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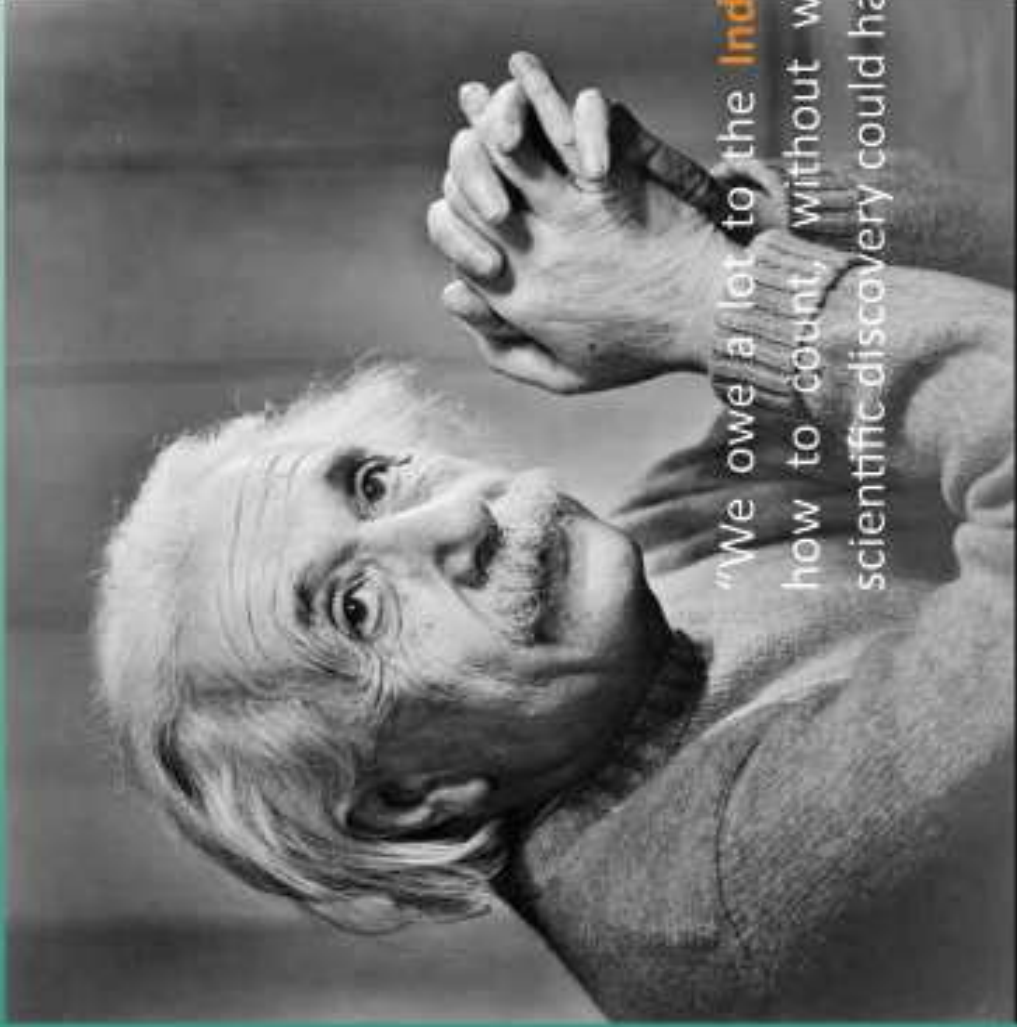
# HERITAGE EXPLORER

LET KNOWLEDGE COME FROM ALL THE SIDES

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**India's**  
contribution  
to the rest of  
the world

"We owe a lot to the **Indians**, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made"

Albert Einstein

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## **Religion And Politics – Are Not They Complimentary?**

It is often said that religion should not be mixed with politics. More the distance the better it is. However, I am yet to discover a reasonable justification for this sermon.

In India, down from the Vedic era, the Kings were never considered as the supreme authorities of their kingdoms. They were anointed only as the political heads of their respective states and the words of their Gurus, their spiritual guides and mentors, were final so far as the state policy and differentiation between right and wrong were concerned. If we take the case of RAMAYANA, the world's oldest epic, this was the case with Sri Ram, the outright model of a perfect King and ruler. Our second epic exemplified the same principles. Duryodhana, the Crown Prince of Hastinapura wanted to rule according to his whims and caprices, whereas Yudhistira, the King in the making, followed what his spiritual guide Sri Krishna advised him to do. We see that in both the cases, spiritualism the basis of all the religions helped them win over their evil rivals. From our recorded history, we can cite the example of Chatrapati Shivaji, who ruled the Marathawada as a custodian of his own kingdom as advised by his spiritual mentor and Guru Santa Samartha Ramdas.

