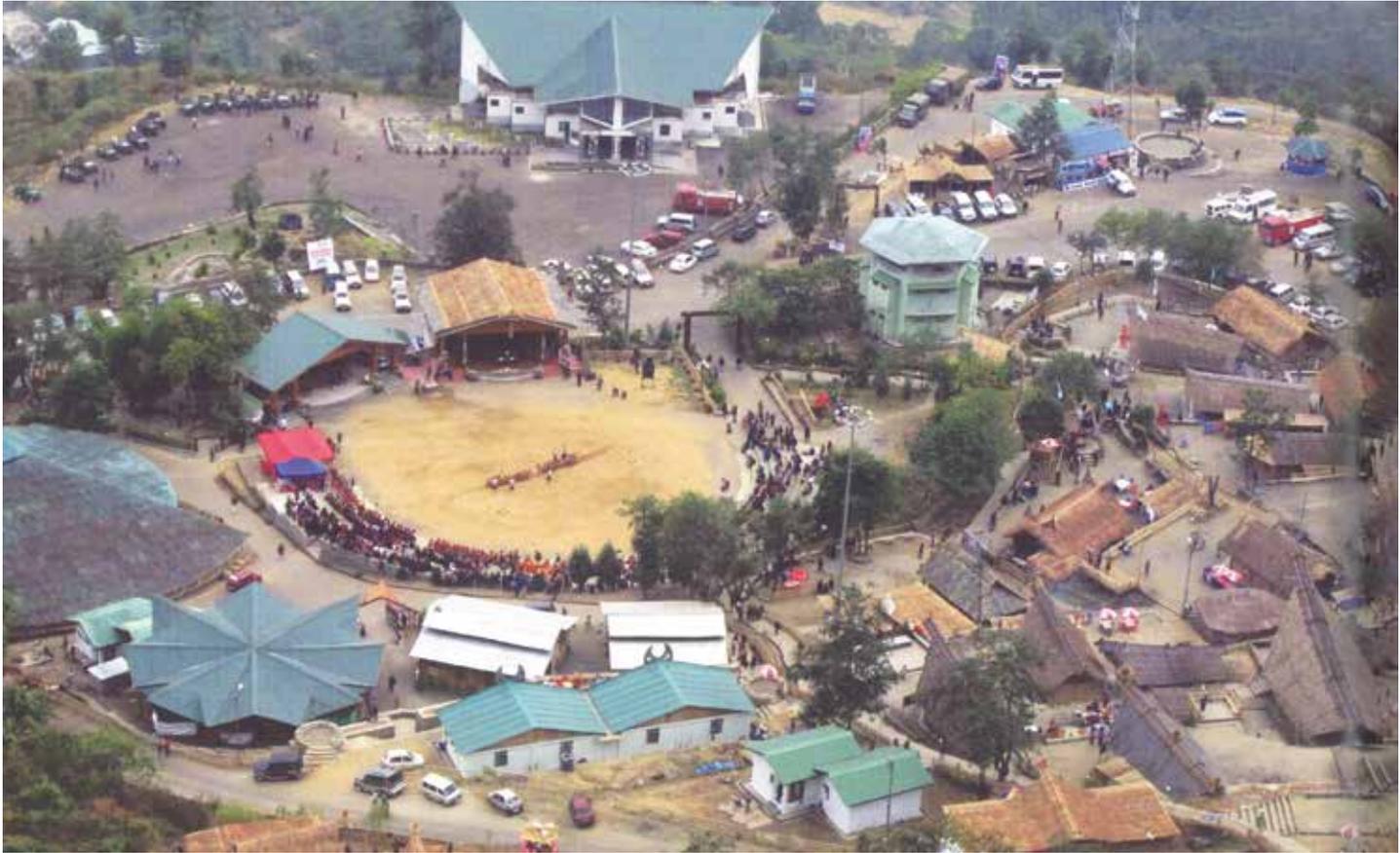
# The Nagaland Hornbill Festival

*Sentila T. Yanger*

Nagaland is a cultural mosaic of diverse multi-ethnicity sprung up by the several tribes that inhabit the State. Each community speaks a different language which has thrown up a patois 'Nagamese' spoken by the diverse groups who follow distinct customary laws and practices from each other, besides wearing of specific textiles that identifies the wearer to the community he/she belongs to

and so on. Other than cultural differences as well as some shared similarities, all the tribes celebrate their festivals revolving around the agrarian calendar making Nagaland by default- a land of festivals.

Taking into consideration the diverse cultural markers, the State Government in the year 2000 desirous of promoting



tourism, conceived the Hornbill Festival to bring together the sixteen diverse tribes of Nagaland to celebrate together, one common festival espousing the spirit of unity in diversity through a weeklong celebration to coincide with the Nagaland Statehood Day on 1st December. The hornbill bird was chosen in collective reverence to the bird held sacred by the tribes and enshrined in the cultural ethos of the Nagas in symbolic signatures to equate status, merit, wealth, as decorative head piece eligible only to the deserving. It was also chosen to create awareness to the fragile status of the hornbill slowly disappearing from its natural habitat.

In the twelve years since its inception, the Nagaland Hornbill Festival has emerged from a local event to

transform into an international festival in the aptly tagged monicker - "FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS", a must visit and a notable attraction in the travel itinerary of both domestic and international travelers. The objective of the Heritage village is to protect and preserve the Naga cultural heritage by establishing a common management approach to support cultural tourism. It aims to uphold and sustain the distinct identities, dialects, customs and traditions of the ethnic tribes of Nagaland and foster inter-tribal goodwill through the coming together of the tribes under the aegis of the Nagaland Hornbill Festival. The Festival, through the collective spirit and celebrations and the colour and vibrancy of several tribal festivities, offers the discerning traveler, a glimpse into the Naga way of life to titillate a visitor's cultural sensibilities.

In the first three years of the Festival, the event was conducted at the local grounds within the State capital, Kohima. It later shifted to its present location at Kisama, ten kilometers away from Kohima in 2003. The name Kisama is derived from the names of two villages, the Angami-Naga villages of Kigwema (KI) and Phesama (SA) and MA refers to Village. On this land of the Naga Heritage Village is the present venue of the Nagaland Hornbill Festival established and commissioned by the State Government of Nagaland. The Naga Heritage Village provides the common platform for the multi-ethnic tribes of Nagaland to showcase their rich cultural heritages and traditions. Apart from hosting the Festival the Naga Heritage Village hosts several events and functions around the year.

The annual Hornbill Festival is held in the first week of December and brings all the tribes and sub-tribes of Nagaland to the foot hills below the craggy lofty spurs of the towering Mount Jafu to the scenic Naga Heritage Village, Kisama. A cultural panorama unfolds in the weeklong extravaganza that encompasses cultural performances, indigenous games, craft marts, music events, art & photo exhibitions, film screenings, fashion shows, beauty pageants, motor sports and cycling events, floral and horticulture galleria, kids carnival and ethnic food courts. A series of competitions in various categories such as the Naga King Chilly Eating contest draws the brave or the foolish who attempt to eat the hottest chilly in the world.

As one climbs the last few steps to reach the open air theatre, an imposing sight that greets the visitors are the tribal Morungs, the learning institutes and male dormitories, which are examples of resplendent vernacular architecture accommodating the respective tribes. Some Morungs house the giant log drums where men intermittently beat the gigantic hollowed out log with wooden beaters in rhythmic synchronization to various arrangements of tempos. In the past, the log drum was an integral feature



of Naga social life. Other than its role as village deity, long before the age of modern communications, the Nagas devised indigenous methodologies of relaying messages by beating different tempos to send out messages, decipherable only to the village members in times of natural calamity, enemy attack, war, fire, death and so on. As the sound of the log drums reverberate throughout Kisama, it hypnotically draws you in search of the source.

On each day of the festival, a series of cultural programmes take place at the amphitheatre. Besides the visitors and tourists, the events are also an eye-opening experience for the Naga communities themselves as it is an opportunity to see the social practices of their fellow Nagas, this is in keeping with the objective of the Festival to foster respect and goodwill among the tribes.

At the craft pavilion, a vast repository of Naga crafts displaying exemplary skills in bamboo, cane, wood, textiles, metal and other crafts are on display. This is the opportunity to source and hunt for souvenirs and meet the craft artisans who come from all over the State to their hand crafted wares.

The festival provides the perfect opportunity to embark on the Naga food trail. Several food courts dish out a culinary treat but for the very ethnic platter, the Morungs are the places to visit where each tribal cuisine and delicacies are served. Not for the faint hearted if spicy food and exotic menus are not palatable. For the discerning foodie the adventure begins with the ample choice of high protein grubs and insects. Highly recommended is the Naga rice wine served in tall bamboo mugs accompanied with assorted spicy chutneys with a cautionary advice to the uninitiated tippler.

A visit to the Hornbill Festival is incomplete without a trip to the Second World War Museum at Kisama. The Battle of Kohima (1944) fought between the Allied Forces and the Japanese Imperial Army culminated in the defeat of the Japanese advance into colonial India. The battle was halted at Kohima and is brought alive in a dramatized sound and light show. The museum also houses a collection of war memorabilia.

On the side lines of the Festival, a series of events are simultaneously played out at different venues. The Second World War Motor Rally sees a good participation of authentic Willys Jeeps, trucks of the 2nd World War era with participation from across the Northeast region. A recent addition is the N-E Royal Enfield Bikers meet, on the last count, over 250 bikers converged from all over the Northeast and elsewhere. Cycling rallies have also become a popular event as well as motor car rallies together with the indigenous cart races. Several photo, film and art exhibitions by Naga artists, filmmakers and photographers dot the festivalscape in and around Kohima.

The annual Miss Nagaland Beauty Pageant is hosted during the Hornbill Festival where the district winners vie for the prestigious title. Fashion shows at the Festival are regular events. It provides the platform to showcase Naga designer wear as models sashay down the ramp

to highlight Naga designer collections of ethnic textiles contemporized to fashion statements. Literary Festivals on the works of Naga poets and writers together with book launches accentuate the Hornbill Festival experience.

Not to be missed is the Night Bazaar where numerous food stalls jostle for space on the pedestrian only thoroughfare on Kohima's main road. Throughout the jam packed street are stores bedecked with colourfully decorated Christmas trees and stars, under strings of twinkling coloured lights criss-crossing the street, the precursor to the biggest pre-Christmas party, lends a testimony to the popularity of the food stalls conducting brisk roaring business feeding hordes of hungry foodies. All this accompanied to live music belted out by talented local artistes from a make shift stage in the center of the street makes this a truly festive experience.

If culture is the essence and soul of the Hornbill Festival, music is surely its leitmotif. The love for music is an overriding passion consuming every sphere of social life with the Nagas. At the Hornbill Festival there is the daily dose of musical performances from western classical to pop to rock to Naga indigenous music, the list is endless. Each day of the festival, several music acts take to the stage in the evenings. One of the most famous and popular rock contests is the Hornbill Rock Contest, offering a cash award at rupees five lakhs for the winning band and it is billed as one of the country's best-rewarded western music contests. The rock contest draws bands from all over the country and is a highlighted event in the Hornbill calendar of events.

To conclude, to experience the Nagaland Hornbill Festival is to experience both the sides of the Naga milieu firsthand - the rich and vibrant Naga heritage and the Naga disposition in cultural pride juxtaposed in the contemporary space.



## Tribes of India and their Religious Practices

*Raghav Chandra*

Our perceptions about the tribes have varied across time. This is largely linked to our understanding of their changing socio-cultural habits. It is interesting to note the history of how tribes were classified over the past decades in India itself. They were initially classified as “Animists” and in 1911 as “tribal animists or people following tribal religion.” In the Census Reports of 1921, they were specified as “Hill and Forest Tribes.” The 1931 Census described

them as Primitive Tribes. The Government of India Act 1935 specified the tribal population as “Backward Tribes”. However, in the Census Report 1941, they were classified as “Tribes” only. In present times, a community has to be judged along the criteria of backwardness, remoteness, distinctive culture, shyness for contact etc. to be classified as scheduled tribe.



Some of the features of tribes of India are very unique. The tribes have a sex ratio of 990 females per 1000 males as against the average national sex ratio of 940 females per 1000 males. It is also interesting to note that almost 90 percent of the tribes live in rural India and only 10 percent are in urban areas, whereas, for the overall population of India almost 40 percent of the population today live in urban areas. Between 2009-10 and 2011-12, the percentage of tribes that rose above the poverty line was only 2 percent i.e. from 47 to 45 percentage. However, in 2011-12, the overall rural population had only 25 percent people below the poverty line. There is, thus, when it comes to economic status, a gap of 20 percent between tribes and the average population of India. This is glaring aspect which will perhaps take many decades to be bridged.

While tribes form 8.6 percent of the country's population, they occupy 15 percent of India's geography. More than half of the Scheduled Tribes are concentrated in central

India – the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand – largely synchronous with the coal and mineral belt. Not surprisingly, the abundant exploitation of minerals – coal, iron-ore, bauxite, zinc etc. mirrors their pervasive social and cultural exploitation. It is also a fact that the tribes have lived and still live by themselves. For them their forests, their families and their animals are more important and comprise their world. They have historically resisted any form of interference in their traditional way of life; not surprisingly, in the past the colonial administration (with its tacit support for evangelism) was naturally very curious and even contemptuous of the tribes.

For tribes, religion is instinctive rather than deliberate - their respect of nature is spontaneous and not borne out of any societal goal. For them worship of a higher entity is more about thankfulness – and not a dependency – for seeking greater material gains or a better life.



The famous sociologist Emile Durkheim viewed religion as something eminently social. But, for tribes, it is derived from their spontaneous feel for nature and is not compelled by their community. Recognizing the social origin of religion, Durkheim argued that religion acted as a source of solidarity and a meaning for life; he saw it as a critical part of the social system. On the contrary, for tribes religion is not intended to have a social role, to evoke a sense of collective responsibility. Religion for tribes is nature and nature is religion – a life process, a force that is bigger than them – which they regard and respect. Totemism, for instance, is their symbolism of this superior force and they imbue to it a certain level of sacredness which is individually driven. As religion is not regulatory it manifests itself in their natural freedom in routine things like sex and marriage in which they are not bound by societal laws, but by a free-flowing sense of tolerance, balance and inclusion.

Over the centuries as forest dwelling tribes and hunter-foragers became agro-pastoralists, they have been influenced by other communities. But it has not been a one-way street. Several hindu deities like Jagannath (worshipped by Saoras) and Shiva (worshipped as



Baradeo, for instance, by Gonds, Bhils and Baigas) have traditionally been worshipped by the tribes in primitive manifestations like stone and rock. The presence of various tribal deities bearing a strong resemblance to the Gods worshipped by Hindus and the presence of Shiva temples and sculptures in various scheduled areas begs the question: Could these Hindu gods have originally been tribal deities? Have they been squarely expropriated by the mainstream communities? Did both Buddhism and Hinduism, competing fiercely with each other for footprint, reach out actively to tribes to integrate them into their fold and increase their evangelical compass?

Let us look at the religious practices of tribes in some regions. In Himachal Pradesh, tribal areas of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Pangi support an incredibly unique system of following Hindu and Buddhism under one roof. Bharmour is an absolute Hindu dominated region and Spiti is a complete Buddhist region following Tibetan Buddhism. The rituals here are divided into Hindu Parampara, Buddhist Parampara and Dev Parampara (the tribal way of following local deities, gods and goddesses). Kinnaur, the place of prominent deities like Ormic and Dakhen celebrates Flaich Ukhayang Festival, Phagul and Losar festivals, which are

related with the local deities. The upper region of Kinnaur is Buddhist dominating area where monasteries not only provide religious instructions but also remain center of festivities and spiritual learning. Lahaul is also covered with several monasteries and temples of Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Shiva, Hadimba and Mrikula etc. Fagli is a winter celebration in Lahaul valley to welcome the New Year. Tsa is a Buddhist post mortal ritual, which was revived after almost 100 years in year 2016 at the confluence of Chanderbhaga River. Cham dance or mask dance is very popular in Spiti. Pangi, the place of Mindal Mata as the main deity of the region, practices both Hindu and Buddhist religions. Jukaro is a winter festival to celebrate New Year and Phoolyatra is autumn festival of the valley. Unlike Lahaul and Kinnaur, the local deities don't move out on chariots from the temples in Pangi valley and they worship nature and ancestors. Bharmour, the place of 84 temples & Manimahesh Kailash, is supposed to belong to lord Shiva. The religion in practice is Hindu and the primary community belongs to Gaddi tribe, the shepherds. Manimahesh Yatra, Chhatradi Jatar, Keling Wazir jagrata are the major celebrations in Bharmour region.

In Rajasthan, the Bhil religious practices are not entirely dissimilar to those of other communities. They worship, for instance, Hanuman, Mahadev and Rishabdev. They also worship the moon and some sacrificial offerings of animals to the female Goddesses like Kali are prevalent even today. Trees like tamarind, pipal (ficus), mango, etc. are revered by them. There are several deities they worship who are supposed to support their harvest or animals – names such as Nandarkho, Hirnayakulyon, Mantyo Dev, Mawli, Gwal Dev, etc. They also keep their lost ones in mind through the practice of tribal *ramna*.

In Tamil Nadu and adjoining areas of Karnataka and Kerala – near the Nilgiris, a salt giving ceremony to buffaloes is celebrated by the Toda Tribe. The salt is given to the buffaloes five times a year. Some tribal customs reflect



their emergence from remote forests to agro-pastoralism – Puthari is a joyous harvest festival celebrated among Betta Kurumbas and some other communities across South India. It is celebrated in the Malayalam month of *Thula* (late October) after the paddy harvest. Meaning of the word '*Puthari*' is new rice, and this is equivalent to the Navakhai festival in parts of Odissa. At this time rice is just harvested and is brought by village leader to the temple from the field and kept there, and after worshiping they then take back the rice to their houses. The festival symbolizes the solemn beginning of the use of new rice from freshly conducted harvest season for offering in the temple. As a tradition young men clean their bow and arrows and take training on it. A sweet pudding made with rice, coconut and country sugar is prepared for offering to the gods on the auspicious occasion. Later this sweet is bound in small bunches and handed over to all those present in the fair. Folk culture of Kurumbas can be witnessed during Puthari as conventional songs are sung and different folk dances are performed. Clay pots used in religious rituals by Kota tribal communities can only be made by women potters of the tribe. Only women of the Kota tribe have engaged in the craft of pottery, which was used for religious purposes. Pottery and religion are intertwined in Kota culture. Clay



extraction begins with the 50 day annual festival dedicated to their deity Kamtraaya and his spouse Ayanoor. It begins after *amavasya* (no-moon night) in December - January. The head priest and his wife lead the procession to the sacred site for clay and no outsiders are allowed. The next four months are spent in making pots – the winter sun and air helps them dry quickly. In the past, women made pots not only for religious purposes but also for daily eating, cooking, storage of water and grains, for clay oil lamps and pipes. Before stainless steel and plastic came up from the plains, the only pots used in these hills were clay ones made by the Kota. From the ceremonial extraction of the clay at grounds close to the settlements to the moulding and shaping, planning and firing, it has been women at the wheel.