Far away from our country, we may relate the case of young Hazrat Mohammad, a merchant and a trader, who became sort of a king via marriage with a 40 year old Khadijah, heiress to immense fortune. Hazrat's newly acquired large property was inhabited mostly by Bedouins and other war mongering groups, majority of whom did not care for a rule of law and were not easy to be ruled. Controlling the subjects of this kind was not easy, but Hazarat Mohammad was not an ordinary man. He took upon himself the mantle of the Prophet and established the religion of Islam. He attracted a large following and laid down a strong foundation for Islam by means of an acute mix of religion and politics.

America, the early avatar of modern day USA, was a Christian country in the beginning and was prospering well. It became secular in response to the needs of the time and not because of any inherent conflict between religion and politics. The Christian state of Vatican is a full-fledged political entity of a state and is ruled by a Religious Head and all political functions are discharged by him. We do not see any chaos or disharmony there. Russia was a Christian state in the days of the Czars. The Communists not only uprooted the monarchy but also totally demolished the bastion of Christianity for they believed that religion is addictive as opium, hence to be rejected in totality. See the state of affairs in the countries run by the communists today.

For us Indians, religion is not an anathema for a peaceful living. Religion for us is the guiding principle for healthy and peaceful coexistence. Leading a life of principle and absolute surrender to the law of 'Divine Justice' is religion, as far as our beliefs are concerned. India survived ruthless onslaught of innumerable aggressions over the past several centuries only because it had the solace of Sanatan Dharma, whereas the mighty rulers of the past and their dominant cultures had bitten the dust. Chanakya, the patron saint of politics in India, never rejected the mix of religion with politics, but insisted on the doctrine of Nitti, the principles.

For us, who are the true citizens of Assam, we do not need to look far for a perfect model of a harmonic state where religion is an integral part of the political set up. Srimanta Shankardeva, the great Saint of Assam, through his Eka Sarana Nam Dharma has shown us the way for hitch less integration and assimilation of diverse groups of people and their peaceful progress towards a seamless and strife less coexistent society, the ultimate aim of all political rulers. Srimanta Shankardeva neither aspired for a political mantle, nor did he want to rule over the people's psyche as the politicians normally do, but he has shown us that a perfect match between spiritualism and humane approach can resolve all differences and usher in happy co-existence. Our modern day politicians may seek Srimanta's blessings to become better political rulers.

**Editor**

## The Heritage of Rongali Bihu: Transition and Transformation

Dr Ranga Ranjan Das

After a brief spell of 'winter' in Assam the symptoms of long summer start reflecting from the first week of March itself. The extreme dry and dusty weather due to wind has made the city life more pathetic and miserable. Everybody is expecting rain to get some kind of relief. There are reports of heavy downpour and thunder in other parts of Assam. However Guwahatians have to wait! There is some occasional drizzle which is not enough to wet the dried surfaces. I have a personal liking to smell of soil after first shower. Always waiting! In the midst I heard resonance of cuckoo reflecting as an eco in my locality during the first week of March. It was melodious and really surprising. Guwahati, the most urbanized, industrialized, thickly populated area has still a space for birds to sing and to announce the advent of Rongali Bihu, most popular folk festival of Assam. Yes! Rongali Bihu is at our door step. It needs not to explain what Rongali Bihu is! Its relevance, importance, significance, rites and rituals, types, forms, functions and genesis in the context of Assamese society and culture is known to all. Bihu is the cultural heritage of the Assamese community and recognized as a national festival. The Rongali Bihu is celebrated and enjoyed most out of three Bihus. The dimension, reflection and exclusiveness of Rongali Bihu make Assamese culture pride and heritage rich.

Rongali Bihu has undergone through various phases of transition and transformation over the decades. The celebration of present Rongali Bihu bears the testimony of mark differences from the earlier. Bihu is basically an agro-based folk festival. Most of the festivals of indigenous communities are related to agriculture. In Indian context we have seen there are in many places and many communities that observe festivals or rituals in a cyclic order over the years. Likewise in Assam, all the three Bihus has a connection of different phases of an agricultural operation: sowing or transplanting, harvesting, reaping or storing paddy. Being agrarian economy, the Assamese people find themselves in different mood and situations. They reciprocate and expresses accordingly. The Rongali Bihu is the

only festival where the Assamese people find themselves in a very balance and joyous mood. They express it out and out through singing, dancing as well as feasting. The peace, happy and joyous mood of Assamese youth is echoed in rhythmic beating of *dhol* (drum), *tal* (cymbals), *taka* (bamboo clappers), blowing of *pepa* (horn of buffalo), *bahi* (bamboo flute), *gagana* (bamboo herp), rhythmic clapping of two palm as well as wonderful display of singing and dancing by young boys and girls known as Bihu dance and Bihu songs. We can see Bihu pandals in the nook and corner of Assam during the Bihu season. The seed of changes and transformation of Rongali Bihu was automatically germinated with the inception of 'mancha Bihu' (stage Bihu). Guwahati Bihu Sanmillani organized first 'stage Bihu' at Latashil field, Guwahati. That was now a history. With the setting of 'stage Bihu', the Rongali Bihu is touched and influenced by modernity. Prior to that Bihu was performed under the trees (*ahot, bakul*), paddy field. Bihu was an out and out affair of rural Assamese folk. No doubt the urban Assamese people also celebrate Rongali Bihu with their limited resources. There are differences in the way of planning, preparation and celebration in terms of places; people like to stay in their native places during Rongali Bihu. In spite of economic hardship, poor economic condition, worst socio-political situation, people never forget to purchase a new cloth at the minimum for their near or dear ones. The significance of gamosa (traditional towel) that I mentioned in my last write up is noteworthy. Assamese girl/women weave gamosa in their own loom in a traditional context. It is offered as a gesture to mark respect and love to the elders, relatives, near and dear ones. In traditional Assamese household, loom (*xal*) and wooden mortar and pestle (*dhenki*) was present. With the advent of modernity, the number of *xal* and *dhenki* is decreasing. Both the items are significant so far as Bihu is concerned. Eye catching and decorated gamosa are manufactured in traditional loom. It has a socio-cultural and aesthetic appeal. But we come across machine made cheap gamosa

in the market during Bihu season. It has affected the economy of local people. The question of protecting indigenous culture rise again. How can outside industries get the right of producing indigenous textile item for profit motif? The indigenous textile items, jewellery are exhibited during Rongali Bihu. It is customary for women and girls to wear traditional attire and ornaments during Bihu dancing and singing. Muga mekhela chador as a women attire is compulsory during Bihu performances. There are various traditional ornaments: keru, golpata, junbiri, gamkharu. Kopouphul (orchid) which is blossomed during Bihu season, tied around the hair knot by young girl while performing Bihu. Replica of all the items used during Rongali Bihu is available in the market during Bihu season. Reports reveal that some of the items are imported from our neighbouring countries.

Rongali Bihu is no longer a festival confined to Assamese rural peasant society. It turns into a major festival among most of the inhabitants of Assam. Everybody takes the opportunity to enjoy and celebrate Bihu in the present circumstances. Members of various Bihu organizing committees are irrespective of various caste and communities. In a traditional context, Rongali Bihu is a seven day affairs during third week of April. Each day is significant starting from goru Bihu (Bihu related to cow), manuh Bihu, gosai Bihu and others. Religious prayers are made in the prayer house (namghar) of Assam. The tradition of offering Bihuwan (gamosa) as a gift is part and parcel of Rongali Bihu. This Bihu is significant due to advent of Assamese New Year (bohag). Various rice pithas (rice cake)

is prepared from rice power pounded in dhenki. Coconut balls (narikolar laru) and sesame balls (tilar) laru, flattened rice (sira) with curd, sugar or jaggery (gur) are taken and offered as an item of delicacy. The rural Assamese women folk become busy in preparing traditional food during Bihu time. It is seen that there is a huge market of traditional food items in urban areas and pockets during Bihu season. One who cannot prepare traditional food items at home has the option to procure it from the market. It has really changed the horizon of Rongali Bihu.

Globalization has its own impact on Rongali Bihu. Various competitions like Bihu kuwari, Bihu xamragi, and Bihu husori are sponsored by various multi-national companies. There is a growing interest of a section of people to witness their favourite local artists performing live. Some of the artist demand huge money. The burden is to share by organizing committee. On the other hand some real folk artists are neglected. In real context, the real folk performing art of Assam including north east region should be reflected in the Bihu stage. It is the real platform to exhibit our rich heritage to outside world. With the advent better connectivity of satellite channels, there is a provision of telecasting all the programmes live. It is useful for promoting our culture for attracting cultural tourism. No doubt, there are changes in Rongali Bihu over last two decades or so, yet Assamese people enjoy Rongali Bihu a lot. In Assam, Rongali Bihu plays a role of catalyzer in maintaining peace, amity, cohesion, brotherhood among the various ethnic groups residing in Assam.