There are some tribes who are more ubiquitous than others, with regional and local offshoots. For instance, the Gonds are scheduled tribes of Madhya Pradesh who live in Mandla, Chhindwara, Betul and Seoni districts of the state. Their many regional offshoots exist in other Central Indian states like Maharashtra, Chhatisgarh, Odisha and parts of Andhra Pradesh. The Gonds could have got their name from Khond, which means hill, or from Koh, which means cave, hence the names - Gond, Khond, Kond, Rajgond, Koitur, Khond, Khand. The Gond folk tradition is rich in art and craft and they are very fond of music and dance. Both men and women sing and dance to the

energetic sound of instruments like the *dholak*, a double-sided drum. The Pardhan tribe is the official narrators of traditional folk stories for this community and they tattoo their bodies with stars, scorpions, flower, bird and animal patterns. The walls of their homes are painted with scenes inspired by nature – animals, birds, people and trees. These are drawn in red and black on a white background. They make colorful floor designs called *rangoli* and beautiful pottery, baskets and other crafts, woodcarving is another talent.

Like many other tribes, Gonds worship Baradeo who is also known as Shambu Mahadeo and Persa Pen. In imagery he is a lot like Shiva, and is usually with something between a spear and a trident. Baradeo oversees activities of lesser gods and is respected, but he does not receive fervent devotion, which is shown only to clan deities. Each Gond clan has its Persa Pen, who protects all clan members. The Persa Pen is essentially good but can be dangerous and violent. Many Gonds believe that when a *pardhan* (bard) plays his fiddle, the deity's fierce powers can be controlled. Each village has its village-guardian and village-mother that are worshipped when villagers celebrate regular festivities. Gonds also worship family and household gods, gods of the field and gods of cattle. Deities such as *Shitala Mata*, goddess of smallpox, help ward off disease. Spirits are also believed to inhabit hills, rivers, lakes and trees. Village priests (*devari*) perform sacrifices and rituals for village festivals and the head of a household typically carries out family ceremonies. Clan priests (*katora*) tend the shrine and ritual objects of the clan's Persa Pen. These priests also guard the sacred spear point and organize annual festivals. Most aspects of Gond life, from the greatest festivals to the building of a new cattle shed, are accompanied by sacrifice. Certain deities, especially the female ones demand chickens, goats and sometimes-male buffaloes. Every nine or twelve years, Gonds sacrifice a pig to the god Narayan Deo in an important ceremony known as the *Laru Kaj* (pig's wedding). Other rituals also involve



offerings of fruits, coconuts, flowers, colored powder and strings.

The majority of Gonds are Hindu. Some are animists, who believe that things in nature – trees, mountains and the sky have souls or consciousness and that a supernatural force animates the universe. They believe that their gods inhabit the forest and ancestor worship is an integral part of their religion. The villagers worship the village gods as a group and a priest conducts the rites. Idols of gods are often spear shaped, made of iron and are smeared with vermilion powder and kept at a special place called *deo-khulla*, the threshing floor of the gods. The Gond people were known to offer human sacrifices, especially to the goddesses Kali, Danteshwari and Bara Deo. This practice was abolished by the British in the late 19th century but ritual of animal sacrifices are still performed surreptitiously.

In the South, when a death occurs in the Kurumbas, the heads of males are shaved by the *jatti*. Both males and females dance to music and around the cot upon which the deceased rests. After all those who should attend have arrived, the corpse is carried to the burial ground. Members of the deceased brother-in-law's patrician bear the prime responsibility for digging the grave, but the Kurumba



present also assists. When all is ready, the body is placed in the grave so that it faces toward the north. The local Inula priest then gazes at a lamp and goes into a trance. A member of the bereaved family asks him if the death was natural or the result of sorcery. If natural, the grave is filled in the right way and if sorcery was the cause of death, elaborate ritual is performed. All the mourners then leave and the highlight in the ending of the seven days is the distribution of new clothing by the Kurumba to these relatives. As soon as possible after the funeral, preferably within a month, a stone is placed in the ancestral temple to give the deceased a place to stay. After pouring a little oil on the stone as part of a prayer ritual and leaving food and drink for the spirit of the departed, the relatives leave. Once a year, all those who had a relative who died within the year participate in a final ceremony. At the nearby river or stream, rice gruel is poured over cloth, which is set adrift. In addition to honoring the spirits of those who died within the year, the Irula thereby honor all the ancestral spirits of the related patricians.

In some form or the other, the sacred grove as a point of worship is intrinsic to most tribal communities. Thus, for instance, in Odisha *sarna* means grove and it usually denotes the sal tree, sacred to the religion, from which



also derives *sari dhorom* or the religion of the sal tree. A large population of the Santhal and Mundas practice

Sarnaism, and worship *Dharmesh*, the God as the creator of the universe. Sarna temples are called Sarnasthal and can be found in villages, while worship can be performed in sacred groves where the entire community congregates and sings collectively. The ceremonies are usually performed with the active participation of village priests and their assistants.

In conclusion, it can be clearly maintained that the tribes are the simplest and most self-effacing amongst all our communities and have a unique culture and identity. There is a lot to learn from them – especially their frugality and devotion to nature. This makes them everlasting sentinels of sustainability for the planet.

# In Search of Folk Gods of Uttara Kannada Region

*Savitha Uday*

The rituals, gods, deities, and festivals of local tribes and communities across the world are derived from nature, which is an intrinsic part of tribal life. Similarly, Indian tribal gods, unlike Hindu mythological gods, were created to seek protection from nature and to protect livelihood and health. The folk gods of Uttara Kannada region, which date back to several centuries, have slowly over time transformed from their original tribal roots into Vedic-Brahmanical gods. This article tries to map this journey of transformation and obliteration that the folk gods have undertaken through several years of fieldwork and study in western ghat forests of Uttara Kannada (Sirsi, Siddapura, Yellapura, Shivamogga and Sagara) and coastal belts of Uttara Kannada ( Karwar and Ankola). The study is based on observation and interviews with villagers and priests who belong to these areas. The views and perspectives expressed are from my own observations and are not intended to hurt any sentiments.

## Features of Folk Worship and Folk Gods

The folk gods are separate from mainstream religions and do not ascribe to any major religion. Folk goddesses are called *Amma* (nagamma, maariyamma, kari kanamma, eleyamma) or *Ajji* (kannjji, choudajji, udugolajji, boore ajji). Gods are called *Appa* (huliyappa, jatagappa) and *Ayya* (bommayya). Folk worship is *matru devata* worship (goddess worship). It can be observed that folk gods have a matriarchal structure where female goddess are prominent. The goddesses usually never have husbands, but they have brothers and male subordinates.

*Amma, kannajji , choudajji, marikamaba, karikanamma, soppodati, eleyamma, adugoolajji, nagamma, karikanamma, beliyamma, huchhumaasti* are all female goddess who ruled this region but there is no mention of a husband for all these deities. Male gods are mostly subordinates or brothers who guard *Amma* (mother goddess). Later under the vedic influence, *kunkuma, haladi*, bangles and *kana* began to be offered to a female goddess (bringing in the concept of a goddess as a married woman). Folk goddesses are mostly represented by water and not fire. Originally most of the folk gods were erected stones with no human figures. Folk gods do not have a concept of a temple structure or a *garbha gudi*. They are worshiped on a raised platform called *katte* (*nagara kette, masti katte, huliyappana katte*) or a symbolic stone (*nagara kallu, jatgappana kallu, masti kallu*). Folk gods were never worshipped every day. There was no concept of a priest since the families of the local tribes and communities called 'Gunga' performed the worship. There was no restriction on footwear and clothes, meat was offered to particular folk gods as an offering and animal sacrifice was a part of the rituals.

The male gods who are subordinates of the female gods have different names according to their jobs. *Bantru* who guards *amma, Keshetrappaala* or *jataga* who guard the land, *gadi jataga*, who guards the boundaries and *kote jataga* who guards the fort. There is also a brother called *Bommayya* who always stays around her.

The folk gods journey from their prehistoric origin into present day can be mapped as follows:

In the first stage (*moola*-origin) the folk gods were of two types:

1. Fertility goddess conceptualized from naga worship (*naaga moola*)
2. Water goddess conceptualized from water worship (*neerina moola*)

In the second stage these gods transformed and assumed different identities, different forms and categorized according to the need of the time and religion which entered and spread in these regions :

1. Warrior gods - Bommayya, Sati (*maasti*), Beera
2. Shaivite gods - Maha Sati, Shakti, Eshwara, Mahabaleshwara, Chamundi, Kannika Parameshwari, Veerabhadra and Jatageshwara
3. Gods of Jainism - Jinnodamma, Jain Beera, Jaina Jataga

In these later stages, the identity of folk gods was completely lost and they evolved into mythological characters and part of the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses, completely removed from their tribal roots, origin, and practices.

The origin and transformation of the fertility goddess conceptualized from naga worship (*naaga moola*) into warrior gods:

Entire Konkan belt was called Nagara khanda, which is also Paatala loka. The king of *Patala loka* was Bali Chakravarti. The tribes and local communities from Nagara khanda celebrate a festival called *Baleendarna habba*. This is the time when Baleendra visits his kingdom and is also the same time when North of India celebrates Diwali - Rama's arrival in Ayodhya.

Uttara Kannada region has an ancient history of Naga worship. In many ruins and historical villages of Uttara Kannada region we see hundreds of ruined *Nagara kallu*

(snake stones) lying everywhere, they are also seen as boundary stones in many villages. Nagara bana, Nagara katte and Kep nagara are the ancient naga worshipping places.



Naagara Kallu

In Kurse there are two ancient naga stones to which, the villagers offer *pooja* on no-moons day of Kartika Deepavali. When they offer *pooja*, they do not play the gong since Kepnagara is deaf (*keppa* means deaf in the local language). On Nagara Panchami in many villages, tribes offer *alla bellada unde* (jaggery and popped rice *laddos*) black gram, green gram and chopped jackfruit seed, considered delicacies to the Nagara kallu.

The transformation of Bommayya and Maasti gods from Naga moola (Naga origins):

Bommayya is always found in high terrains. In the villages where we find



Bommayya Bandi Habba -Ankola

Bommayya, we find it along with Maasti and Nagara kallu since the tribes and local communities believe Maasti and Bommayya are brother and sister. Though Bommayya has evolved over time into a warrior god we can trace several roots that point to Bommayya being originally a snake god.

In Bandi habba (village car festival) the *gunaga* (local priest) plays with giant wooden masks. One of the masks represents Bommayya and his head is carved with snakes.

In Honnavar, in the ancient village of Kare Okkalu hamlet there is a statue of Bommayya deity and though he is seen sitting on a horse as a warrior, a snake is depicted on his head. Interestingly, in this hamlet, he is known by his original name - Naga devata and the local people call this deity Nagadevate. The transition from being a Naga devata to a warrior god took place due to wars between the kings of the region. Bommyaa began to be depicted as a warrior god and was carved on stones sitting on a horse and holding a dagger. Slowly he lost his naga identity and became a warrior god.

### Maasti

Naaga represents Prakriti and Srishti (creation and fertility). In Kare Okkalu community newly married couples have to visit Maasti and offer a pair of coconut (*jodu*) and one *sidde* (local measuring unit) rice on a banana leaf (*kudi bale*). Maasti is also called Huttada *amma* (mother of termite mold) or Maasti *yamma*.



Ammanavaru



Offering pooja to newly formed termite mold

The shrine is nothing but an erected stone surrounded by termite molds. The local tribes and communities believe Maasti is Bommayya's sister and Bommayya is always found near Maasti. Snakes live in termite molds, is an old belief in tribes and these termite molds are believed to be *Ammanavara guttu* or *Maasti guttu* (mark or symbol). The tribes of Uttara Kannda region believed the snakes guard the guttu.

Although many scholars believe that Maasti or a *Maasti kallu* is a heroic stone of a woman who sacrificed herself as Sati, there are several roots that show Maasti was a tribal snake deity just like Bommayya and in the later stages, both the brother and sister became warrior gods. Bommayya was depicted as a brave soldier who died in the war and Maasti become a maha Sati. If Maasti is indeed a death stone of a warrior's wife who sacrificed her life, then why do newly married couple visit the place? This is because of Massti's old naga moola identity of representing a snake (god of fertility).



Maasti gutta near karki viilage Honnavar



Hucch maasti and nagara kallu -Sodigadde, Bhatkal

We see many Maasti stones are offered to Maasti in Karkki village in the same way of offering Nagara kallu. We also observe that many Halakki tribe men are named Maasti, showing us that Maasti is not necessarily a woman, therefore need not be a sati.

Gama devaru- Grama devaru - Gram devata (representing naaga moola/snake worship):

In Yellapur Maavinamane village there is a deity called Grama devaru. It is a basic crude form of deity with a few erected stones. The village head said this goddess (Grama devaru) is guarded by snake. They believe that a serpent appears in this place when there is a wrong doing in the village. This again indicates that Grama devaru is also a symbol of Naga worship placed (freshly offered). There was a pair of *jodi tengina kayi* (coconut) a new *panje* (towel), placed or offered by a newly married couple. This again indicates the fertility goddess and naga origins of the Grama devaru. This Grama devaru also has two subordinates called Bantaru to whom the animal sacrifice is offered, but not for the Amma Grama devata. Near Sirsi Devanahalli village the head from Kare Okkalu community, Venku Subbu Gouda, talks about celebrating Gaamada habba. According to him, Gama means *hutuu* (naga).



Gama Devaru

When we visited this Gama devaru we saw it is nothing but termite mold and an erected stone. This leads to an interesting discovery that originally the Gama devaru - Gramadevaru was also just a termite mold and that the erected stone came much later.

The stone which has replaced it, is shaped like a termite mold which, also may have in time, transformed into the Linga. The reason for the stone maybe that the stone was a permanent symbol to represent termite mold as there is always a possibility of the termite mold washing away during rains.



Gaama Devaru

Its interesting to observe how the naga worshipping concept evolved into different forms. The basic worship of termite mold led to the Nagara kallu, which then got a human identity with the name Maasti and Bommmayya, who in the later stage became warrior gods. Maasti becomes maha sati who sacrificed herself as sati and Bommyya became a hero who fought and died in the war. In the later stage, they took a form of Shakti, Parvati, Durga or Ambika and male gods into Shiva's form.



Ruins of pots near Amma

The origin and transformation of water goddess conceptualized from water worship (*neerina moola*) into Vedic goddess:

Tribes and indigenous communities of Uttara Kannada were not fire worshippers but water worshippers. Water bodies are considered sacred places and to protect these water sources, gods were created.

At Devi Gadde and Koorse in Sirsi, the village head says there were many ancient earthen pots (*kalasha* and *kumbha*) were found around Amma.



Earthen *kalasha* with human features

My observation is that these indicate the water goddess. When I observe these pots, I felt these pots are not just earthen pots, but they have women's features like breasts and human faces. These earthen pots have taken the shape of Amma in these ruins. In one of the *Ammanavara Gudi*, I saw this human featured earthen pot (*kalasha*) was symbolically placed on the top of the Gudi, giving the pot the highest place, indicating the origin of the goddess being *neerina moola* (water worship).



Ammanvara gindi and Bantara gindi

Kalasada mane is a place where the local communities keep their two sacred pots called Ammanavara Gindi and Bantara Gindi which represents Amma and her subordinate Bantaru.



*Kalasha* is carried by a non brahmin priest -Gunaga at Bandi Habba

'*Kalasha eluvadu*' is a procession where the Gunaga (priest from the local tribe) holds the *kalasha* on his head and goes into trance. This festival is called Gadi habba or Bandi habba.



Borajji gamokkalu community

*Kel pooja* is basically a *pooja* offered to a water filled pot. On the occasion of Deepavali and Nagara Panchami, there is a ritual of filling fresh water in this pot.



Borajji during deepavali festival

### Boode habba - Boore habba - Borajji:

Borajji is a water goddess who comes home in an earthen pot. In Uttara kannada region, Deepavali festival is called "neeru tumbuva habba" means a celebration of filling fresh water in the pot. Kare Okkalu calls it Boode habba or Boore habba. Boore Aiji is a water goddess and Boorajji habba is the celebration of water goddess and giving respect to the water sources.

On this festival day the girls go to the water source and fetch water in a pot and fill it in a large *hande* (earthen pot) and the *hande* is decorated with *hindli kayi* (small bitter cucumber) and *shedi* (white clay).



Neeru meeyauva habba -decorating *hande*  
(bathing pot ) on Deepavali

Kannajji and Chowdajji: Goddess of water sources:

Chowdajji or Chowdamma is also a water goddess who stays in the well, but a symbolic stone is kept outside the well. Choudamma and Jatagappa are found together in this region. Slowly Choudamma is losing her identity and converting into Vedic god. Observe how the name Choudi is evolving. Choudi - Chandi - Chamundi - Chamandeshwari . Now Choudamma, under the influence of vedic gods is offered Chandika homa (offering to agni) and through this ceremony, she is converted from a water goddess into Shakti. This erstwhile water goddess now enjoys grand *poojas* on Navaratri festival. The water identity of this goddess is slowly being forgotten.



Kannajji near Apsara Konda forest waterfall Honnavar

Kannajji is found near water bodies such as streams and springs. Slowly *kannajji* is also losing her identity and being converted into a Vedic god. Devotees offer her green bangles, green saree and *haladi kunkuma* (signifying married status) under the vedic influence. We observe how the name Kannajji is evolving, Kannajji -Kannika - Kannika Parmeshwari, who has transformed into the Vedic goddess Parmeshwari .

## Jatagappa - Jataga

It looks like the concept of lingam has been taken from the Jatagappa. The history of Jataga –the erected stone dates back to prehistoric times. Some scholars believe that artifacts from Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro archaeological sites indicate that some early form of Shiva worship was practiced in the Indus valley. These artifacts include lingam the Pashupati seal and the bull. Jataga looks like the earlier form of the Shiva lingam, a stone without *peeta* (mount). However, Jataga in tribal lore is placed as one of the subordinates of Amma. He is considered as a guarding god, eg: he is named as Bagilu banta or Baagilu jataga (doorkeeper), Kote jatga (guard of the fort) and Kshetra pala (who guards the land). In the later stage Jataga evolved into Jatageshawara and assumed the identity of Eshwara.



Subordinates of Amma

In Ankola taluk, in Heggar- Marugadde village, there is a temple for Amma and her two subordinates called Bantas. The *pooja* for the Bantaru is done by Kare Okkalu

tribe, but the *pooja* of Ammanavaruru is done by a Brahmin priest. Interestingly, a part of the salary is given to the Brahmin priest by Kare Okkalu community to offer *pooja* for Ammanavaruru. Every Sankaranti they pay Rs.2500 for this arrangement. However, he comes only thrice a year to offer *pooja*. Apart from this, all collections from the hundi money also go to the Brahmin priest. When asked, the Gunga says, earlier the *pooja* for Ammanavaruru was done by Kare Okkalu community, but now it is taken over by a Brahmin priest.



Ammanavru temple in unkept condition - Marugadde Ankola

This is the story of most of the tribal gods. They are buried in the deep forest or given to Brahmin priests to offer either a *nitya pooja*, *homa* or *havana* ( ritual wherein offerings are made into a consecrated fire) by which, the priests generate income and none of which goes to the tribal community. In some places the local tribes and communities pay a monthly salary to offer *pooja* to their gods by the Brahmin priests.