## Religion and Spirituality

- Dr Jyotsna Bhattacharjee

People often identify religion with spirituality, but actually they are not identical. They are distinct entities. Religion, generally speaking, includes certain rituals, which are followed by different sects. Diverse religions follow diverse rituals, some of which are edicts laid down in the religious texts and some are injunctions ordained by the priestly class. Hence religion has certain dogmas which are absent in spiritualism. The object of spiritual pursuit is to attain the one God, that is formless and which is distinct from religious issues. Religions usually believe in a personal God, with whom the devotees can communicate. But in spirituality personal God is not needed.

God has been conceived in different ways by different people. We have to enumerate the qualities of God in order to reach a spiritual meeting point between different religions. Some Hindu scriptures enumerate God at two levels. The Para Brahman is the ultimate God and Para Brahman has no form or activity. At the beginning there was nothing other than Para Brahman, which was alone with nothing else existing. The Upanishads state that Para Brahman was one and it decided to become many. The desire led it to mutate into Apara Brahman, which is also formless like Para Brahman, but Apara Brahman is active. Para Brahman is like the energy stored in the battery, while Apara Brahman is like the electricity flowing in the wires. Both are formless, but one is inactive while the other is active. Apara Brahman is formless, just as wind, gravitation or electricity has no form. Yet it has activity and movement. Electricity cannot be seen, but it can make the lights flash and fans rotate. Similarly God cannot be seen, but He makes the world move. Thus God has to be the starting point of an international discourse on spirituality.

Philosophy is different from religion. Philosophy is an intellectual study, while religion is a kind of emotional pursuit. God in religion has to be personal and only with a personal God we can communicate. We want God to listen to our prayers, to solve our problem, to help us in every way, and to protect us from adversity. Only a

personal God can satisfy our emotional urge. How can we be happy with a God who is formless, quality less and devoid of any personality? In Indian philosophy the nastika systems do not believe in a personal God of religion. The Samkhya system belongs to the nastika group. The world according to the Samkhya system is the product of inactive Purusa and active Prakriti.

An analysis of the content of the God-idea brings out the following points, which are implied in it. First, God must be one. A suggestion of more than one God not only creates metaphysical difficulty of explaining the continuity and harmony in the world-process, but also religious difficulty of explaining a uniform management of man, his proper responsibility and his whole-hearted worship and prayer. Then God must be an ultimate Being and this follows from His oneness, because ultimacy of a Being prevents plurality. Two or more Beings cannot be said to be ultimate, only one of them can be ultimate and the rest must be secondary or subordinate. From this it follows that being ultimate also implies that it is the Absolute and self-sufficient Being, which depends on nothing outside itself. The idea of being suggests that God is the Reality. The term Reality implies that it confers reality on all that is evolved, but it is the supreme cause, which is underived.

God must be a rational being. If He is not rational, then the whole existence will be chaotic, without beauty and harmony, full of evils and misery, without any rational ideal for man to follow, without values to realize. Then God is not a static reality, but a dynamic one, whose dynamism consists in his self-objectification into the world-process or world-evolution as his self-expression. The relation between God and the world is like that between Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover" and the world that moves. In evolving the world God operates as the cause of the universe, not as an efficient one, but as a rational and teleological cause, pushing not from behind, but pulling from 'before', as a true teleological cause should. It is not by 'push', but by 'pull' that God attracts the world towards "Himself" as the home of values. God is also

described as an individual. The individual selves enjoy their limited individuality and personality in their action and reaction with other individual selves, but aspire after the Absolute individuality in which all antagonism between themselves and other selves is reduced to a minimum. Here ethical individuality, which means moral responsibility and freedom in the relative sense of the terms, approaches the individuality of the Absolute, in which ethical individuality is transcended and approach to this highest or ideal individuality coincides with religion.

Then God must be conceived as an embodiment of absolute values. The world-process is teleological and tends towards the attainment of values in its different states. The whole history of the world is a progress towards realization of values. God as the embodiment of the highest and absolute values expresses Himself through the evolution of the world and the higher the world raises in the scale of evolution; it manifests higher and higher values and approaches the value constitution of God as Ultimate Reality.

To sum up, God is the one Absolute Spiritual Reality, the ultimate principle of individuality and values which immanently works out the evolution of the world of things and selves and tends to realize the absolute spiritual values whose unity is God Himself.

Man's belief in God or gods is as old as his relation to the world. In his transactions with the world he often finds himself facing many problems, which cannot be solved. He finds that his wishes, desires and activities, his coming into being and passing out of it, his good fortune and misfortune, his health and disease are beyond his control. Natural events like the winds and rains, floods and famines, the seasons of the year, natural disasters etc also appear to be baffling to them. They create in him the feeling that he is too small, insignificant and helpless. He then comes to believe in a power which seems to control not only his destiny, but the destiny of the world as well. From such beliefs various religions started and they have gone through diverse stages. Feeling or faith is the essence of religion. In religion emotion rules the whole mental process and excludes the element

of reason and volition. God has been interpreted differently by different religions.

All theistic religions have conceived God as identical with the Absolute. Even Hegel, who was a strictly logical thinker, could not avoid the theistic conception that God is not only absolute, but also personal. But some thinkers have denied the identity between the Personal God and the Absolute. In both philosophy and religion the mind seeks to attain the Universal, which can be done only by super sensuous consciousness. It is the super sensuous consciousness or intuition that gives a vision of God. If God of religion is nothing but the Absolute and Universal Reality, then only intuition or super sensuous consciousness can be competent to grasp such a Reality.

In philosophy to the subject matter of inquiry is the Universal or Absolute Reality. Such a Reality can never be grasped by the senses; it can be comprehended only by intuition. Some people believe that the aim and attitude of religion and philosophy must be different from one another. But it is not true. Religion and philosophy, both aim to comprehend the Universal and the Absolutely Real. Unless philosophy joins religion to make it a rational living force in human life, religion will degenerate into dogmas. There is no antagonism between reason and intuition, between philosophy and religion, because it is the same Reality that intuition synthetically grasps and realizes in religion while reason analyses in philosophy. The apparent differences that may be said to exist between philosophy and religion is that religions consciousness directly experiences Reality as a Divine Being embodying the highest qualities. These qualities are re-oriented into the ultimate objective values of Truth, Good and Beauty to constitute His being. Philosophy is a theoretical study, and it is a theoretical interpretation of experience as a whole. It is very close to religious consciousness as the vision of that which unifies all values to perfection. But philosophy always maintains its theoretical attitude of rational understanding distinct from the attitude of practice and conviction that we find in religion.

It can be stated that philosophy and religion are closely connected, as both are concerned with the search for Reality, yet their approach is different.



Philosophical approach is intellectual while religious approach is more or less emotional. In religion the emphasis is upon a communication with a Personal God, but in philosophy it is an attempt to analyse and understand Reality.

Sankaracharya of the Advaita Vedanta School stressed on an Absolute Reality, which is 'nirguna' or quality less. Sankara said that quality or attribute limits the Brahman or the Absolute Reality. Hence no quality can be ascribed to the Reality. But in that case religion will not be possible, as a worshipper cannot communicate with a nirguna Brahman, which is impersonal and devoid of quality. Sankara said that there is only one Reality and the world is nothing but Maya (illusion). As we mistake a rope for a snake, so also we mistake the world for Reality. Actually according to him the world is a stage and due to avidya or ignorance we believe it to be real. Obviously Sankara's Advaitavad makes religion and morality impossible. We cannot communicate with a God who has no personality and who is devoid of quality. If the world is an illusion then religion, morality and all the higher values of life also become an illusion. But we cannot accept a theory which denies religion, morality and the values. Possibly Sankaracharya himself realized it and he said that God of religion may be accepted only from the Vyavaharika (practical) point of view, but He had no reality from the paramarthika (transcendental) point of view. But human beings cannot be satisfied with a God who has no transcendental reality. Hence Sankaracharya's Vivarta Veda cannot satisfy the religious urge of the humanity.

Ramanuja of the Vedanta system advanced Parinama Vada to satisfy both the intellectual and emotional longing of the people. For him God is saguna and has all the excellent qualities. According to Ramanuja the God of religion and Absolute of Philosophy is the same Reality. Ramanuja conception of God is acceptable since it satisfied both religion and philosophy. For us God must be the Absolute Reality and He also must be Personal, since only with a Personal God we can communicate. We want a God who can respond to our problems and who can solve our problems. We pray to God for His blessings and it is our belief that God will protect us from all adversity.

He is omnipotent and omnipresent. There is nothing impossible for Him. There is an emotional bond between man and a benevolent all-powerful God. God is kind and loving.

It is obvious that Sankaracharya's Brahman cannot be conceived as the God of religion, since a 'nirguna' Brahman cannot have any personal and emotional bond with the worshippers, which is so necessary for religion. But Ramanuja 'saguna' Brahman may be identified with the God of religion. A devotee can never be happy with a Reality, who cannot respond to his appeal. We believe that God is the Absolute Reality, who can help us and protect us from all evil. He is kind and benevolent. Only a Personal God can satisfy the religious sentiments of the people, which cannot be done by a 'nirguna' Brahman. For religion God is a spiritual transcendental Reality. He is also the creator of the world. According to some philosophers, after creation of the world God remains aloof from it and does not maintain any connection with it. As a watch maker makes a watch and then leaves it, so also God creates the world and then leaves it to fend for itself. But we need a God who is with us and not outside us. We want a God, who is both transcendent and immanent, that is, He is beyond the world, yet He also remains in it. Hence for religion God is spiritual, but He is also concerned with the world. He remains in the transcendental sphere, but is also present in the phenomenal world. The spiritual nirguna Brahman apparently has no connection with the world. After creation of 'many', Brahman remains aloof from the world.