## Tea Workers of North Bengal: Brewed in Bedlam

*Prafull Goradia*

It is a flawed common notion that the British first discovered that the Chinese had been drinking tea for several thousand years and introduced it to the rest of the world. Nothing could be far from the truth. It was only in the mid-19th Century that the British East India Company started establishing tea plantations after having discovered that certain tribes in upper Assam used leaves from a bush that grew wild to make tea. By then, the rest of the European colonists like the Portuguese had already started trading in tea.

A British army man, Major Robert Bruce, is credited with the spread of tea plantations in India. But establishing large plantations, particularly in north Bengal, required a sizable workforce that was hard to put together in that particular region of colonised India.

The Darjeeling hills and the foothills of the Terai (the border with Nepal) and the Dooars (the border with Bhutan) were largely dense forested areas, crisscrossed by streams that flowed down from the mountains. Most sons of the soil,



or the original inhabitants of the region, were reluctant to work in tea estates.

It was a hostile terrain, an area remote and totally cut off from the rest of the world. But the push to establish tea estates made the British turn to cheap labour in the tribes that dwelt in the hills of Darjeeling and Nepal and transported *adivasis*, like the Santhals, Mundas, Oraos, etc, from the Chhotanagpur region (now Jharkhand and parts of Bihar) to settle them in the gardens that were gradually gnawing into the forests of the Terai and the Dooars. In the steep and rolling hillsides in Darjeeling, local tribes like the Gurungs, Mangars, Limboos, Khamis, etc, provided the workforce which tended to the tea bushes and plucked their leaves to be turned into tea. The gardens in the plains gradually saw workers belonging to indigenous ethnic groups like the Ravas and the Rajbangshis also take up work in tea plantations.

The rolling tea estates with their green panorama punctuated by women in colourful attire plucking tea leaves present a serene picture-postcard like vista. But over a century the tribals and the *adivasis* have been working in abysmal conditions, having to regularly face hardship that would make others shudder.



In the early days, entire families of *adivasis* and Nepali tribals were settled within the boundary of the tea estates. Labour suppliers, at the bidding of their colonial masters, enticed men to leave their home and hearth to come and start living in these remote areas. As families grew, more and more hands were made available to the planters to work in the tea gardens and the factories that each estate established to manufacture the finished product.

A key feature of the tea sector is the high participation of women in its labour force. No other industry has such a high percentage of women comprising the workforce, sometimes making up almost half of the labourers. From the very beginning women have formed a sizable portion of the garden workers. They have plucked leaves during the day and tended to their families after shifts. Thus, over generations, these families have been working in the gardens of the hills and the plains.

Today, according to a survey by the Bengal Government (2012), the number of tea estates in the hills and plains of north Bengal stands at 273. Over 1.1 million people live in these estates located in the districts of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar. The survey indicates that there are about 2.6 lakh permanent workers in these gardens.

Over the years, the tea industry in Bengal has seen a downswing in many aspects that have inexorably cast a shadow on the lives of its workers. Traditionally, wages paid by planters have always been low with families having to live off sparse crop cultivation to feed themselves and fuel wood from the forests to fire their *chullahs*. However, after Independence, a Plantation Labour Act was passed in Parliament in 1951 in a bid to better the lives of tea workers. Despite the industry wide agreed wages appear low but the garden managements 'paid in kind' apart from the daily remuneration. Tea companies 'provided' drinking water, healthcare facilities, education, rations for the family comprising rice and *atta* (flour) at low, concessional price as well as fuel. At present, the daily wage of a tea worker in north Bengal is Rs 159.

Though the tribals and the *adivasis* are steeped in a rich tradition of religion and culture, each with its unique ethnic background, their existence in the tea estates has been affected continuously by adverse conditions not within their control. In the past two decades and a little more, tea gardens have either been shut down or abandoned by managements for months at a time drying up the only major source of income for the families. During this period over a thousand residents in these gardens have died of hunger and malnutrition. There were times during the early 2000s that as many as 22 tea estates had stopped functioning temporarily on some pretext or the other. At present, 14 gardens in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar are closed. Workers and their family members in the closed gardens are forced to look for jobs elsewhere to stay alive and many, especially women, fall victim to human trafficking. Workers in some closed gardens manage to pluck tea leaves that they sell to middle-men at low prices. Years have passed, but the workers even now continue to wait to realise their statutory rights. Going back to the government survey we find that in many tea estates workers still do not enjoy dues as per statutory norms.

The central problem has been that prices of tea have not risen in step with inflation. In 1939, the eve of World War II, the wholesale average price of Bengal and Assam tea was about two rupees per kilogram (price per pound raised to kg). Today, the price average is say Rs. 160/- or 80 times the level of 1939. Whereas the overall cost and price level is a minimum of 400 times the 1939 level. If that be so, the wholesale price of tea should be Rs. 800/-, not Rs. 160/- as it happens to be. This is the crux of the tea situation. Most other factors follow from this mismatch between cost and price.

The tea garden population has also to make do with unfiltered water supply from streams and waterfalls. Most gardens do not have proper pipelines to supply water to the workers residences. Even though there are hospitals in 166 tea estates, only about a third of them have qualified physicians. Nurses, dispensaries and ambulances are also lacking and the workers and their families have to travel huge distances for medical attention and childbirth.



Apart from these taxing circumstances the tea garden denizens also have to cope with another challenge — wildlife. The tea estates were established by the British in prime forests of the north Bengal hills and plains. This permanently affected the ecological balance of the region. Human encroachment, which continues even now, has

upset the habitat and behaviour of animals. Tea garden residents have to frequently face elephants, leopards and bison. These encounters leave behind deaths, injuries and damage to houses and crops.

As elephant corridors or routes used by the herds for millennia to travel from one part of the forest to another now pass through a tea estate halting work, the huge beasts send people scampering for safety. At night, elephants are known to raid workers' settlements to eat corn or paddy in the fields and even break down the walls of huts to get to rice and grain stored by a family. Elephants also never pass an opportunity to raid stores where grain meant for school mid-day meals are kept. In 2015, 37 humans were killed in elephant attacks in north Bengal and each year the numbers hover between 20 and 50. Elephants too are killed as villagers illegally erect energised fences to protect homes and crops.

Leopards have adapted to life in the tea gardens and even prefer gullies, bushes and forested areas within an estate to have their litters. Thus, encounters with leopards are not entirely uncommon. In the plains bison have to share space with humans. These large animals are very unpredictable in temperament and thus not easy to drive out of areas inhabited by humans.

The conflict between the animals and humans continues to scar both sides. Between 2000 and 2013, 10 people have been killed and 91 injured by leopards as per official estimates. Twenty-two leopards have been killed during the same period in retaliatory attacks by humans. Bison though, has not been smeared with the reputation of the elephant and the leopard as more of them die due to shock at being chased. But human deaths and damages to village dwellings continue to occur.

The life of a tea garden denizen is arduous to say the least. But even then people here do celebrate life with zest. The mosaic of ethnic groups observes myriad festivals. From the celebration of Durga Puja, Losar, the Nepali New Year, Id, Christmas and Easter to the throbbing percussion beats during Karam and Hul of the *adivasis* and the plaintive songs of Tusu Puja— the tea workers do experience brief interludes of gaiety and happiness by participating in religious and cultural activities.



## Tribal Jewellery of Ethnic Gujjar Bakkarwal Nomadic Communities of Jammu and Kashmir

*Dr. Kavita Suri*

In the mountainous border state of Jammu and Kashmir, the twin tribes of Gujjars and Bakkarwals are the nomadic communities which oscillate between the higher reaches of mountains and the plains. They move to the lower and middle mountain areas of Pir Panjal mountain pastures in the summer with their flock of sheep, horses and buffalos twice a year where some of them engage in cultivation and come back to the plains in the winters. Bakkarwals are

the ones who travel as far as Dras and Kargil from Jammu plains as part of their traditional nomadic journeys.

Gujjars and Bakkarwals are primarily nomadic tribal communities who, like any other tribal communities in India, have maintained their unique lifestyles including the dresses and ornaments even though there has been some dilution in their cultures. The cultural heritage of



the Gujjars is rich and diverse. It includes millennia-old indigenous culture and tradition and spans the customs, culture and art of these ancient nomadic tribes. Gujjars also have a rich intangible cultural heritage in the form of oral traditions and expressions including Gojri language; unique social practices like Jirga, rituals, festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature, traditional craftsmanship etc.

Tribal Jewelry is primarily intended to be worn by these tribes as a form of beautiful adornment also acknowledged as a repository for wealth since antiquity. These are the members of the twin Scheduled Tribes of Gujjars and Bakkarwals who with their unique social, cultural and linguistic identities form the third largest community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Ornaments used by Gujjar and Bakkarwals stand out in a crowd because of its rustic and earthy flavour. Like various other tribes in India, they also use different types of jewellery to adorn themselves. These tribes adorn themselves with their indigenous tribal jewellery most of which is made of silver. They use heavy, bold and rugged silver ornaments which clearly reflects the ethnic characteristics of this tribe. The exotic Gujjar and

Bakkarwal tribal women wear heavy and artistic jewellery most of which is made of silver.

Women of Gujjar Bakkarwal tribes are very active partners in the economic and social life of the community. Notwithstanding the fact that they profess Muslim faith, they do not observe purdah and carry huge pots of milk to the market on their heads and perform numerous outdoor jobs with much ease and confidence. They wear silver ornaments which, over the years, under the pressure of arduous pastoral living, have become bold and crude. O.C Handa, in this book, "Textiles, Costumes and Ornaments of Western Himalaya," writes that the Gujjar women are required to carry huge loads of household items and milk-pots on their heads to long distances on foot and to work in very harsh geophysical terrains under the nomadic conditions and thus the ornaments used by them include a few bold and heavy silver items only for ears, nose, neck and wrists, and nothing for head and feet."

The Gujjar and Bakkarwal females are fond of mostly silver jewellery and have a fascination for the necklaces. Their necks are embellished by different kinds of necklaces. Women wear a long chain made of silver around their necks known as '*Gaani*' and '*Haseeri*'. One of the varieties of the tribal necklaces that they wear has a triangle pendant, studded with a beautiful stone in the centre of it. It is known as "*Chamkali*" and symbolizes 'evil eye' and mainly utilized to avert bad luck. Another type of silver necklace is known as "*Dodmala/Duldo*", the one, which is made of small thin cylindrical hollow beads of silver together, and each piece pointed at the end. '*Dod*' is actually a hollow ornament, made of silver, with a bead inserted in it that rattles on slightest movement. Another silver necklace which is very popular among the women of these tribes is "*Hamel*" necklace which is made of coins. The coins are strung on a thread with a centrally fitted heavy silver pendent. The "*Jomaala*" and "*Hansli*" are the other necklaces. Among few more ornaments for neck,

'Haar' is a heavy silver necklace, 'Mankay', is a necklace of small silver and glass beads tied close to the neck, 'Naliya' is a cylindrical hollow silver ornament tied round the neck by means of a thread. The Gujjar women also wear a necklace of one-rupee silver coins, tied to a chord by the hooks.

Dr Suresh Abrol, the biggest private art collector of J&K and well known culture enthusiast who is also the founder of Shashvat Art Gallery Museum and Manuscripts Library and has a rich collection of antique Gojri jewellery, informs that "Gojri Haar" consists of many types, i.e. *teen lado*, *chaar lao*, *panj lado*, *cheh lado*, *satt lado*, *eath lado* and *nau lado* (means the number of strings in any necklace describes its name). Dr Abrol whose art gallery has been designated as Manuscripts Conservation Centre by National Mission for Manuscripts, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, further adds the Gujjar necklaces like *Hasseri* and *Seeri* can weigh up to 250 gm to one kg. This makes it amply clear that the Gujjar women had been wearing heavy weight of this metal which, over the years, has become lighter.

Gujjar tribal women also tastefully decorate their ears with silver. Their ears droop with the weight of a dozen

"Balis" or silver rings with bells. *Balis* or *baliyan* are the large size silver ear-rings, with a bunch of tiny metallic flowers attached to them, which produce jingling sound on movement. They also wear "Jhumkas" which dangle and tinkle and are silver ear-pendants. They also wear a fancy silver cap or crown on the head known as 'chok phool' which is a bowl shaped ornament fastened to the head.

While among the Hindu women, the wedding *nath* is on their left nostril and the Muslim women is on the right nostril, among the Gujjars, there is a custom of wearing ornaments on both the nostrils, and even in the septum. Piercing of nose and ears of females is one of the important sacraments among the Gujjars. The nose-piercing ceremony is called *Nakseen* and the ear-piercing ceremony, *Kanseen*. Both these ceremonies are performed between the age of three and nine years. Piercing is done by the eldest woman of the neighbourhood with needle, and a thread is inserted through the holes. Majority of married women of these twin nomadic tribes have their nose pierced and they put nose pins, which are made of silver on their nose. Nose pins come in different sizes which denote whether the girl is married or not. While the unmarried girls wear





a small string of silver, the married ones have their nose decorated with a big silver ring studded with stones or pearls. The "Murki" is another nose ornament suspended from the Centre part of the nose which is mostly worn by young girls. "Murki is a small silver pendant worn in the nose-septum. The smallest nose-pin known as a 'Nali' is worn by girls; a slightly bigger nose pin or "Teeral/Kokol Tila" is worn by older girls while married women wear large and intricate nose-pins known as "Loung". By way of the nose-ornaments, the Gujar women also wear "Balu", a big silver ring studded with imitation stones.

For the wrists, Gujar women wear 'Kangan" - a type of round big weighty silver "Karas' i.e., the bangles. Besides, they wear glass bangles, called *Kanch-ki-choorian*, *Mureeda*, *Bandh*, and *Gokhru*. For the fingers, gold or silver *anguthis*, finger-rings are used. The Gujar brides also are decorated with silver ornaments like silver chains, silver *Dolara*, silver *sargast*, silver *mahail*, silver *gaani*, silver earrings, silver bangles, silver rings etc. At the time of marriage, the bride is made ready for the nikah by combing her hair in multi-plaits, and her palms are treated with henna. Males also colour their beards with henna. She is also given nose-ring and bangles by her parents on that occasion.

Men sometimes wear rings of silver but they usually don't put on heavy jewellery. The typical Gujar *kameez* or shirt sometimes has silver buttons. Silver beads hooked to the buttons produce a sound. Silver studs called "mogla" are used as cuff links. Silver anklets called as "Jhanjra" are worn along with the "Anguthra" on a silver ring on the big toe. Gujjars also wear 'Tabeeet' is a tiny amulet, tied with red or black thick chord round the neck. *Tabeeet* is an encrusted silver square piece, with a chord to wear it round the neck.

All along the traditional nomadic routes of these twin tribes of Gujar and Bakkarwals, a number of silversmiths have been working since ages who cater to the particular needs of the nomadic people and their traditions.

# Cultural Heritage of the Mizos

*Prof. Laltluangliana Khiangte*

## Introduction

The present land of the Mizos, Mizoram is a mountainous region, which became the 23rd State of the Indian Union in February 1987. Formerly, it was known as, “the Lushai Hills” district of Assam until it became a Union Territory in 1972. This land lies in the southernmost corner of North East India and is the abode of the Mizos. Area wise it ranks 18<sup>th</sup> in the Indian Territory, with 21,081 sq km. The length of the geographical area of the State, stretching north to south is 277 km, while the width from east to west is 121 km. It shares its boundaries with three states of Indian Union- Assam, Tripura and Manipur, which extended over 95 km.

It has a total of 630 miles (722 Km.) international boundary with Burma and Bangladesh. It is bounded on the east by the Chin Hills of Burma, on the south by the Arakan Hill Tracts of Burma; on the west by the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and Tripura state of India; and on the north by the Cachar district of Assam and the Manipur state. It lies just within the tropics between Latitude 21.58° to 24.35° north and Longitude 92.15° to 93.29° east. Mizoram on the whole, has a pleasant and agreeable climate. Tropic of Cancer passes through the heart of the land and it is neither very hot nor very cold. In summer, the temperature varies between 20°C to 29°C and nor very



cold in winter between 11°C to 21°C. It is observed that the entire area is under the direct influence of the monsoon. It rains heavily between the months of May and September and the average rainfall is 254 cm per annum.

## Origin of the People

One cannot trace back very far the origin of the tribe. Most of the Mizo clans claimed that their ancestors came out of the earth through a big hole on a mountain side in the east at a place called Chhinlung, the big stone shutter. Several stories were told to explain the origin of Mizos, and some are quite interesting. There is also a myth that Mizos originated as one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The Reverend Liangkhaia who wrote many books including the first History of the Mizos (*Mizo Chanchin*) way back in 1920's reluctantly mentioned one supposition that the Mizos are the descendants of Japheth, one of the three sons of Noah.

Although this belief is difficult to substantiate, there is at least a possibility of its likelihood as enunciated by some groups of people. People also believed that the Mizos had migrated from China during the reign of Chien Lung (hence the Mizos, most probably called *Chhinlung*), and it was believed that apart of the lost ten tribes of Israel found themselves in China. The Mizos are racially said to be of Mongoloid origin and their language has been found under the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. They are a part of the great waves of the Mongoloid race, which fanned out of the east and the south of Asia in the past. Further evidence is strong enough that the Mizo people migrated from Yunnan province (China) through the Shan

state in Burma. From that Shan state they came further west, crossing the Irrawady River in Burma, leaving some Mizo families known as the Lusei in Burma / Myanmar. The Mizo ethnic groups have been found today in the three independent states of Myanmar, Bangladesh and India.

## Religion and Cultural Heritage

The religion of the Mizos of the past has been usually escribed as 'animism', which lexically means 'attribution of soul to inanimate object or natural phenomena.' The term, however, is now generally used to describe the faith of pre-literate people, depending on memory and oral traditions rather than on sacred literature. It involves the belief in all kinds of spirits with a High God, including belief in some form of life after death. Believe it or not, the Mizos, in their animistic beliefs and practices, seemed to have depended on their own genius for the development of their ideas and practices.



Khamliana Sailo Chief of Lungleng Village

The charm may be rendered in English as follows: "Oh, hear us and answer us, thou who were worshipped by our ancestors." After which they went on to mention their old homes and the surrounding areas, which lengthened the sacrificial spell or invocation.

The Mizos of the past had a distinct community and their smallest social unit was the village. The village was usually set on the crest of a hill with the chief's house on the best location, normally at the centre of the village and the *Zawlbuk* (the bachelors' dormitory) prominently located near the chief's residence. An open space near the chief's house, *Lal mual zawl* (yard) which is always close by the bachelor's dormitory will be the venue for the main observation of festivals and to perform dances as well. Yearly festival, tiger's head dance, enemy's head dance, different kind of indigenous games will also held here in most cases.



Mizo chief Vanphunga's Zawlbuk

*Zawlbuk* happened to be the place where young adult and all bachelors were trained to understand the socio-cultural heritage of the community and even boys were shown various cultural practices in and around this very dormitory. Not very far from the chief's residence, blacksmith's hut will there where every morning working tools have been sharpened by the villagers and while waiting for their turns, reports of all information, review and discussion of everything will take place so as to inform even silent listeners about the news of the village and its surroundings.

In the same way, women will be made aware of what is happening in and around their village through *Nula-rim*,



Sakei lu lam (Tiger's head dance)

traditional courting of girls that all eligible bachelors must do at night time. Young women may know something in the public water point and also at the yard where traditional *Pawnto* (evening games and entertainment) activities have been conducted.

The chief and his village elders used to have regular meeting and all the burning issues, including day to day administration of the whole subjects have been informed through *Tlangau* (village spokesman) and *Valupa* (respectable senior leader) regular and casual visitors of bachelor's dormitory. At the time when one is ill or died, the patient or dead body has to be transferred to his or her village with prior notice so that all young and middle aged male would join the *Mizawn-inchuh* (trying to carry the stretcher by all means) and this can be considered as an inter-village traditional games to exemplify whose village is shining brighter to perform the basic idea of *Mizo tlawmngaihna* (code of conduct and good form for others)

All above cannot be elaborated in detail, including Mizo good form of life called *tlawmngaihna* (practical code of conduct) but the festivals and dances may be explained in detail just to inform some important cultural heritage of the Mizos. Oral literature plays an important role in the society and whatever the older people inform as a kind of story would be handed down orally and as such,

chants, songs, riddles, proverbs, folk theatre and other folk practices have been made effectively to educate all people of the village.

### Festivals

The Mizos have three annual festivals called *Kut*, marking three different stages of the agricultural process, because Mizos have always been shifting agriculturists. The three festivals are - *Chapchar Kut*, *Mim Kut* and *Pawl Kut*.



Chapchar Kut celebration

***Chapchar Kut:*** *Chapchar Kut* or spring festival may be considered as the most important and grandest festival of the Mizos and it is the time for merry-making and enjoyment for all. *Chapchar Kut* normally lasts three days and three nights, during which drinking, feasting and dancing continue throughout. Oral tradition says that

this festival was first celebrated in Seipui village in Burma (the present Myanmar) where the ancestors of the Mizos lived many years ago. *Chapchar Kut* was celebrated to give thanks to God for saving them from all kinds of injuries and for the blessings he bestowed on them during their engagement in the jungle especially at the time of clearing of forest for jhum cultivation at the beginning of the year.

So *Chapchar Kut* is still observed today in the last part of February or early part of March every year when the felled trees and bamboos of the jhum are left to dry and the shifting cultivators have leisure time to enjoy themselves in their respective villages.



All Mizos, irrespective of age and gender distinction, participate in this grand festival. Decked in colourful dresses, boys and girls go on a dancing spree, which sometimes last all through the night. Young men and women, holding one another's shoulder would dance in the village chief's courtyard day in and out during the festival to enjoy themselves. This festival (*Kut*) is no doubt, the gayest of all the three festivals. That is why some people refer to this festival as, 'a time to celebrate one's own head' which means, one may enjoy this festival in extreme joy, with no limit and without considering any other problems that surround him.

On the day of the festival, the people, particularly children, would be dressed in their finest clothes. In those days, everyone brought platters of cooked rice, eggs, meat etc. out on the platform at the centre of the village, usually in the chief's courtyard and put the food items into the mouth of their friends and relatives. That was really an enjoyable celebration for all the people present in the ground. Young men and women would prepare themselves to dance in a big group called *Chai lam*. The most important item in the celebration, that is, *Chai dance* should be performed throughout the night, especially on the first night, failing which would bar them from dancing for the rest of the *Chapchar Kut* festival.

On the third day the young men and girls assembled at the centre of the village and form a circle, every girl positioned between two youths, whose arms cross over their necks, holding in their hands clothes which hang behind like a curtain. Inside the circle is a drummer or gong-beater, who chants continuously and the young people taking up the refrain would tread a slow measure in time with the song, while cups of *zu* (*rice beer*) are brought to them in rotation.

Amidst hard toil, scarcity and threat of tropical diseases the citizens of the Sailo (and other chiefs) domain would have their weary souls recharged by sharing in the celebrations of various ceremonies and festivals. Expressions of joy, freedom and solidarity through informal gatherings, singing and dancing to the rhythm of drummers and gong-beaters was an important feature of the community existence of the Mizos.



In fact, the success of *Chapchar Kut* depended on how long the young people could continue in singing and dancing. The dancers had to perform *Chai* dance, sing and dance along, drinking rice beer occasionally. How long they could dance would be the best indicator of the success and failure of *Chapchar Kut*. It was said that, in one of the villages called *Chawngtui*, they danced for such a long time, almost till the last part of the year, that they ate up all the stocks of rice and other edibles. Since they did not cultivate due to prolonged festival in that particular year, they had to disperse from their village for want of food. That was the record for the most joyous celebration of *Chapchar Kût*.

***Mim Kut:*** *Mim kût* was celebrated with solemnity, in honour of the dead. In this *Mim kut* or autumn festival, the first fruit of the crops were offered to the dead. *Mim Kut* may be the darkest of the three *Kuts*. The word *Mim* is derived from a popular plant known as *Vaimim* (maize) and sometimes used as a substitute for rice. It was believed that the spirit of the relatives would re-visit their houses during this particular *Kut*. This festival is purely observed for the spirit of the dead, especially of their close relatives.

*Mim Kut* takes place mostly in the month of September every year when the crops, other than paddy, in the fields were reaped and when the weeding work in jhum cultivation was lighter. Some people observed the same in the last part of August. In this festival, fresh vegetables, maize bread, necklaces and clothes were offered to the spirits. The first fruits of the crops were offered to the departed souls. They were placed on a shelf near the place where water was stored in the typical Mizo houses. *Mim Kut* is not a time of joy and merriment as it is observed for the spirit of their relatives. The souls of the dead were expected to partake of the meal. The soul of a dead person was supposed to come out of the head of the dead and remain around the village for about three months. During this period, the bereaved family would ask the departed soul to remain with them. They had to keep an empty seat

for the soul at meal time and small portions of meat and food were kept aside for the soul at every meal.

During this period, if a woman misbehaved with another man, she would be considered an adulteress. After this period was over, the soul was sent to the spiritual world by performing a ceremony of separation called *inthen*. It is believed that the souls of the dead went to *Mitthi Khua* or *Pialral* after observance of the three days. Since the people bade farewell to the souls of their near and dear ones, it was not a joyful feast at all. This festival is also sometimes referred to as *lahna Kut* which means the "feast of weeping". Everyone was free to eat food only after three days. During this period, there would be much singing both in the family and the community. The songs invariably spoke of the dear ones who had left this world.

*Mim Kut* is rarely observed today by the Mizos, perhaps due to Christianisation. The idea behind it is no longer practical and the Mizo Christians would like to observe Good Friday and Easter Sunday instead of *Mim Kut*. That is why only *Chapchar Kut* remains popular in the present time.

***Pawl Kut:*** This festival is held after the paddy harvest, mostly in the month of January, that is why January is named by the Mizos as *Pawl kut thla* (the month of *Pawl Kut*). This festival is enjoyed by the community especially by children and women in the beginning of the year. They prepare their best food and feed one another in a selected yard called *lungdawh* with great amusement and enthusiasm.

The oldest among the three Mizo festivals, *Pawl Kut* was a kind of harvest festival as well as a sort of thanks-giving festival for the community, usually held after the harvest of rice in jhum cultivation, mostly at the turn of the New year according to the present Gregorian Calendar. It is regarded as a festival for the children though adults also participate in it.

During this period, they usually have “*chhawngghnawt*” in which children in their costumes feed each other with meat, eggs and rice. No doubt, male members of the village would enjoy this festival with home-made rice beer while the women and children are involved with different kinds of merriment organised for themselves.

There are two assumptions for the origin of festival. Some say that it originated with the catching of rats (*Zu pawl*) that were found in a heap of straw when the Mizos lived in Burma. Others assume it began with the severe famine, which visited the Mizos when they were in Kabaw Valley around 1450-1700 A.D. After the famine was over the people prepared a feast.

There is a legend behind the origin of this festival. In olden days when the Mizos were in Chin Hills, which is now in Burma, there was a famine that lasted for three years. In the fourth year the people had a very good harvest of a variety of crops. The chief told the people that after three years of famine the ‘*Chung Pathian*’, the supreme God, had blessed them with sufficient food. So they celebrated it by giving thanks to God. Since then, Mizos continue to celebrate this festival. Although a festival for children, young men and women join the children in their amusement while most parents were drinking around their children. Some people said that the duration of feasting and drinking depended on the amount of *Zu* (liquor) available for the occasion. It was perhaps because of excessive drinking during other festivals, which often resulted in shameful drunkenness that the early Mizo Christians insisted on total abstinence from drinking.

*Mizo Kut* had a great impact on the life of the masses because even the poorest would enjoy, as it was celebrated by the whole community. On these occasions, they forgot all their worries. Everyone was given equal treatment. This gave the poor a sense of equality in society, since no discrimination was made between the rich and the poor.

These festivals filled the people with new inspiration to work hard as well as a sense of living together in peace and harmony. These festivals reformed social life, which enhanced feelings of fraternity, harmony and oneness in Mizo society.

The most important feature of the *Pawl Kut* festival was that the people did not drink so much rice beer (*zu*) as in other festivals. A special drink for children called *Zulawm* was commonly used on this occasion. This *Kut* also gave a sense of equality to the people. It was perhaps a type of thanks giving to the goddess (*Khawzing Pathian*) for the blessing of their good harvest. This festival brought joy, happiness and tolerance. It is a unique feature of the Mizo culture, and highlight the Mizo way of life.

In addition to the above three festivals, in all the other cultural ceremonies amongst the Mizos, a community feast (*Ruai*) was placed as significant, essential and is part and parcel of the society. Rich and poor, children and adults, men and women would partake of the grand feast as a sign of close-knit society for their life philosophy being, share and live, grab and die. No one tried to grab alone but shared his fortune with others.



## Dances of Mizoram

The Mizos can boast of several community and folk dances which have been handed down from generation to generation; developing under the influences of the birds, the beasts, the hills and valleys. They love to dance as much as they love to sing. The dances are expressions of the gay, carefree spirit of the Mizos. It should be mentioned here that these dances are not intended for stage performances. Rather, they have evolved for community involvement and participation.

### Cheraw

*Cheraw* is a very old traditional dance of the Mizos. Sometimes it is referred to as 'Bamboo dance', especially by non-Mizos, who are not familiar with the exact name, because bamboo staves are used for the dance. It is believed that the dance had existed way back in the 1st Century A.D, when the Mizos were still somewhere in the Yunnan Province of China, before their migration to the Chin Hills in the 13th Century A.D. and eventually to the present Mizoram. Some of the tribes living in South East Asia also have similar dances with bamboo staves in one form or the other with different names.



*Cheraw* was usually performed on the occasion of *Buhza-aih* (Bumper harvest by an individual family). Formerly, it was not a community dance but a dance performed by a

few selected girls with exceptional skills. It was performed at marriage ceremonies and other merry occasions to celebrate success. On such occasions huge crowd would gather to watch the pride fill performance of *Cheraw* dance by the few expert / skilled dancers. It was also performed on moonlit nights. *Cheraw* is the most popular and colourful dance of the Mizos. Men sitting face to face on the ground tap long pairs of horizontal and cross bamboo staves opening and closing to rhythmic beats. Two bamboo staves are placed on the ground as the bases at right angle to the many pairs of bamboos, at either end of which the men open and close their respective bamboo staves to produce the rhythmic beats.



Girls attired in the colourful Mizo costumes of *Puanchei*, *Kawrchei*, *Vakiria* and *Thi-hna* dance in and out between and across the pairs of horizontal bamboos in accordance to the beats. This dance is now performed at almost all festive occasions. The unique style of the *Cheraw* is of great fascination everywhere it is performed. Gongs and drums are also used to accompany the dance.

### Sarlamkai - Solakia

This is an impressive dance originating from the *Pawi* and *Mara* communities of the southern Mizoram. This dance is known as *Sarlamkai* by the *Pawi* and *Solakia* by the *Mara*. In



the past when different tribes were constantly at war with each other, a ceremony to deride the vanquished beheaded skull of the enemy was usually held by the victor. This ceremony was performed to ensure that the vanquished remain a slave to the victor even in death.

Any person who brought up an occasion for such a ceremony was highly regarded and respected by the people, the king as well as his elders. Therefore, every adult strove with all his capability to be such a hero. The courage and bravery of such heroes was a great consolation for the people when faced with any external aggression. It was during this ceremony that the *Sarlamkai* dance was performed. As is obvious, it is a war dance performed to celebrate a victory in war. Songs were not sung; only gongs, cymbals or drums were used for creating beats. In the dance, boys and girls standing in alternate positions, dance in circles. They generally wear colourful dresses while the leader is dressed as a warrior.

### **Chheih-Lam**

*Chheihlam* originated after the year 1900 on the lines of the song known as *Puma Zai* and the dance is known as '*Tlanglam*'. It is a dance that embodies the spirit of joy and exhilaration and was performed to the accompaniment of a song called '*Chheih hla*'. People squat in a circle on the floor, singing to the beat of a drum or bamboo tube while a pair of dancers stand in the middle, reciting the song and dancing along to the strains of the music.

It was a dance performed over a round of rice beer in the cool of the evening. The lyrics were impromptu and spontaneous, on-the-spot compositions, recounting heroic deeds and escapades and they would also praise the honoured guests present in their midst. While singing the song in accompaniment to the beating of the drums and clapping of hands, an expert dancer would perform a dance, chanting verses with various movements of the body; stooping low with the knees bent, limbs close to the body and moving around as low to the ground as he can.

*Chheih-lam* was performed in the past, normally in the evening when the day's work was over. Today, unlike the past, it is performed on any special occasion with colourful costumes. It has now become, sometimes an entertaining exercise at the time of welcoming important guests and dignitaries.



As the tempo of the dance rises and the excitement increases, enthusiastic people squatting on the floor would leave their seats and join the dancers as other members continue to sing along to the drum beats. In fact, unfamiliar guests present are also invited these days to join this joyous dance, especially on the day of the celebration of *Chapchar Kut*.

## Khuallam

*Khuallam* literally means “Dance of the guests”. It is a dance usually performed in the ceremony of *Khuangchawi*. In order to claim a distinguished place in the society and to have a place in paradise or *Pialral* one has to attain the coveted title of ‘*Thangchhuah*’.



There are two ways of attaining this title. Firstly, one could attain the title *Thangchhuah* by proving one’s mettle in war or hunting by killing many animals which should include animals like barking deer, deer, wild boar, wild- gayal, viper, hawk, etc. Secondly, one could also get the title *Thangchhuah* by performing various ceremonies which included offering several community feasts and dances. *Thangchhuah* therefore, could be attained only by the brave or by the rich. The ceremonies performed in the second method are known as *Khuangchawi*. Important guests invited from other villages at the *Khuangchawi* ceremony enter the arena dancing this *Khual- lam*.



Darbung & Darkhuang

The traditional hand woven Mizo cloth known as *Puandum* is wrapped over the shoulders and the dance is performed by swaying the cloth. *Puandum* has the colours black,

red, yellow and green. As most other folk dances of the Mizos, this dance is accompanied by a set of gongs known as *Darbu* and no song is sung. It is generally performed in large numbers; the more the merrier. The participants are usually to be large in number if this dance is to be performed well in a function.

## Chawnglaizawn

This is a popular folk dance of one of the Mizo communities known as ‘Pawi’. ‘*Chawnglaizawn*’ is also performed at festivals and also to celebrate trophies brought home by successful hunters. On such occasions, it is performed in groups of large numbers. Boys and girls standing in rows dance to the beat of drums. Shawls are used to help the movement of the arms, which also adds colour to the dance. Only drums are used in this dance.



## Zangta-Lam

*Zangtalam* is a popular dance of the ‘Paite’ community, performed by men and women. The dancers sing reciprocal songs while dancing. The drummer is the leader and director of the dance. The steps are few and simple. It forms a good community dance in which anybody can join in and enjoy.

## Par-Lam

The land of enchanting hills has yet another dance to its credit, that is *Parlam*, as choreographed by Mr. L. Biakliana, who also happens to be the first Mizo novelist, hailing from Saitual village, near Aizawl. He has transcribed the song, *Zotui thiang tê* (far from the mountain.....) which is used as the lyric and music for *Parlam*. He taught the dance in the mid 1930's at Saitual village and it has become one of the most important dances of the Mizos, which is mostly performed by young girls.

Girls attired in colourful dresses, with flowers tucked in their hair, dance to the tune of the song which is mentioned above and sung by them. The principal movement in the dance involves the waving of hands with ribbons. A couple of boys lend musical accompaniment by playing guitars. This is a comparatively new dance form. Nevertheless, it has become a part of the Mizo culture.



## Chai

*Chai* is a popular festive dance performed on the occasion of '*Chapchar Kut*'. It is one of the most important dances of the Mizos. In this dance, men and women stand alternately in circles, with the women holding onto the waist of the men, and the men onto the women's shoulder. In the middle of the circle are the musicians who play the drum, choreographing the entire nuances of the dance, while the one with the mithun's horn chants the lyrics of the '*Chai*' song. For instance, to begin the dance, the drummer beats on the drum, and upon the fourth stroke of the drum

the *Chai* song is sung with the rhythmic swaying of the dancers to the left and right, in accordance with the beat of the drum. Depending on the nuances followed the '*Chai-lam*' has four versions, viz. '*Chai Lamthai - I. Chai Lamthai - II, Chai Lamthai- III and Chai Lamthai- IV*'. The dancers sing as they dance and the few musical instruments used.

## Cheraw Creates World Record

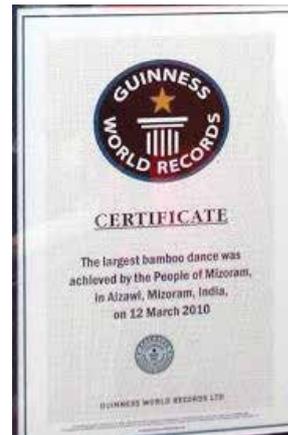
As already mentioned, Cheraw, one of the most unique and interesting dances of the Mizos is popularly referred to as 'Bamboo Dance' especially by the non-Mizos, who are not familiar with the local name because bamboo staves are used in the dance. There was also a time when long, smooth and slender tree trunks, which serve as Mizo traditional grinder of rice husk (*suk*) were used for this particular dance in various places. The dancers perform the dance by an alternate stepping in and out, from, between and across a pair of either horizontal bamboos or *Suk*, which are held against the ground by persons sitting face to face at either end, who continuously tap the bamboos open and close in rhythmic beats. Two bamboo staves are put, as the bases on the ground at right angle to the pairs of bamboos, at either end of which the rhythmic beaters bang their respective bamboo staves to create the rhythmic beats.

*Cheraw* is a very old traditional dance of the Mizos. It is believed that the dance had already existed way back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D., when the Mizos were still somewhere in the Yunnan Province of China, before their migration to the Chin Hills in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D, and eventually to the present Mizoram. Some of the tribes living in South East Asia also have similar dances in one form or the other with different names, like Tinikling & Singkil (Phillipines), Mua-sap (Vietnam), Rabam-kom-araek (Cambodia), Dance of Li people (China), Magunatip (Malaysia), Ram-gratop-mai (Thailand), the Kuki-Chin and the Karen of Thailand.