Spiritualism implies going beyond the world of experience and mundane things of the world. A person, who practices spiritualism, concentrates on the Absolute Reality and his only aim is to attain 'moksa' or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. In religion one has to follow certain dogmas, as introduced by various sects. In religion it is believed that certain rituals have to be performed in order to get blessings from God or the Gods. In ancient era too various rituals were performed for getting diverse boons and benefits from the gods, as we learn from the ancient literature. We have come to know that "jagyas" were performed for

(Contd. to Page 22)

## India hoists tallest Tricolour at Indo-Pak Attari border

A 360-foot high (110 metres) flag post, said to be the country's tallest, was formally inaugurated recently at the Attari Border, just a stone's throw from Pakistan.

Punjab Minister Anil Joshi inaugurated the country's largest tricolour on the tallest flag post - measuring 110 metres in length, 24 metres in width and 55 tons in weight. Built at an approximate cost of Rs 3.50 crores, the flag post was a project of the Amritsar Improvement Trust Authority of the Punjab Government. "With the model code of conduct for the assembly elections being in place in the state, the minister got special permission from the Election Commission for the inauguration, officials said.

The flag post, installed at the border, became an attraction for thousands of tourists who had reached there to watch the Beating Retreat

Ceremony during the sunset. Even visitors from Pakistan's gallery were also seen watching the Indian flag with keen interest. The pole is said to be visible from a long distance, even from the city of Lahore in Pakistan.

At present, the tallest flag post of India is in Ranchi (300-foot high). Amritsar city already has a 170-foot tall flag in the local Ranjit Avenue Public Park. Earlier, there was plan to hoist the tricolour on January 26 but due to some technical reason it was delayed. Talking to media persons, Joshi said that it was his dream project and today it turned into a reality. The flag mast has been set up near the tourism building at Attari, just 150-metres away from Indo-Pak border.

*(<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-india-hoists-tallest-tricolour-at-attari-border-can-even-be-seen-from-lahore-2343506>)*

## Prez Honours 31 with Nari Shakti Puraskar on Women's Day

Gender biases have no place in modern India where inclusive development is a key objective, President Pranab Mukherjee said on Wednesday.

He also lamented the rise in crimes against women and said it was inexcusable that they do not feel as secure and safe as they should in India.

His remarks came during a ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan to present Nari Shakti (Women Power) Puraskar on the occasion of the International Women's Day.

The 31 awardees who were honoured included ISRO scientists, first-ever women troupe of Kathakali dancers, India's first female graphic novelist, survivors of acid attacks and trafficking, environment and animal activists, among others.

"The government is equally concerned at the rising rate of violent crimes against women. It is inexcusable that women in India do not feel as secure and safe as they should.

"Gender biases have no place in modern India where inclusive development is a key objective," said President Mukherjee while addressing the gathering.

The three women scientists from ISRO, who

were honoured, were Subha Varier, B Codananyaguy and Anatta Sonney. They have participated in ISRO's historic space missions like the Chandrayan mission, Mangalyaan mission and the most recent launch of 104 satellites in one go.

Subha Varier, who was in-charge of the video system for the launch of 104 satellites, explained her role in the most recent mission, "Video is the best way to show our achievement. Seeing is believing. In this mission we had satellites of six different countries and therefore it was even more necessary to have visual evidence."

"We had eight cameras for video processing. Images were acquired in real time, compressed, transmitted on ground, de-compressed and converted into a video so all of us could watch it," she said.

An all-women Kathakali troupe was also awarded for claiming a dance form which was traditionally a male preserve.

Tripunithura Kathakali Kendram Ladies Troupe from Kerala was formed in 1975 and since then they have delivered over 1,500 performances in India and abroad.

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## INDIA into the Ferocious Jaws of ‘Freedom of Expression’

- Salil Gewali

One wonders what makes good journalism. Is it that to find out a few “brats” and pat on their back who pose a threat to the nation? Unlike in any other countries in the world, this is a glaring fault-line noticed in India. Well, is it the journalistic propriety to applaud and make heroes of such treacherous youths who speak the language of terror and “defend” the activities of terrorists? Have we forgotten that terrorists have badly harmed our nation for decades by killing thousands and maiming innumerable innocent civilians? And all those who think for the country and advocate for the integrity of the nation are oddballs? Is it jingoism and fascism to defend one’s nation and speak for its security and integrity? The commoner citizens are too confused and wary.