Cheraw has now become the most popular and the most colourful dance of the Mizos. Usually, a troupe of eight men sit face to face on the ground tapping long pairs of horizontal and cross bamboo staves with rhythmic beats and the girls perform the dance. There are varieties in the pattern, style, steps and gestures in Cheraw dance - imitation of the movement of birds, the saying of trees, and so on. Had it not been for the skill and expertise of the dancers, the ankle of the inexperienced dancer would be nipped and hurt by the moving bamboos. As King Solomon might have said 'the foot of the expert findeth safety, but the ankle of the novice received many nip.'

At present, Cheraw dance is performed by the Mizo boys and girls on festive occasions, though the significance of the Cheraw dance and its original identity has somewhat lost. In this respect, some conservative Mizos might like to suggest that the performance of the dance should be conserved so as to maintain its identity and significance. On the other hand, some liberal Mizos might be of the opinion that, since the original identity and significance of the Cheraw, being mythical and unscriptural, the maintenance and revival of its original concept is not a necessity and could be harmful in a way as it is quite unrelated to the scriptural teachings. Therefore, it is quite sufficient that we use it as one of the Mizo cultural dance items.



#### **Cheraw in the world records:**

An attempt is made, with the initiative of the Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram to register CHERAW into the Guinness Book of World Records by a performance of the largest number of Bamboo dancers ever on earth, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 at Aizawl. A record number of 671 sets of Cheraw, with 10736 dancers excluding the musicians and

gong beaters, all above twelve years of age from different localities of towns and villages gathered in the city of Aizawl and performed this rare feat to create a world record. 'A new Guinness World Record was created with dancers performing the bamboo dance for eight minutes in perfect rhythm', a representative of the Guinness book of World Records from London, an Italian lady Ms. Lucia Siniggagliessi announced after the event.

As one might be aware of, the largest bamboo dance gathering was held at Cebu, Phillipines in 2009 where 7,700 people danced together to create the world record. Now, for the Mizos all over the world, March 12 can be remembered as a historic day, for the bamboo dance (Cheraw) has crossed frontiers to hit international

headlines as the capital city of Aizawl demonstrated the world; largest and longest bamboo dances ensemble. The city of Aizawl may now be referred as the 'City of Cheraw' (Bamboo Dance - Cheraw Khawpui) from 13<sup>th</sup> March 2010 onwards.

### Folkloristic Heritage

Without music or songs, tribal life is incomplete. Music is practically, part of the Mizo life. From time immemorial the Mizos have had their own different kinds of *Zai* (i.e. tunes or flow of the traditional song). Singing, chanting, dancing are natural expressions of tribal ethos. In fact, Mizo *Zai* is as old as the Mizo history itself. Composers all had their own styles of composition or particular *Zai* which came to be known after the name of the composer or initiator, for example - *Laltheri zai*, *Lianchhiari zai*, *Saikuti zai*, *Darmani zai*, *Awithangpa zai* and so on. Besides these, there is another common style known as the *lengkhawm zai*, which is the traditional way of singing with two drums. It appears that the Mizos can sing with heart and soul even without musical instruments except for the local drum, made of animal's skin. That music is deeply rooted in the Mizo life is clearly observed from the fact that they may enthusiastically sing throughout the night till dawn.

When consoling a bereaved family, they sing the appropriate song named as *khawhar hla*, and when attending a marriage party or any other thanksgiving function they sing songs of joy. In this way, different songs are sung depending on the occasion. So, sometimes Mizoram is referred to by some poets as 'the land of music.'

When one dies, he is buried in the common burial field called *thlanmual* and the relatives erect a memorial stone after some years have passed by. Relatives and friends gather at the house of bereavement and *khawhar hla* are sung for about a week or so. The spirit of *Tlawmngaihna* may be best seen in times of bereavement and hardships.

Songs and chants seem to have been a natural outcome of the Mizos' poetic and nostalgic nature. The earliest couplets which later developed into triplets, then into longer, more complicated forms, seem to have first emerged not out of a conscious effort to compose, but were rather a spontaneous outpouring.



Other songs of this early period include lullabies, *hlado* and *bawhhla* of hunters and warriors. *Hlado* is sung to celebrate slain game and *Bawhhla* to proclaim victory of slain enemies. *Salu lam zai* was to celebrate a successful game hunt and *dar hla* was sung to the accompaniment of gongs. *Thiam hla* and *dawi hla* are verse forms of invocations and incantations, chanted by the traditional priest and sorcerer while performing rituals. Certain sets of songs to be sung at the time of specific festivals, dances, celebrations, enjoyment etc. are abundant, as are diverse folk compositions. Beating of drum is part and parcel of almost all the traditional dances.

There are so many proverbial sayings since time immemorial and some people might have doubts about their origin as well. However, these are the sayings that had been told much before the existence of Mizo writing in roman script. Many thought provoking sayings may be



mentioned one after another in this connection. When they say, 'Nu siar nu siar' in case of women and *pa siar pa siar* in case of men, they mean to say that a daughter will be hopeless as her mother or the son will behave as his father, but not in a positive sense. Parents have offspring of their own type, who are not very much better or worse than the parents. On the positive side as well, they

used to say, 'A beautiful bull-gayal gives another beautiful bull-gayal, and ferocious one gives another ferocious type (*Sial rangin sial rang a hring, sakawlin sakawol a hring*). A beautiful mother would deliver a beautiful daughter and a brave father is succeeded by a brave son.

*One who hoards for one self alone will die and those who share with others will survive* (*Sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*) has been the genuine principal philosophy of the Mizos of the past. Sharing with others is the centre of thought and all well to do families would share their treasures at the time of *Khuangchawi* festival by arranging a series of public feast and by distributing different kinds of valuables to the public.

In those days, they did not read the Bible or any other books on moral teaching. They were not instructed to think

logically and act wisely. But they were well equipped with unbelievable wisdom that has been handed down orally. It is a pleasant enterprise to note the sayings and proverbs of our forefathers in the present era where documentation of cultural heritage is discussed.

It is clearly reflected in sayings like - a share and survive or eat alone and perish; even the big boulder cannot be firm without the support of the smaller stones. All these sayings, proverbs, maxims etc. have been used as the guiding moral principle of the Mizos for a long time and it is true to note that they are not inferior to other sayings and proverbs of other great nations.

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## The Traditional Dwellings of the Gonds and the Baigas of Balaghat

*Chitkala Zutshi*

The District of Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh is famous for its tile factories and rice mills and still more famous for the Kanha Tiger Reserve, the largest National Park of Central India at 1177 Kms<sup>2</sup>. The district has a large population of the Gond & Baiga tribes besides the Halbi and the Bastariya. The core zone of the Kanha Tiger Reserve was home to the

Gond and Baiga tribes who had to be relocated in 1968 and onwards in order to avoid any man – animal conflict in the area. The members of these tribes are to be seen in the buffer zone around the Reserve, most still living in houses that are built using traditional materials and traditional techniques.



In order to see at first hand these houses made of mud and *kodo paira* (described later), I had made a trip recently to the Birsa Tahsil of Balaghat District, to the edge of the Kanha Tiger Reserve and not far from the Mukki gate leading into the Reserve. I had booked myself into the home stay of Sheena and Jhampan Mookerjee, who have built a beautiful home in the area and have two spare bedrooms which they let out to visitors. The place is called Salban Kanha. The area is lush with Sal and Saja trees. Rice paddies- golden yellow at this time of the year, carpet the area and the resettled villages here are backed by densely forested mountains.

After spending the night at Salban, I made my way in the morning to the home of Jethia Bai and Budh Singh, members of the Gond tribe. Their home is located in the midst of the ripening paddy and backed by the lush green hills. Budh Singh works in the Salban resort, while Jethia

Bai works at home and in her fields, sometimes doing part-time work at the Salban resort. The house in which Jethia Bai lives is 7 years old. It is a traditional house built with mud and *kodo paira*. Budh Singh tells me that the mud for the house comes from his own fields, while the *kodo paira* is made from the stalks of the *kodo* plant, a local millet. The mud & the shredded *kodo* stalks are mixed together with water and their bullocks help to churn the mixture well with their hooves until it is ready for use. This mixture is then used to build the walls; it hardens once dry and set, and has the added advantage of being termite proof. The roof is made of local bamboo and tiles which were purchased in Balaghat. The tiles used in this area are either the traditional round ones made locally from mud procured from the river nearby, or of the type seen on Jethia Bai's house. Jethia Bai informed that their normal diet consists of rice, dal, roti and vegetables; "just like what you eat". The main festivals celebrated here are



Diwali and Holi. During Diwali the cattle are rounded up and washed and their bodies decorated with flowers and colour. *Kheer puri* is cooked and enjoyed by all. When I asked her about the traditional tribal festivals, she was unable to tell me much.

Jethia Bai then allows me to take pictures of her house, including the hearth over which a pot of dal simmers merrily. The pot is coated with mud to prevent the outside from blackening. A motor bike in her front yard connects this family to the reality of urban living and urban facilities not very far from these idyllic surroundings. Dense sal trees shade her home from the sun. A traditional grinding stone and koyta bear witness to the green chilly chutney she has just made. The house itself is a series of long rooms, each opening into the other. The first room is the formal one and is followed by one used for storing grain and then the kitchen. The sleeping quarters are smaller rooms placed on either side of the three main rooms and the courtyard

at the back has a place for washing. Some bunches of local grasses are drying on the roof; when dried they make excellent brooms.

Leaving Jethia Bai's home, I may my way to the nearby hamlet of Bandha Tola which is a resettled Baiga village. The houses are similar to Jethia Bai's and are surrounded by rice paddies, the rice being almost ready for harvest. Some cattle are tied up in front of the houses and the homes here are painted a brilliant deep blue and the roofs are covered with the locally made round tiles. The traditional method of lathering the outer walls with cow dung seems to have been given up for this modern method of using paint. Some of the paddy is already harvested and forms a lovely golden hued foreground to the perfectly built homes.

In the evening I spend two hours on the Bamhni Nature Trail with the guide Karan Armo, a Gond. Karan points out to me that the local saja tree, *Terminalia Tomentose*, the one with the "alligator bark". This tree is worshipped locally and is very useful to humans. The wood of the *Terminanalia Elliptica*, a similar species, is used for making furniture, for boat building, railroad cross ties and as a decorative veneer. The bark is used medicinally against diarrhea and the stem of this tree can store water, which can be tapped when other sources are not available. The ash of the bark of this tree is even used as soap. The tussor silk worm feeds off the leaves of this tree and spins its lustrous cocoons on the tree. These cocoons are then harvested and the bright sturdy tussor yarn is spun out of these cocoons to be made into sarees, dress material, kurtas and shawls. No wonder the tree is worshipped and is considered to be the abode of Bada Dev, the Great God. When I ask Karna Armo about his traditional festivals, he mentions the Pola festival. It falls on the day of *Pithori Amvasya* in the month of *Shrawan* and marks the day when the farmers worship their bullocks and pray for a good harvest.



Karan also points out the bright yellow corkscrew flowers and the spiders hanging from their webs between the branches. After a stroll along the Banjar river, I return to Salban for the night. The next morning I visited the hamlet of Bhimlat on the river Jamunia. Bhim is supposed to have visited this place during the *vanvas* of the Pandavas in the forest, and left his *lathi* here, hence the name Bhimlat. Many of the houses in Bhimlat are painted the same bright blue as the houses in Bandha Tola. The roofs are made of bamboo and round tiles and some dried Okra and chana are tied up in a bundle and hang from a wall for safe keeping and use later.

On the way to the home of the Sarpanch of Baherakhar, I stopped at a memorial built recently for the Gond king Shankar Shah Madavi (pronounced Meravi locally) and his son Raghunath Shah. Shankar Shah was the Gond ruler who became a martyr on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1857. This day is celebrated in this region as *Balidan Divas*. It appears that a number of memorials of the Gond King and of Rani Durgavati have been coming up in this region. They represent the self assertion of the Gonds of the area. In Baherakhar I visited the homes, one old and the other

brand new, of the Sarpanch. The older house is built of the same raw material, that is, mud, *kodo paira*, the round tiles and wooden beams, as the houses in Bhimlat. The front entrance leads into a court yard that is surrounded by rooms. The new house has more contemporary tiles on the roof. The interior of these houses are on a slightly larger scale than the houses I had visited earlier; the construction style is however the same. At Salban, my hostess, Sheema Mookerjee, shows me a collection of the paintings and the drawings of Jangar Singh Shyam, a local artist, which contains a depiction of Bada Dev, reminding me faintly of Narsimha.

At Salban I visit the patch of land where Sheema is growing *kodo*. The grain glows like some exotic garnets on the green stalks, now ripening to a wood-brown. With great reluctance I leave the area and head back home through the green clad hills and vales of Balaghat.

# Santhal Pata of Majramura

*Ananya Bhattacharya*

Santhal Pata is a languishing tradition closely linked to the rituals of life and death of the indigenous people of Chotonagpur plateau. The Purulia district in West Bengal is part of the Chotonagpur plateau. The landscape is rocky and undulating with hills and monadnocks. Indigenous communities like Santhal, Munda, Sabar, Kheria, Kurmi, Mal, Bedia live in this region and nearly 36% of the population of 2.9 million (Census 2011) belongs to scheduled castes and communities. The indigenous communities of Purulia have a rich tradition of art and culture. *Chau* dance and *jhumur* music and dance are popular and thriving. There are communities making *chau* masks, *dokra* and musical instruments like the *dhamsha*. Communities living in the forest fringes make basketry items with *sabai* (grass) and bamboo. Majramura village in Kashipore block has the largest cluster of around 70 folk painters called Patuas and there are about 5 to 10 artists in Raghunathpur and Burrabazar. Bharatpur near Susunia hills, a one-hour journey by car from Majramura, is also a hub of 10-12 Patua families. They all have their last name Chitrakar, meaning painter. The *Patuas* belong to the Patikar community and most of them belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) group while one-fourth belongs to the Scheduled Castes.

The Patuas paint stories ranging from the origin of the Santhals to the likes of Madanmohan Leela, Krishna Leela and Raas Leela, which reflect the influence of Hindu neighbours and intermingling. The scrolls are eight inch to 12 inch in width and vary in length. The panels are marked by simple borders. Most of the scrolls start with representation of the Jagannath trinity, Brahma and other

Hindu divinities. The songs are sung both in Santhali and the local bengali dialect.

The *Jadu Pata* depicts the story of creation of the universe and the origin of the Santhals. Santhal legend states that in the beginning, there was no life on earth and there was only water. The creator *Thakur Jiu* or Lord Shiva first made aquatic creatures like crabs, crocodiles, prawns, fish, worms and turtles. The creator then made two humans with mud and gave life to them, but the sun horse came down from above and trampled on them, breaking them into pieces and destroying everything. *Thakur Jiu* then tried another way, he decided to make *has* and *hasil*, two birds (gander and goose), by rubbing dirt from his chest and moulding it into these shapes. He then infused life into them and they flew in the air and settled down on his hands. At that time the sun horse came to drink water and as he drank water, foam dripped from his mouth and floated on water. *Thakur Jiu* ordered his birds to go and sit on it like a boat, but the birds would not go as they were hungry. The creator then called a crocodile, prawn and crab and told them to bring earth from under the water. Each one of them tried but failed. The creator then called the worm to do the job. The worm promised to do the needful if the turtle would stand firmly in the water. *Thakur Jiu* tied the turtles' legs to four quarters, the worm dived down, sucked up the mud and excreted it through its tail on to the turtle's back till the world was built. *Thakur Jiu* levelled the earth with a crusher. Some of the lumps got stuck to the crusher and became mountains. The foam on which the birds were floating settled on earth and *Thakur Jiu* planted seeds on it and the first grass grew. The goose and gander made their

nest on the grass and laid two eggs. The eggs were hatched by the bird couple and the first man, *Pilchu Harem*, and the first woman, *Pilchu Bhudhi*, were born. The bird couple fed their newborns with juice squeezed from food on to cotton wool and they grew up in a place called Hihiri Pipiri.

The *Yama Pala Pata* depicts the Santhali perceptions of hell. Another popular theme is that of the tiger god or *Baghut Bonga*. The paintings include everyday activities like hunting, farming, pounding grain, etc. Apart from the narrative scrolls, there are symbolic traditions like the *chaksudhan pata* or *paralaukik pata*. This is practiced as part of a funeral ritual. When a person dies, a *patua* visits the family of the deceased. The dead is depicted in square or rectangular panels and the eyes are drawn with charcoal and turmeric on a drawing of the deceased person.

The painting style is simple and has minimal use of colours. Rarely, more than three colors are used in a frame and lighter shades of the colours are used. Saffron, yellow, orange are made by pounding stones collected from neighbouring hills. Green is made from leaves of flat pea, purple from *pui metuli*, pink from banyan flower, red from phanimansa flowers, and yellow from *palash* (flame of the forest) flowers. White is made from *kharimati* (fuller's earth) and blue from indigo, black is made from soot.

Bhado Chitrakar from Majramura has won a state-level award while Baul Chitrakar has been awarded at the district level. Among the other leading artists are Hem Chandra, Jiten Chitrakar, Joydeb Chitrakar, Suman Chitrakar, Bappa Chitrakar, Kalo Chitrakar. Nearly 80 percent of the artists of Majramura are illiterate. Baul Chitrakar's son is the only graduate among the artists. The Patuas are extremely poor and belong to the BPL (below poverty line) category and do not own land. The Government has made houses but many are inhabited since they lack access to water. The Patuas earn by visiting rural households to sing for grains and alms.

In the last two years, the Patuas of Majramura have come forward to safeguard their tradition. The Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles of the Government of West Bengal, in collaboration with UNESCO, aims to promote rural cultural enterprises. The project, initiated in 2016, has supported strengthening of skill transmission. Classes have been held on painting, singing and revival of the natural colours. The artists have participated in different exhibitions and for the first time, they have started selling their Patachitra as works of art. Some of the established artists are earning around Rs 6000 per month.

The oral tradition of *Jadu Pata* is indeed priceless. As we listen to the lilting tunes and try to decipher the painted narratives, we travel to a surreal world of ancient wisdom and tales. The Chitrakars of Majramura have kept the dreams of their ancestors alive. They have now taken up the challenge of taking the message of close inter-connections of man and nature, animate and inanimate, the living and the ethereal out to the modern world.

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## Totos of West Bengal

*Sanjay Thade*

The Toto Tribal community is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of the West Bengal along with Birhor and Lodha. They reside in a small village called 'Totopara', geographically located on 89°20' E to 26°50' N in the Madarihat block of Alipurduar district. The Totopara or the toto village is nestled at the hill slope of the eastern Himalayas near to the south of the border line between Bhutan and West Bengal. The eastern side of the village is bathed by a gargling river popularly known

as Torsa. Toto's belong to Mongoloid group racially and their complexion is yellowish. Their physique is short but well-built and they have small eyes, flat nose, broad and square cheek and thick lips.

The total population of Toto is 1,495 of which, males - 783 and females - 712. The number of males in 0-6 age group is 74 and females is 82 (according to Base line survey on Toto conducted in the year 2018 by Cultural Research Institute, TDD, Govt. of West Bengal).



According to Roy Burman, previously the place was under the control of the Bhutia people. In the sixties of the last century it came under the domination of the British. Since the very beginning it has been the British policy to keep Totopara, as a sort of reserve for the Toto's - allowing no other communities to settle there. The whole area of the village comprising of about 3.12 square miles was recorded in the name of the 'Toto Mandal' or chief on behalf of the whole community during the first settlement operation conducted by Sunders in 1889-1894.

The boundary of the village Totopara comprises of the tading hills and Bhutan himalayan range on the North, the river Houra and Titi forests on the South and the West respectively. The river Torsha is flowing on the East of the Totopara. The total village area is divided into six *gaon* (hamlet) namely Panchayetgaon, Mondolgaon, Subbagaon, Mitragaon, Pujagaon and Dumsigaon. The hamlets are mainly divided on the basis of clans residing in these places. Totos are generally divided into 13 exogamous clans namely: i) Dantro-Be ii) Danko-Be iii) Budhu-Be iv) Bongo-Be v) Nubi-Be vi) Nuringchanko-be vii) Mangko-Be viii) Longkaiji-Be ix) Diringchanko-Be



x) Mangching-Be xi) Pisuchangko-Be xii) Digbi-Be xii) Mandro-Be.

The Toto language belongs to Tibeto-Burman family of the sub-Himalayan group as classified by Hodgson and Grierson. Till date they don't have any bounded script but they are working to settle their own script's sketch. They speak in Bengali and Nepali too. The traditional dress of a Toto Male is called *gappo* or *gado* and for a female it is called *zuia* or *mera*. But now they wear more westernized dresses like pants, shirt, *salwar* etc. Traditionally, the Toto were involved with orange trade but due to some inevitable reasons their trade collapsed and now not a single orange tree can be found in the village. Totos now engaged as porters and trade in Bhutan. They mainly depend on cultivation and selling betel nuts (*supari*) and few of them are working in banks or as teacher or social worker.

All the agricultural fields are at the bottom of the village near the river where they cultivate maize, millet, pulses, paddy, potato, sweet potato, tapioca, turmeric and ginger. Almost every house has a kind of kitchen garden where they cultivate green vegetables and drumstick. They are



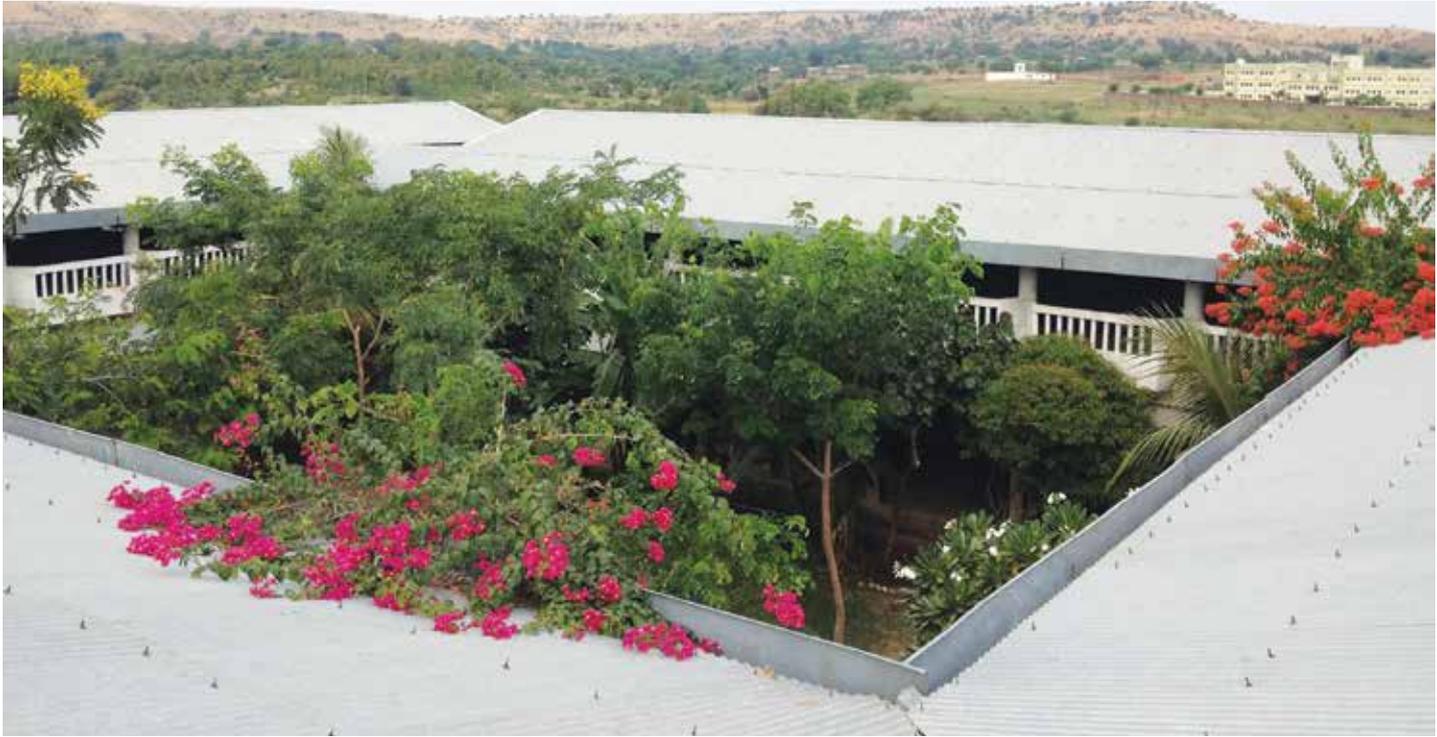
also engaged with animal husbandry and rear cattle like goat, cow and pig. Some are also engaged in 100 days work under the gram panchayat scheme. Rice with some low oiled gruel is their staple food. They avoid using much spices, use salt and prefer to have boiled food. They relish pork in their different ceremonies and consumption of red meat and poultry is common. They prepare a fermented drink called 'eu' with a minor millet called 'marua', which they cultivate themselves - rice powder and serve it in *poiipa* (mug made of bamboo). Hunting big games were one of their favourite pastimes. Earlier times, while staying in the forest they used to cook a special kind of rice and chicken by using bamboo and collect different types of mushrooms and tubers from the adjacent forest area.

A traditional hut of Toto is built with bamboo spilt wall.

They built their huts on a height of about six feet above the ground and a raised platform is used for storing of firewood and other objects. It also helps them from animal attack as the village resides in the Dooars region. The huts are made on wooden or bamboo posts. The bamboo platforms are called 'dui' and the roofs are thatched. Tree trunk or thick wooden plank serves as the staircase to reach the platform. Their huts are divided into three sections and they place their ancestral deities in the third section where guests are not allowed to enter.

The village temple, 'Dimsa' is situated near Pujagaon where no one is allowed except the village priest and people gather there only on the occasion of their festivals. Though monogamy is common form of marriage among Toto but polygamy is not prohibited. Marriage by negotiation, escape, capture and love marriage are the various ways of acquiring mates. The Totos marry within the tribe except those from the same clan to preserve their ethnicity. Very few cases of out-caste marriage have been reported in the recent past. Divorce is allowed but with prior reasoning to everyone. The Toto people nowadays define themselves as Hindu though they mainly believe in nature worship. Due to attribution of Christian missionary works, few of them got converted to Christianity.

Totopara has been provided with a community hall and pipeline drinking water supply. There is a Government high school in the area and are they are getting the benefits of various State Government schemes like Sabooj Sathi (free Bi-cycle to the girls and boys of class IX to XII), Kanyashree, MNREGA etc.



School Building

# **Bhil Academy**

## **How English-Medium Education Influences Tribal Students in Rural Madhya Pradesh**

*Fabian Tögel*

In 2004, while doing a surgery clerkship at AIIMS Delhi as part of my final year medical training at Munich University and after having spent a year in Jhabua as a volunteer in 1998, I wanted to make a lasting difference in the lives of the tribal community in Western Madhya Pradesh. I encouraged some of the friends I made while living in Jhabua to form the 'Bhil Health Initiative and Literacy

Society' which in turn set up 'Bhil Academy', an English-medium residential school. Five years later, my German donor NGO was fortunate to receive a generous grant from my Government to fund the construction of a school campus on the outskirts of Jhabua town to accommodate the students who lived far and learned in rented premises.

Jhabua had been known for having the lowest literacy rate in India as per the 1991 census as well as high migration, malnutrition and disease incidences. More than 90% of the district's population belong to the ST community and are part of more than ten crore Adivasis in India. As Scheduled Tribes they enjoy constitutional protection and affirmative action including reservation in higher education as well as special land rights including the benefits derived from the Forest Rights Act 2006<sup>1</sup>. In a 2011 study the World Bank found that STs are more disadvantaged compared to Scheduled Castes and non-SC/STs, suffering from higher poverty levels and a lesser rate of decline in poverty since the early 1980s<sup>2</sup>.

Everybody in the society and among the donors agreed to address Jhabua's development challenges through education and the local members convinced the donors that the medium of instruction should be English. Looking back, I believe that they were right. The debate over which language to teach in, goes back almost 180 years when the British East India Company's practice of funding local instruction in Sanskrit and Arabic was reversed in the form of the English Education Act 1835. In recent years, the same debate seems to have shifted in favor of English language yet again with several State Governments opening English-medium schools. In 2012 it was the second most common medium of instruction with 2.3 crore students studying in English-medium schools after Hindi-medium (studied by 9.7 crore students) and ahead of Bengali (1.5 crore) and Marathi (1.2 crore) in classes I to XIII with a third of the total of 19.3 crore students enrolled in private schools<sup>3</sup>.

1 Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Notification. 2008. Accessed 4/3/14 at: <http://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201212031232212636718File1036.pdf>

2 World Bank. 2011. Poverty and social exclusion in India. Accessed 4/3/14 at: <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/978-0-8213-8690-3>

3 National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA). 2013. Elementary education in India. State report cards 2011-12. Accessed 4/3/14 at: <http://www.dise.in/Downloads/Publications/Publications%202011-12/State%20Report%20Cards%202011-12.pdf>



Bilidoj Campus

English is the dominant language of higher education. The Indian Institutes of Technology and Management (IITs/IIMs) being shining examples, including law, medicine, and social sciences taught at metropolitan universities and their affiliated colleges. Mehtabul Azam from the World Bank and fellow IZA colleagues in 2011 found that the knowledge of English provides a significant economic advantage and is associated with a 34% higher wage when workers spoke English fluently and a 13% wage increase if they knew little English when controlling for age, social group (including ST), schooling and geography<sup>4</sup>. Adivasis were the least proficient. Mr. Azam also found that overall ST households in India are the most disadvantaged, partly due to geographical isolation and - to a lesser degree - discrimination, and recommended to raise their human capital in the form of education<sup>5</sup>.

4 Azam M, Chain A & Prakash N. 2011. The returns to English-language skills in India. University of Connecticut Working Paper 2012-29. Accessed 3/4/14 at: <http://www.econ.uconn.edu/working/2012-29.pdf>

5 Azam M. 2009. A distributional analysis of social group inequality in rural India. IZA Discussion Paper 3973. Accessed 3/4/14 at: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3973.pdf>



Bhil Academy Girls

The society members and donors asked themselves how education can be improved among the Bhils of Jhabua district and their English speaking skills enhanced to provide the same opportunities that others enjoy at publicly funded institutes of higher education. Reservations existed for tribal students, but the difference between the 'general category' and STs (and others who benefit from reserved seats at those institutes) seemed striking. Cutoffs for entry as well as final results are glaringly different which might have led to the notion that Adivasis are on average 'less skilled'. A study looking at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi by Frisancho-Robles and Krishna showed that on an average the quota targeted poorer ST students compared to students in the general category, while once admitted in selective majors they tended to fall behind peers and earn less once in the labor force<sup>6</sup>. However, the fact that the 'creamy layer' or wealthier ST students performed similar to non-minority peers both on entrance examinations and graduation suggested that ability and discrimination do not explain this picture.

At a lower educational level, the Right To Free and

<sup>6</sup> Frisancho-Robles VC & Krishna K. 2012. Affirmative action in higher education in India: Targeting, catch-up, and mismatch. NBER Working Paper 17727.

Compulsory Education law passed by India's Parliament in 2009 brought with it strong stipulations. Most States in turn passed the law by their legislative assemblies and notified its rules, while still deciding their own language policies and curricula. For example, two ST-dominated States in the Northeast, Meghalaya and Nagaland, chose English as the language of instruction and administration. Madhya Pradesh, which has the largest total number of ST population with over 1.5 core equal to 21% of the total, introduced English-medium boarding schools for tribal students in 2012. According to Meganathan, the State introduced English as a compulsory subject in class I as part of its State Curriculum Framework in 2007 which distinguishes between 'General English' when the medium of instruction is Hindi, and 'Special English' when the entire curriculum is in this language<sup>7</sup>. In this case Hindi is the 'second language' in what is a departure from the 1968, 'Three Language Formula' but in line with the 2007 National Knowledge Commission's assessment, that teaching English early allows for a more inclusive society. Another large State with a significant tribal population, Andhra Pradesh, and Northeastern States (with significant if not majority tribal populations) including Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland adopted much of the 2005 National Curriculum Framework without considering how to impart English which is introduced from class I.

It was also important to take into account the history, ethnography and attitudes of Adivasis, which could in part be explained by geography. In Jhabua seasonal migration has been rampant. One prevalent custom is a bride price rather than a dowry which appears to be a strong feature of cultural integrity and influence on gender equality but

<sup>7</sup> Meganathan, R. National Council of Educational Research and Training. 2009. English language education in rural schools of India: the situation, the policy and the curriculum. Accessed 4/3/14 at: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/rama-meganathan/english-language-education-rural-schools-india-situation-policy-curriculum>

not on educational outcomes. But rather than geographic access, what else could account for the better educational performance of non-tribals? Could their geographic isolation and unique customs be a refusal to participate in mainstream society? Scott proposes the latter theory for Zomia, a hill track which incorporates India's Northeast and stretches across Southeast Asia along the Mekong river<sup>8</sup>.

The Right To Education (RTE) law, which makes schooling mandatory, was an interesting yet unexpected development in this context. After its introduction in Madhya Pradesh in 2011 the State was now held accountable to provide elementary education for all children within a small radius from their habitations. At the same time more emphasis was being placed on learning outcomes, which are already tracked through the NGO Pratham's Annual Survey of Education Report. Private schools have to reserve 25% of seats in incoming classes for so-called 'Economically Weaker Sections' (EWS), which are allocated through a lottery. Such a program has the potential to improve EWS students' test scores while not affecting the other 75% adversely as shown by Muralidharan and Sundararaman<sup>9</sup>.

The RTE law didn't change much at Bhil Academy, except that the large numbers of applicants were now randomly selected through a lottery rather than being admitted based on need. Based on our data on admissions the demand for English-medium education remains strong even in a low-literacy tribal district like Jhabua. While following the state curriculum the Bhil Academy's administration also had to decide over time which subjects to offer in the higher secondary section which opened

in 2012. Considering a positive learning environment in the residential premises all class XI and XII students are currently studying in the science stream with either biology or mathematics depending on their interests. One recent graduate managed to enroll in the BE civil engineering program at Barkatullah University Institute of Technology in Bhopal while another graduate enrolled in a B.Sc. Nursing program in Jhabua, both of which are offered in English. While it may not be realistic to expect that all future graduates will follow these student's paths, the prospects of being conversant in English to find one's way around higher education and eventually the world of employment in a digital age appear to fuel the aspirations of Bhil Academy's children and their parents.

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8 Scott J. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press (Preface, p. ix)

9 Muralidharan K & Sundararaman V. 2013. *The aggregate effect of school choice: Evidence from a two-stage experiment in India*. NBER Working Paper Nr. 19441.



# Birsa Munda

*Shree Deo Singh*

Birsa Munda was a young freedom fighter and a tribal leader, whose spirit of activism in the late nineteenth century, is remembered to be a strong mark of protest against British rule in India. Born and raised in the tribal belt around Bihar and Jharkhand, Birsa Munda's achievements are known to be even more remarkable by virtue of the fact that he came to acquire them before he was 25. In recognition of his impact on the national movement, the state of Jharkhand was created on his birth anniversary in 2000.

Born on November 15, 1875, Birsa spent much of his childhood moving from one village to another with his parents. He belonged to the Munda tribe in the Chhotanagpur Plateau area. He received his early education at Salga under the guidance of his teacher

Jaipal Nag. On the recommendation of Jaipal Nag, Birsa converted to Christianity in order to join the German Mission School. He, however, opted out of the school after a few years.

The impact of Christianity was felt, in the way he came to relate to religion later. Having gained awareness of the British colonial ruler and the efforts of the missionaries to convert tribals to Christianity, Birsa started the faith of 'Birsait'. Soon members of the Munda and Oraon community started joining the Birsait sect and it turned into a challenge to British conversion activities.

During the period, 1886 to 1890, Birsa Munda spent a large amount of time in Chaibasa, which was close to the centre of the Sardars agitation. The activities of the Sardars had

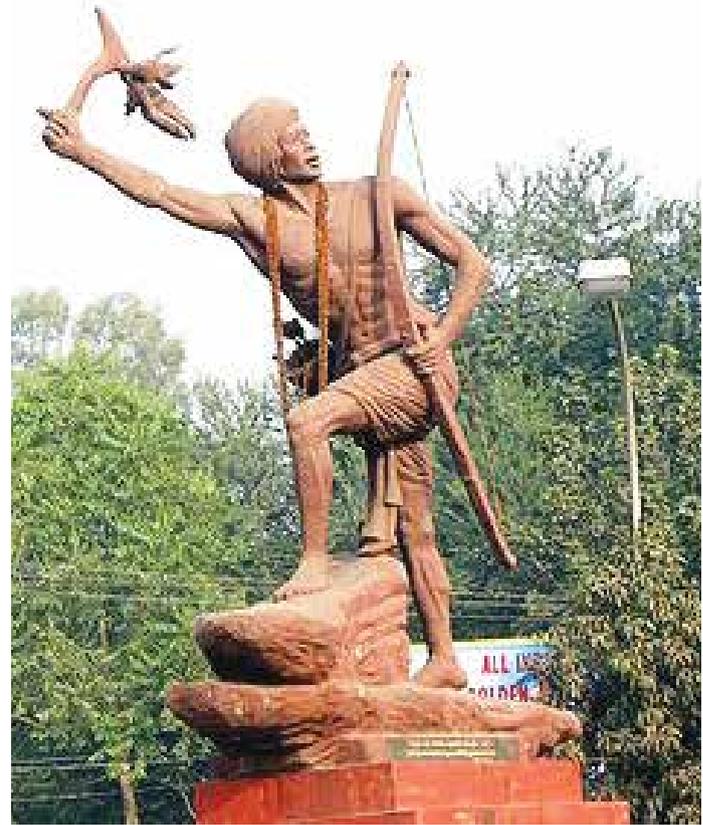


a strong impact on the mind of the young Birsa, who soon became a part of the anti-missionary and anti-government program. By the time he left Chaibasa in 1890, Birsa was strongly entrenched in the movement against the British oppression of the tribal communities.

On March 3, 1900, Birsa Munda was arrested by the British police while he was sleeping with his tribal guerilla army at Jamkopai forest in Chakradharpur. He died in Ranchi jail on June 9, 1900 at a young age of 25. Though he lived a short span of life and the fact that the movement died out soon after his death, Birsa Munda is known to have mobilised the tribal community against the British and had also forced the colonial officials to introduce laws protecting the land rights of the tribals. Birsa's achievements as a young tribal revolutionary has continued to be celebrated over decades now and he has successfully carved out a space for himself in popular and folk literature, academia, and mass media.