For instance, if your murderous neighbours attack your home, should your children not stand up and shout on top of their voice for the protection and help. Should not they, by all means, try to safeguard their homes and properties? But, what will be the consequences and the family solidarity if a couple of your own “children” join the enemy camp and start cursing you and your ancestors? Will you then say that your kids have become mature and liberal and are now exercising their “freedom of expression”? Well, going by the present practice and modus operandi of a certain top media, your estranged children are not just the “normal” but they deserve the praises for being hostile to you,

your family and your kith and kin. As per the standpoint of the present-day media, in the name of “freedom of expression”, your children, if they feel, can gleefully provoke your inhumane neighbours to throw a few stones at your mother (your children’s granny...). No exaggeration, for this is what I have observed with my unbiased conscience and because, till date, I’ve not been affected by the opium of ultra-intellectualism which has doped many of our unsuspecting youths.

Further, going by the news items, editorials and articles published in front-ranking newspapers and magazines, it fills our minds with a pall of despondency. What a strange, the media is leaving no stone unturned to portray the seditious Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid, Sheila Rashid... as innocent as kids. But one’s who fear these vicious wolves and scream against the looming shadow of subversive forces then they are branded as bigoted and chauvinistic “bhaktas”.

So, why to hold back — now stand tall on the “raised platform” of your “University” and spit the “venom” against the country. Put your bold foot forward to salute those who bombed Mumbai, Delhi, and Pathankot because these falls within your “right to dissent” and “freedom of Expression” — your coveted intellectual right. You need not fear anyone anymore because “Mr. MEDIA” will reach your doorstep to praise your valour, shake your hands and hug you.

(Contd. from Page 10)

### Prez Honours 31 with Nari Shakti Puraskar on Women’s Day

Among the other winners were Amruta Patil, a writer and painter. She is also the first female graphic novelist of the country. Her novel ‘Adi Parva’, based on the Mahabharata, Puraans and tradition of oral storytellers, was selected as one of the year 2012’s best graphic novel.

Asia’s first woman to drive a diesel train, Mumtaz Kazi, was also bestowed with an award.

Anoyara Khatun, a survivor of trafficking, who has worked to rescue child labourers, victims of human trade and domestic violence, also received

an award. Anoyara was also nominated for the International Children’s Peace Prize in 2012 and has represented India at the UN.

The Nari Shakti Puraskar comprises of Rs 1 lakh and a certificate.

Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi was also present at the event where she recounted the achievements of her ministry in the past three years.

(<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/prez-honours-31-with-nari-shakti-puraskar-on-women-s-day/374536.html>)

## 5 From Northeast Receive Nari Shakti Puraskar

- Romen Chakraborty

Bringing laurels to the region, four noted women personalities and one women organisation have received Nari Shakti Puraskar on the occasion of International Women's Day. The receivers are — Sumitra Hazarika from Assam, Bano Haralu and Zuboni Humtsoe from Nagaland, Ringyuichon Vashum from Manipur and MIZO HMEICHHE INSUIHKHAWM PAWL (M.H.I.P) from Mizoram. President Pranab Mukherjee has conferred this prestigious award.

Nari Shakti Puraskar is instituted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 1999 to recognise women who have made a lasting contribution to women's empowerment. Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Leena Nair said the award instituted by Government of India is to honour women who have exceeded expectations to challenge the status quo and make a lasting contribution to women empowerment.

The award was presented by the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee on March 8 at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi on the occasion of International Women's Day, 2017.

The award carries a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh along with a certificate and was conferred to Zuboni by Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.

A brief introduction of each of the above named Award Winners is appended below.

### Sumitra Hazarika

Ms. Hazarika is an international medal winning athlete and President of Mission for Integration, Gender Equalization, Harmony and Fight against Threat (MIGHT) and is the only Assamese to receive the award this year, an official release said here.



While speaking to reporter after receiving award she said, "It is a proud moment to have received the coveted award which would

definitely inspire and motivate me to further the cause of women's empowerment in the days ahead."

### Zuboni Humtsoe

Zuboni Humtsoe, who heads the indigenous fashion label 'Precious Me Love', was awarded the 'Nari Shakti Puraskar 2016' for her



outstanding contribution to women empowerment.

Recalling about her journey into coming up with Precious Me Love, Zuboni relates the following account:

After graduating from Delhi University I did not want to return home to Nagaland because of the lack of opportunities there. However, I had to do it when my father suffered a massive heart attack and our family was going through a very difficult time. Being a creative person and a dreamer I did not want a Government Desk Job but watching my ailing father suffer, broke my heart and that's when I vowed to work really hard and make my own destiny.