### **Birsa Munda Jail Complex**

The Old Birsa Munda Jail at Rachi is historically a very significant complex in the heart of the city. It is this Jail where Birsa Munda was kept imprisoned and it is here where he took his last breath under mysterious circumstances. His life history goes down in the history



of Jharkhand as a story of emancipation of his own people who were subjected to prolonged suppression by the British.

The Old Birsa Munda Central Jail was built in the mid-nineteenth century by the British. It has been a neglected site since November, 2006, when the inmates were shifted to the newly constructed central jail at Hotwar, Ranchi. Presently the Jail is housing the security personals of the Central Reserve Police Force. They have made some minor changes within the complex. However due to the absence of a proper planning for the reuse of the complex and lack of maintenance, the condition of spaces are getting dilapidated. Therefore a complete DPR has to be made for conservation, restoration and reuse of the complex.



## Marriage Customs of Bhutia Tribe in Sikkim

*Sonam T Venchungpa*

The Bhutias, who are one of the ethnic minorities in Sikkim, derive a lot of their cultural ethos from their religion namely Tibetan Buddhism, which has played a pivotal role in developing its core values as propagated by the religion. Secondly, Sikkim had had close connection with Tibet, be it diplomatic, religious, educational or social, which went a long way to influence its culture. It also shared its borders with Nepal, Bhutan and district of Darjeeling; giving way to historical ties both pleasant as well as unsavory.

The Bhutias are predominantly Buddhist, the majority practicing the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism, which is the oldest of the four Schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The village life of a Bhutia Buddhist was guided by the religious events of the local monastery that provided both solace and entertainment to the Spartan lifestyle of the people. It was also a usual practice to send one of the sons to the Monastery to get a religious education as it was the only form of education then, until the advent of Christian missionaries in Sikkim. These missionaries opened up

schools and provided rudimentary western education supported by the British Raj (known as Company to the Sikkimese).

Their art and architecture was also heavily influenced by Buddhist motifs. All art was religious in nature, which is evident in 'Thangka Painting', wall painting and idol making following a strict portfolio of rules in terms of metrics, color and postures. The wooden houses had an architecture, which was double storied, the ground floor acting as a granary. The kitchen was the largest living space followed by the Lhakang (Prayer Room), which usually doubled as the Guest room. Apart from rooms which may be available, one small room is called the 'Bou' (store) to store milk products, meats etc. The overall house is called eight edged (sur gey). This is basically achieved by extending the wooden floor beams beyond the natural parameter of the plan to make a small enclosure for bedding requirements. The house had no running water which required for an extended space for storage and washing of utensils; this was possible in a makeshift bamboo machan like structure called a 'yokha'.

The kingdom of Sikkim was ruled by a line of religious kings (Chogyal) who was consecrated in the year 1642 at Yuksom by three Buddhist monks/seers. This cultural history had a strong bearing on the values, customs and ethos in general. The nature of the economy being agrarian, tax collection was arcane and inefficient, which gave rise to a group of tax collectors called the Kazis (belonging to all the ethnic groups, Bhutias, Lepchas, Nepalis).

The language of the Bhutias is colloquial, and derives its roots from the Tibeto-Burmese stock, and has had strong influence from Tibetan. Mostly the spoken language is informal but in special occasions the medium of addressing is more formalized and respectful. The songs carry the theme of nature, beauty and storytelling to commemorate the great religious and secular heroes. The



local manifestation of culture is more apparent during births, deaths and marriage ceremonies which may be not in great variance with all tribal cultures in the sub-Himalayan region laced with eccentricity imbibed with time, isolation and of course religion.

Bhutia or Denzongpa community of Sikkim has its own unique custom of marriage, which differs from the custom of other brethren Bhutias of the Himalayan countries. Sikkim Bhutias have five different stages in the complete procedure of a marriage. The procedure begins with Thi-chang or inquiry formalities, then Kha-chang or proposal formalities, Nang-chang, the engagement and Nyen and Tashichangthung or the wedding ceremony.

The knowledge of "Rueh" (caste) "Khung" (clan) of the parties seeking matrimonial alliance is prerequisite of the marriage. Marriage cannot take place among the blood relatives. Proper verification of the clan and background is of utmost importance before finalization of matrimonial alliance. The marriage involves a number of rituals and

formalities in the absence of which it cannot enjoy legal sanctity or acceptance by the society.

### **Thi-Chang** (inquiry formalities)

This step is a preliminary inquiry by the boy's maternal uncle/paternal uncle with a bottle of wine and *khada* (traditional scarf) to enquire if the maternal uncle of the girl is willing to have his niece married, with the assent of the girl's parents. If in agreement, an astrologer is consulted.

### **Khachang** (proposal or agreement)

If the horoscope matches and is found favourable, a team of four persons inclusive of maternal uncle of the prospective groom, (as a mediator), paternal uncle and the groom approach the parents of the girl to seek their consent for their daughter's hand in marriage with the prospective groom. In Khachang procedure, the party takes gifts like jaril or tea leaf, tsamtruk chi (basket of puffed rice), a bottle of wine, a token cash of Rs. 108/- and a long traditional scarf (*khada*), as introductory and proposal gifts. Next day, after the proposal has been accepted, the groom goes to the girl's maternal uncle to offer "AayaSeygo" or a special gift consisting of cooked hen and rice along with soup to thank him for mediating the proposal to get through.

### **Nang-Chang** (engagement)

On acceptance of Khachang, the parents of the prospective groom visits the astrologer to fix the date for the Nangchang and on the preceding day for the Nangchang the party takes the following gifts:

- a) Cash of Rs. 11,000/- as a *rinphue* or token advance for bride's price
- b) Phagrokchokpa chi or a dressed pork
- c) ChumkhyeNyi (40 kg rice)
- d) ChangkhyeNyi (40 kg millet beer)
- e) A sack of puffed rice.

- f) Tea leaf 1 kg.
- g) Butter 1 kg.
- h) A long Ashi Khada ( traditional scarf)
- i) Gift packages to all relatives.

The nearest senior relatives are also entitled to get four items of gifts such as a dressed chicken, a bottle of wine, a basket of ChadungByasu (cookie made of corn) and a bag of fine rice with a *khada*. Other relatives inclusive of the brothers and the sisters older than the bride gets three items such as two kg pork, a bottle of wine and a basket of Zhedro (cookie made of rice) with a *khada*. In case a younger sister is getting married while the elder sister is still unmarried then the elder should be honoured with an extra gift as 'LungtaThushe'. preferably three items as mentioned above.

When the formalities are completed, the 'jo' or a Shamanist priest performs a '*khelen*' ritual with a jar of millet beer and burning incense to signifying the marriage tie by invoking the ancestral deities and the family protector deities to cast the blessings. As soon as this ritual is over, the elderly ladies of the village assemble in a room in order to finalize *rinzo*, which refers to bride's price. After a round of formal discussion they fix the bride's price, which is normally charged in *tollas* of gold. The quantum of gold finalized as 'rinzo' or bride's price is then conveyed to the maternal uncle of the groom or the groom's party. If the quantum of gold charged is a bit too much for the boy's party then the boy's maternal uncle or the mediator can negotiate to bring it down to nominal. After the negotiations are settled, the feasting begins with pork lunch and drinks of millet beer. This event is celebrated with village elders, blood relatives and of course the woman folks of the respective village only. No males other than village elders are allowed to participate in this event. After completion of the Nangchang, the party returns while the groom is left at the girl's house to work for a period of two years to gain confidence of the girl's parent.



### Nyen or first part of wedding

Nyen or marriage is normally conducted in two parts. The first part of the marriage ceremony takes place at the girl's house. After expiry of two years term, if the situation went well, the girl's party fixes an auspicious day for the marriage ceremony with the help of an astrologer after taking into consideration the convenience of the boy's parents. However, it is customary to bear all marriage feasting items by the boy's party. As such the list of items like gold and traditional dress for the bride, whole bull or equivalent price in cash, rice, *chang*, tea leaves, gifts for the relatives of the bride, etc. required for the ceremony is to be arranged by the boy's parents,

### Ceremony

Marriage ceremony at girl's house is always signified by the thorn-fencings that are constructed at three places blocking the path leading to the girl's house within 200 meters. Thorn hurdles made for the boy's party signifies that the girl is like a precious gem and is not easily obtainable. In order to taunt the Thapon a 'Samshing Tapu' or a wooden block horse saddled with an irritable bamboo skin is constructed and placed by the side of the main gate. All the while in the shrine room normally four lamas are engaged to perform a ceremony called "Yang-khug" to retain fortune so that the fortune of the house may not decline with the departure of the daughter.

On the day of arrival of the groom's party the path leading to girl's house is blocked by the village women with fronds of stinging nettle in their hands intended to whip the groom's party. During this confrontation a person designated as *bhami* (mediator) from groom's party tells the women guards that all the items for wedding feast have been brought as per the tradition. He further narrates the significance of this fencing tradition while taking out a *khada* and ties it on the peg. Then he offers token cash to the leader of the women. Thereafter a person appointed thapon breaks through the fence with the help of a *Chengi* (a traditional dragger) and provide safe passage to his group while confronting attacks from the women guards. In the second hurdle the Bhami tells the women guards that all the relatives of the bride were taken care of with gifts during the Nangchang and then he seeks a formal permission from them to take away the gem (bride). Here too the fence is dismantled by the Thapon.

The third fence is a hurdle meant for the 'manglok', as the leader of the women folks asks the bridal party what respect and regard the bridal party have for them, the Bhami or the mediator tells them that they have brought "manglok" for them as per tradition, which comprises of two bottle of wine, two kgs of beef and cash with *khada*. At

the same time he informs them that the manglok would be offered once they enter the house. This gift of course pacifies the women folks. However, the women folk obligate the 'thapon' to mount the *SamshingTapu* (wooden horse). Here the thapon narrates his background and offer *khada* with some cash to the person who made it. On entering the bride's house the leader of the groom's bridal party, preferably the AjangShangpo prostrates thrice and places a long *khada* at the altar with a cash offering of 108/-. Thereafter the *bhagpo* (bridegroom) prostrates.

Then the Donngyer (chief caretaker) appointed from the girl's house, ushers the groom's entourage to their designated seats and he serves them tea and cookies. After tea, the *bhami* goes to Am Mangpo's room to offer the 'manglok' to escape from the frequent nettle whipping attacks. Thereafter he offers the 'Nyen Kang and Rinzo' in the shrine room in presence of all the relatives while explaining the items and also asks for a pardon from the dignitaries if any short fall is observed.

At this juncture, the guardians of the girl strictly warn the boy's party that they will not tolerate and will act upon, if any undesirable torture or ragging of their daughter comes to their notice. The boy's party then tries to reassure them that she will be taken care of like a daughter. After this convention, the party resumes their seats, while the Donger serves 'soechung' (first part of lunch) with pork gyari, to the Lamas and the bridal party.

On the other hand, women folks take charge of the bride's wardrobe, dressing her with traditional Bhutia dress accessorized with ornaments and '*khatee*' (eod scarf) to cover up her face. Then she is led to the shrine room, where she first makes prostration thrice and seats herself beside the bridegroom (*bhagpo*). At the same time a 'Jo Bhonpo' or Shamanist priest is engaged to perform the 'Khylen' rites, which is purely a marriage tie up ceremony. The priest invokes all the regional gods; Yakshas and local

demons to partake the wine filled up in a wooden jar and asked them to bestow prosperity to the couple. He then invokes the ancestral deity of the girl to cast blessing to the couple to have sons to foster the lineage. After this, *soechang* (millet beer) is served to lamas and the bridal party with *changshap* or *kartsi-martsi* (spicy chicken snack).

## **Bada**

This is a scarf offering ritual to the couple wishing them to lead a successful life. Bada also includes token money. This ritual begins with the head Lama followed by the Shamanist priest offering his *khada* and he is followed by her parents. Only after them, the blood relatives and guests are allowed to offer *khadas*. This is a very significant practice and a prescribed protocol to be maintained by all for the good cause of their tradition.

Note: All the designated persons in the groom's party are entitled to get 'Bada'. Especially Bhami or mediator gets a special gift called; Bhazen' comprised of a pork meat preferably from the foreleg, a bottle of wine and a token cash to thank him for playing his role successfully in this matrimonial alliance. Then the wedding-feast begins with Chang (millet beer) and rich lunch. In the evening, a group of dancer led by their leader commences the traditional songs in the shrine room, which includes 'DuetseYarchod' ritual, wine offering ritual to designated dignitaries.

This is followed by chanting of '*beh*' or hymn. '*Beh*' as per ancient tradition, is the duty of 'Thapon' to chant when he is asked to partake the ceremonial wine. However, today an expert from the village is specially assigned to chant the '*beh*' instead of Thapon. Thereafter they begin 'Zhungllu' the country songs inclusive of 'Zudruk' worship ritual. Thereafter, the dancers continue the programme with folk songs which lasts till midnight.

Next day, according to the auspicious time, the groom's party enters the Lhakhang where the Yangkhuk Lama



performs over ritual for the departure of the bride by offering khadas to all. At the same time some younger girls or sister-in-laws are busy hiding away the right-side shoe of the groom. This is tackled by the mediator pleading them to return the shoe by offering a khada with token cash. But the girls haggle with the token cash, which embarrass the bridal party to some extent. Thereafter, the bride is then mounted on a horse (colour of which is determined by her horoscope) and the bridal party proceeds to the bridegroom's house. These days the horse is replaced with cars.

### **Tashi Chanthung** (second part of the wedding)

The ceremony conducted at the boy's house is called 'Tashi Changthung'. Here the procedure is followed as under:

- a. '*Thapso*' is arranged at a distance which is approximately three hundred meters from the boy's house and a team of women led by one elderly male are assigned to greet the BhamBhadey (bride's entourage). The place of Thapso is constructed with a curtain made upon three branched pegs. In front of which traditional seats and tables are arranged for the bride's party. Once they arrive on the spot

Chang and tea are served. The leader of the party sprinkles the chang as a gesture of worshipping the local deities.

- b. '*Thapra*' is constructed with water filled up in three bamboo cylinder and pile of three bundles of wood supported by a fence built upon three branched pegs. Here, the Bridal party is stopped where the leader of the bride's party tie scarves to three posts and then sprinkle water from bamboo cylinders whereby he pleads the girl's guardian deities to return back. He also pays homage to the house gods of the boy and tells that he came to hand over the gem (bride).
- c. '*Gektoed*' is performed at the main entrance by the lamas to remove the demon's effect from the girl's party.
- d. *NamoiTemdey* - The bride, according to her horoscope, has to perform one kind of domestic work such as preparing tea, tending fire or placing a pot of water to the oven, which is supervised by her mother-in-law. Then she is led to the Lhakhang.

In Lhakhang, she has prostrates thrice and takes her seat. The leader also has to prostrate three times and offer long *Khada* with token cash to the altar. Thereafter tea is served by Donngyer while Tashi lama performs '*Chamchoe*' or tea offering prayer. This is followed by offering gifts to the boy's parents. Afterwards, the Thapon and the Bhami traditionally hand over the bride to the parent of the boy with a traditional Rhyme. The parents while giving them the protocol seats reciprocates with gifts. Thereafter, Sochung (first part of lunch) is served to lamas and the Bridal party.

After Sochung, with permission from the Tashi lama '*Kheylen*' is performed by a lay Priest in which, he invokes the boy's ancestral deities to shower blessing to the couple. Specially he asks the house deity to accept the bride as a gem of the house. This is followed by *bada*

ritual, in which Tashi Lama, priest and boy's parent offer *Khadas* to bless the couple. The bride's entourage are also entitled for '*Bada*'. The feast then begins with Chang and Dumzi (meat item) followed by rich lunch. The guests also offer *khadas* to couple wishing them prosperous married life. The celebration continues with traditional songs and dances till mid night. In the evening the Tashi lama place a '*TashiTorma*' on the head of the couple as a gesture of blessing and hand over the same to them to keep it in their room.

It is a customary to arrange '*Nangjin*' or cash gift with two bottles of wine to the singing party from the girl's party. Next day, the girl's entourage returns while the boy's party gives vote of thanks to all the members with *Khada* and cash gift who volunteered to extend their help for making the ceremony successful as per the custom followed in the villages. With this the wedding comes to an end.

### **PYIDZONG:**

A year after the marriage when the married couple returns bride's home with presents for the parents and relatives in the form of *Gozuk*, the parents again invites all the blood relatives to lunch party. *Pyidzong* is arranged as per the prevalent custom which means to say that the quantum of gold which was received as bride's price during the marriage has to be returned with equal value of gold from the girl's parents supplemented by many other household items like beddings, crockery and domestic animals etc. In addition to this, blood relatives also give kind or cash in the form of gift to the couple. This signifies the newly married couple to start their new household life. Of course, there are slight variations in marriage custom from region to region, yet this is the basic procedure that is followed by the majority of Bhutias of Sikkim.

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(Source: "My Customs and My Traditions: Sikkimese Bhutia")



## Bhagoria Haat Festival

*Rakesh Jayant*

This year, when I was planning and searching the internet for visiting a place where I could witness the Holi festival, I stumbled upon a unique festival called Bhagoria haat festival. This festival seemed very unique and not to be

missed, I decided to witness this festival and booked the ticket on the same day. Then came the day when I reached Ratlam by train and further reached Jhabua, supposedly the epicenter of this festival.



Bhagoria haat festival is celebrated by Bhils and Bhilalas tribes in West Nimar and Jhabua districts in Madhya Pradesh. It is celebrated in the month of March before the festival of Holi. The Bhagoria has supposedly derived its name from the word '*bhag*' which means to run. A *haat* or local market is organized in as many as 100 venues like Alirajpur, Ranapur, Raipuria Jhabua etc. where all the tribal men and women come to buy certain essential items being sold there by the sellers from all over the place. Some of them also bring their tribal musical instruments like flute and play along. You can hear music everywhere especially the last day of the festival in Jhabua, where lakhs of people reach and dance the whole day. This festival also has agricultural significance as it coincides with the end of

harvesting season. The eager buyers who have handful of money after selling their harvest are now in the mood of relaxing and enjoying. This is not a single day festival but the festivities continue on specific market days at various villages for one week. These weekly markets bear a lot of importance as villagers depend on these markets for all their buying and selling. This haat, in this time, also works as a meeting place where young men and women try to find their partners and sometimes elope to get married. In Bhagoria haat festival, according to the tradition, the boy is supposed to apply *gulal* (red colour powder) on the face of the girl or offer a *paan*, (betel leaf) to the girl, whom he chooses to marry. If the girl is willing, in response she also applies *gulal* on the boy's face or accepts the *paan* from



the boy. The girl might not accept his offer immediately but in due course the boy can persuade her and succeed. After proposing and persuading the counterpart, agreed couple elopes to get married. Eventually the couple is recognized as husband and wife. During Bhagoria, the market place actually becomes a fair ground with various fun activities and food stalls serving local delicacies. Men and women dressed in their finest attires and tribal jewellery, attend these fairs. Another fascinating cultural facet of this community is the spectacular silver jewellery and its ensembles - one witnesses during the festival. The Bhagoria festival symbolizes the completion of harvesting and is celebrated just before the festivities of Holi there

by underscoring the significance of agriculture and community interpretations of colours -in their daily chores and lives. This festival signifies the wedding season and rituals pertaining to nuptial vows of the Bhil and Bhilala tribes.

Women and brides adorn themselves with various designs of silver jewellery fused with traditional characteristics. Some of the most popular accessories amongst the women folk are the *basta kada* (armlet), *khilli wala kada* (for the wrist), *hansli* (necklace) made of coins that weigh almost half a kilogram and *paan wala haar*. Other accessories woven out of beads, shells, colorful wool, glass beads and sequins are



*chomal*, *dulhan ka rumal* and *phool*. Made of coins, *ghungroo* and various figurines of ethnic importance - these silver art works have come to establish the historical relevance of preserving these art works and carrying those forward from one generation to the another. Even men can be seen wearing heavy silver ornaments in the form of buttons on their shirts or *kurtas* and in the form of belts across their shoulders to chests.

Here you can also find the young men and sometimes-young women too, sporting cheap glittery and shiny sunglasses. Everyone seems to be in a competition of looking better than the other. One also witnesses the tribal men and women sharing beer with each other openly. The Bhagoria haat festival is like a window into the lives of these ancient tribes. This region comes alive in every venue where the local market takes place. The tribal men and women from all over gather in these venues to witness and participate in this annual fiesta.

Ratlam is the nearest railway station to Jhabua from Delhi. Jhabua is a small town in Jhabua district in the Madhya Pradesh. It is the administrative headquarters of Jhabua



district. I also witnessed musical procession filled with tribal men and women mixed with the sound of big *dhols* and other tribal musical instruments like colourful flutes, *manjeere* and *khartaals*. Their dresses were very colourful and the women were walking and dancing in various groups comprising of 8-10 members in each. Their colourful dresses were like uniforms as each group was adorning similar colours but different from the other group. Elderly men were wearing white *dhotis*, white *kurtas* and simple *pagdi* on their heads, though some of them flaunting their silver jewellery. Young men were wearing cheap and shiny but modern western dresses. At the end of the procession they all assembled at the Haat, that was buzzing with festivities and activities.

I witnessed various activities on the last day of the Bhagoria haat, which happens to be a day prior to the festival of Holi. All the tribal men and women and visitors started reaching the main *chowk* (market square) in the center of Jhabua. Within 2-3 hours, lakhs of men and women reached the *chowk* dancing on the beats of *dhols* and *manjeere*. By dusk the festival finished, but the impression of that fiesta will be there, on the heart and mind, in the years to come.



*Wearing of buffalo horn as ornamental headdress by Nagas*

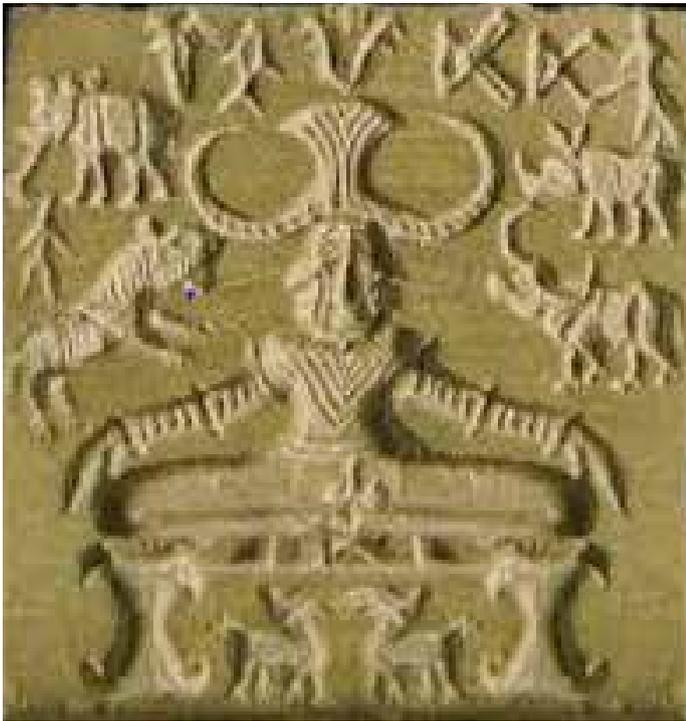
## **Buffalo Horn: An Ancient Historic Tradition of the Nagas**

*Dr H.N.Dutta*

The prevalence of the use of buffalo horns as a popular art motif and as symbols used in decorations indicates the prominence the Nagas give to their cultural heritage. It is found on the village gates, the village dormitories (*murungs*), the facades and roofs of the households of the rich men or the chieftains. The use of buffalo horn as art motifs and symbols in textile designs of Nagas, also indicates the traditional continuity of this art form as a cultural legacy of remote antiquity. Buffalo horn motifs are seen as decorative elements of the head dress, necklaces etc.

Almost every household in Nagaland is, associated with the Buffalo horn, either as a symbol of might, prowess, or power or as a symbol of prosperity. Hence manifestations of varied carvings of Buffalo horns, as a sign of status symbol in society are found in decorative art forms. Under such considerations, the horns of the buffalo, either in original or its expressions in wooden art forms is found as the most common and popular art form of the people of Nagaland.

J.H.Hutton, Thomas Bloch, Verrier Elwin, and several other scholars like Von Heimendorf, have particularly marked the use of Buffalo horn as art motifs and symbols by the people of Nagaland. While Thomas Bloch describes existence of buffalo horn stone columns in Dimapur archaeological site, the capital of the Kachari Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> our observation reveals that the western row of the monolithic columns of the principal alignment of the Dimapur archaeological site, are erected with Buffalo horn columns. J.H.Hutton<sup>2</sup> recorded existence of Buffalo horn columns in Mongnyu, Sekitima village. The motif and symbols of Buffalo horn, drawn from the tradition has been found used as modern art forms in galore in Naga society today.



*Indus Valley seal of lord Pasupati Siva*

From the large-scale use of the buffalo horn columns as symbolic pattern for reverence, it appears that the Naga art heritage bears certain remote legacy of some of the most

predominant prehistoric art tradition of ancient Indian and European cultural heritage. Use of animal horns featuring human or animal figure as God or representative of God, or as symbol of fertility or divine super power, or as lord of animals, as has been depicted in the figure of Indus Valley Seal of lord Pasupati Siva-the lord of all creatures<sup>3</sup>. There exist numerous horned gods and goddesses, which, have been, worshipped universally both in European and Asian countries.



*Coins of Alexander the Great (BCE 256- 323) engraved with horns of Ram (left) A painting of a coin of Alexander showing the horn of the Ram in details (right)*

The metaphor of the horn originally used by Gods, was then transferred to the kings (Babylonians crown of horns) and chieftains and finally to normal prayer. The Macedonian Emperor Alexander the Great (BCE 256- 323) minted his coins with carved horns of Ram, as the royal insignia to represent his God-like presence on earth

Most of the Naga communities wear headdress ornamented with animal horns and horn shaped teeth. As discussed, the village gates and facade of the houses of the rich Naga's are finished with carvings of horn of the buffaloes. As such, it appears that the remote art history of the Naga's bears a legacy of certain remote cultural tradition of Eurasian art. This is indicated by the fact that enormous manifestations of the carvings and wearing of buffalo horn and animal teeth that reflect in the public life of Nagaland prominently formed an integral part



Headdress adorned with horn-shaped animal teeth worn by Naga



Use of horn of Ram as headdress by ladies in recent years

of the cultural life in ancient Greece and in Indus Valley Civilization.

J.H Hutton described the use of buffalo horn as a symbol of prosperity in Nagaland. Similarities in use of animal horns as art forms both in Nagaland and Europe since ancient times indicate the highly placed art tradition of the Naga's globally. It appears that some Prehistoric people migrated from Asia and Africa, to north east India, had passed on to East Asia. Section of the Prehistoric racial elements remained in Nagaland for centuries together, whose remote cultural insignia of wearing the buffalo horns, or adoring of houses of the chiefs and erecting of the buffalo horn stone columns remained as a social and cultural tradition in Nagaland.

Certain prehistoric tribes of Nagaland had migrated to this region following the ancient sea route. This could be traced from the use of fish as a motif of fascination of fertility and continuing the practice of aquatic cells as supplementary food items by some Naga tribes. The Pochury tribe of Nagaland is seen adoring their *murongs* with motifs of fish. Certain sections of the Naga's were also found using sea shells as items of food, and wearing them as ornaments, which indicate their remote association with sea and water.

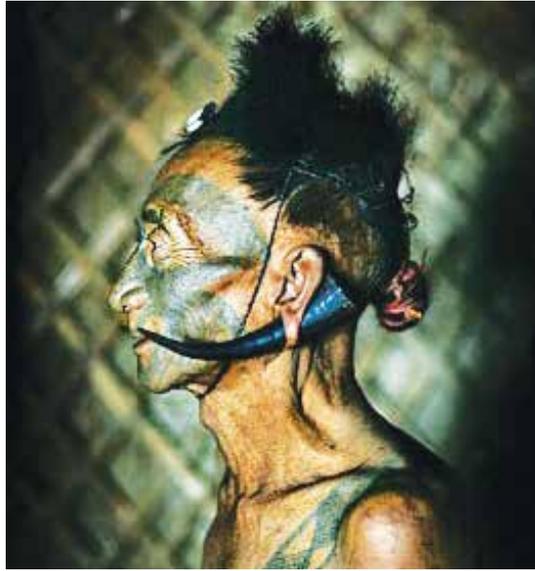
It seems that the prehistoric tradition of wearing animal horn as headdress to represent divinity or a symbol of royal status, worn by Alexander the Great of Macedonia<sup>5</sup> and by such other superior men as kings or chieftains in prehistoric society remained as an undying tradition in the art history of Nagaland. Hence the use of animal horn remains as a popular tradition in Nagaland from the prehistoric days until recent times. Study of the Naga art history would bring to light the glorious past history of the Naga's and their ethnic relations with some of the most ancient and advanced communities of the world. This is very essential for the Naga youth to draw inspiration for their identity and to project it in their future life.



Carved wooden Buffalo heads and symbol of fish believed as a sign of fertility, carved in façade of Pochury houses in Nagaland

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# The Konyak Tribe: An Overview

*Sharon Longchari*

Mon district, the home of the fierce Konyak tribe, has always been perceived as a mysterious and fascinating place even to the other tribes of Nagaland. Still fiercely protective of their culture and way of life, the Konyaks remain one of the most intriguing tribes and can boast of being one of the most colourful tribes, both in their richly vibrant costumes and historical heritage.

## **The Angh System**

The term 'Angh' refers to the king of the village or area. It is what makes the social system of the Konyaks unique. Till date the 'Angh' is revered and holds a prominent place in the social structure of the Konyak society. Mon district has about seven chief Anghs. The Villages are (1) Chui (2) Mon (3) Shengha Chingnyu (4) Longwa (5) Shangnyu (6) Jaboka and (7) Tangnyu.

Anghship is a hereditary practice. An Angh can marry more than one woman but only the son of the queen, who is usually the first wife, can become the Angh after the father's death. The other wives are concubines and so their children are considered ineligible to carry on the lineage. The Major Anghs such as the Chui, Mon, Shangnyu and others have influence over a number of neighbouring villages and land and most of these Anghs have a huge collection of traditional artefacts, including animal trophies, which are major attractions.

## **Head - Hunting**

This practice of decapitating the enemy and bringing the head was indicative of courage and pride in the past and believed by the forefathers that the human skull possessed some magical powers. In the past, a heroic and ceremonial

reception was accorded to a warrior who entered the village with the captured head of the enemy. The skull was tied to a log drum and dancing and feasting continued throughout the night. The Konyak warriors would wear brass heads around their neck to indicate the number of heads he had claimed.

### **Tattooing**

The custom of tattooing is unfortunately a dying tradition and art form. Different areas have different patterns specific to their area, however every pattern is supposed to indicate different milestones or achievements. The traditional method of tattooing is supposed to be very primitive and therefore painful, but the men and women in the past accepted it as customary and underwent the painful process. The upper Konyak region is where you would find the famous tattooed faces and Mon District is one of the only places in Nagaland where you will find the tattooed faced warriors. Sadly they are a dying generation and only a few tattooed faces remain today.

### **Architecture**

The Konyak house is referred to as 'long house' and is typically made of wood, bamboo and palm leaves. The length and size of the house is indicative of the owner's wealth and status. The house will always have a central wooden pillar, which is of significance – design can indicate status etc. Number of posts along the house also indicate the richness and status and are usually exposed through the roof and the thickness of the palm roof also indicates status. Mithun and buffalo heads are displayed outside the house – though this is commonly done for aesthetic reasons now, there is a legend behind this practice. It is said that the Konyak people experienced a strange period where the days were pitch dark and the people could not venture out into the fields; during this time the people resorted to using the dry bones lying around to make fire and bring light. Therefore, the animal skulls are displayed or hung outside the houses as a precautionary measure in case of such a time again.



## Arts and Craft

The Konyaks are one of the only tribes that practice brass work. They are famous for their indigenous brass sculptures and furniture, which are sought after especially in the international market. Unfortunately due to their simplicity and ignorance, many visitors have taken away historical and important artifacts from the Konyak villages over the years. In the past, a brass plate was often used as a currency of sorts among the Konyaks and would be received as fines, dowry for marriage etc.

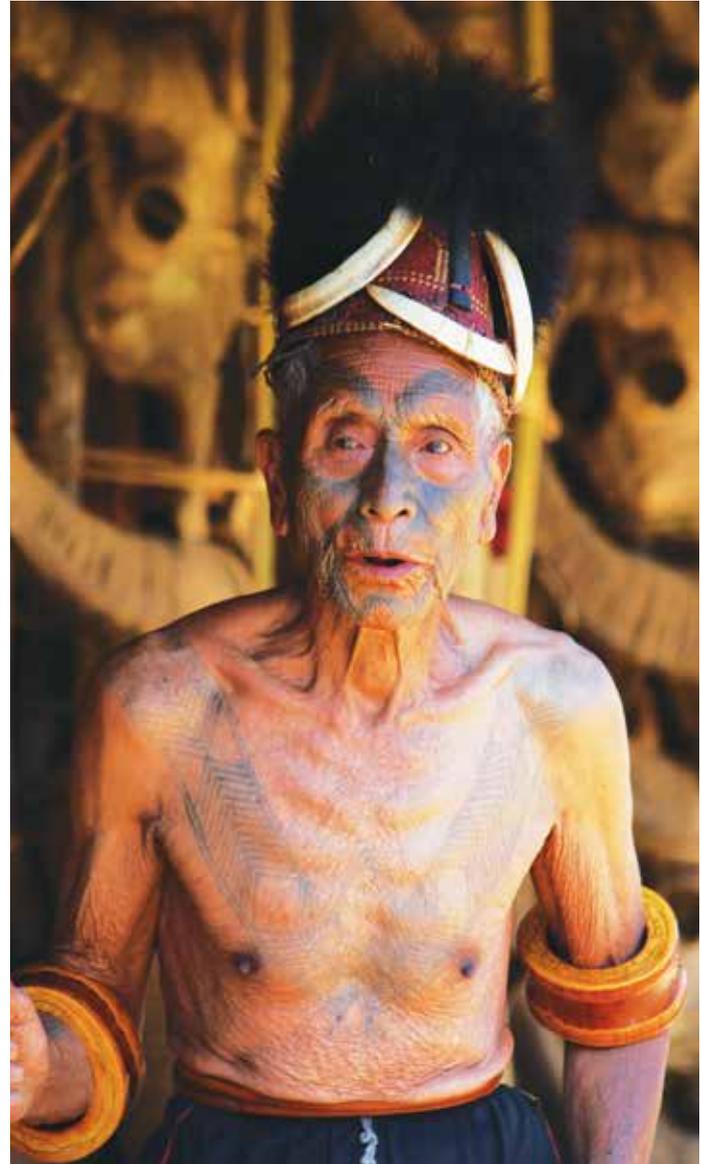
The Konyaks are also adept weavers and their 'mekhalas' (wraps) and bags are really popular amongst the other Nagas' also. The famous Konyak pattern was originally a design specific for only queens and princesses due to the difficulty of the pattern; however it is now a commercially used design. The beadwork that Konyak women practice is also another unique forte of the tribe and this talent can be seen in their colorful jewelry and artifacts. The Konyak's are also famous for their locally made muzzle loading guns.

## The 'Morung, System

The word 'Morung' means 'bachelor's dormitories. With the attainment of a particular age, the boys and girls were sent to these institutes and they remained there till adulthood or till marriage. The young members were trained in different aspects - discipline, warfare, customary lawsetc. With the changing times, the importance of such institutes is losing ground but they still exist in a lesser extent.

## Mon - A Major Tourist Destination

Mon district has been one of the most visited districts in Nagaland by tourists, both national and international. It continues to be one of the favourite destinations of Nagaland, and many tourists come to Mon directly



from Assam. The number of visitors to Mon has been steadily increasing every year, despite poor infrastructure availability to meet the needs of these visitors. The Mon district has enormous potential as a tourist destination whether for cultural tourism, natural tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism.



The other major attractions of Mon district are mentioned below with some details:

- i) **Local Heritage Sites** - there are some unique locations and local heritage sites found in Mon district, which makes it a major tourist destination. These includes the following:
  - a. **Longwa village:** This village is located in the international border of India and Myanmar. Half of the village population and settlement is on Myanmar and the other half in India. The most interesting feature of the village is the Angh's (Chief) house which was built on the international border line, so half the house is in India and the other half in Myanmar.
  - b. **Shangnyu village:** The existence of this village has been recorded by some Europeans during the British rule in India. A huge wooden carving is found and is now housed inside a micro museum of the village along with a number of artefacts found in the village. Another attraction is the joined trees or love trees located nearby the village. These two trees are joined by a branch, about 14 feet above the ground and it also has a story to it.
  - c. **Chui and Mon Villages:** These two villages are known throughout the district because of their Anghs. They were once empires very powerful and controlled a huge area of land which included many villages. Today the houses of these two Anghs are known for displaying various artefacts belonging to the Anghs, which were considered wealth and are now priceless.
  - d. **Others:** Other important local heritage includes the Yannyu village (site of the Iron Pillar), Changlang village (Angel's Cave) and Langmeang village (human skull burial site)
- ii) **Jhum Cultivation** - The Konyaks practice Jhum cultivation, ie the slash and burn practice, which continues to be a topic of debate. The Konyak system of 'jhumming' is also unique and considered to be sustainable and researchers and students, both national and international, have come to study this system. The Jhum cultivation practice is interwoven into the cultural system of the Konyaks and festivities are celebrated to mark certain practices of the jhum systems.
- iii) **Community Conservation Forests** - Becoming aware of the global issues and concerns like Global warming and Climate Change the people are now initiating community based biodiversity conservation in forested areas. One such place is the Hongmong Community Conservation Area (CCA), located about 70 km south of Mon town. This CCA is the joint effort of 6 villages coming together to protect the forest and the wildlife, where important species like the Blythe's tragopan, Khalij pheasant, hoolock gibbon and clouded leopard are found besides others.

# About the Authors

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