With Rs.3500.00, saved from my college scholarship fund, I dismantled our beds and converted our bedroom into a walk-in store and started 'Precious Me Love' (PML) through Facebook in 2011. Since we did not have a lot of resources, we worked from the backyard of our house, bootstrapped and on a shoe-string budget, tapping our creative veins, making use of all our available resources to the hilt and using artistic photography to share our story.

In the beginning, many people discouraged me saying women can't or shouldn't do business. Unmindful, we kept working really hard, made sacrifices, innovated, collaborated, met many wonderful people and made amazing friends. Over

time we grew and became an all-girls' team from the photographers to the seamstresses, stylists to designers, models to writers, doll-makers to managers.

Living in a society that is crazy about the comforts of white collar jobs, there have been many times when we had to literally rebel against our own families. In 2015 Lothungbeni Humtsoe (PML COO) told her father that she didn't want a Government job and left home to join PML saying, "If PML can do it, even I can do it". Similarly, against her family's wishes, Babita Meitei (PML Head-crafts designer) continues to work and make beautiful handmade dolls. Other team members also share similar stories of how difficult it is to follow one's own dream and convince family and relatives most of the times.

Today, PML sells everything from premium Nagaland fashion designs, vintage clothing, and fashion accessories from different designers to handmade dolls of Northeast India. From a simple page in Facebook in 2011 we managed to launch our own fashion e-commerce website in 2016, becoming one of the first fashion e-commerce website from Northeast India. The website also features the PML fashion blog and stories of the beautiful handmade dolls of Northeast India.

For more than 5 years now we have been delivering precious me love products to almost every part of the country. From Delhi to Mumbai, Goa, Bangalore, Chennai, Pune, Pondicherry, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Hyderabad, Odisha, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland etc. We also have good clients from abroad buying and supporting us.

Keeping social responsibility at the heart of our business we have been conducting and participating in entrepreneurship skill trainings and workshops to encourage more self-empowerment for the students and youths. We are also working towards an inclusive workplace to empower and employ more differently-abled individuals and people from different strata of the society.

Entrepreneurship taught us so much, it has

empowered us and the best part of it is that we get to empower and better lives of even more. The love and support regardless of gender, tribe, caste, creed, religion, and race has been overwhelming and inspiring. And being aware of the problems we face in our side of the country we envision to work relentlessly and create great industries that would be free of any sort of 'ism' and to provide a platform of opportunities, welfare and empowerment to generations. This is our dream that we will spread the love we have received through our work to even more.

### **Bano Haralu**

Ms. Bano Haralu is a noted journalist who has two decades of work experience with both state and private broadcast media, namely Doordarshan and



New Delhi Television. She has set up the Nagaland Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Trust and coordinated various surveys to determine the status of wildlife in the state for the forest department.

### **Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkawm Pawl**

Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkawm Pawl (MHIP) is Mizoram's apex women body is struggling for gender equality in a strict patriarchal society. "Our



struggle for gender equality in the male-dominated Mizo society during the last 41 years has witnessed significant achievements. However, we still have many miles to go to achieve our ultimate goal," said former MHIP president B. Sangkhumi.

Meanwhile, speaking on the occasion President Pranab Mukherjee pointed, "Gender biases have no place in modern India where inclusive development is a key objective."

## Muslim Girl Recites Bhagwat Gita to Glory

A five-year-old girl from the minority community surprised all here in this coastal district when she topped the Bhagwad Gita recitation contest.

Firdaus topped the Gita recitation contest held here yesterday by getting the better of senior competitors.

A standard-1 student of Sovaniya residential school here, the tiny-tot has got by heart the Hindu religious scripture at the tender age when her classmates find the going tough in reading alphabets.

Firdaus is an exceptional talent and she stood first in the Gita recital competition for the sub-juniors in the 6-14 years category, said a judge of the competition, Biraja Kumar Pati.

“We have read about the singing sensation of Indian Idol fame being allegedly issued Fatwa for performing in open stage. But a Muslim girl here has set an example of communal amity and tolerance by topping Bhagwat Gita contest”, said a local resident, Aryadatta Mohanty.

Firdaus was miles ahead of her competitors. At one go, she recited the Gita with consummate ease and uninterruptedly. Her pronunciation was immaculate. “We awarded her 90 marks out of a total of 100”, described another judge of the district level competition, Akshyaya Pani.

“My teachers have taught me moral education

and have inculcated me the spirit of? Live and let live others? I believe that all human beings are members of an extended global family. This is what my dear teachers tell us in the classrooms”, the little girl said with a tinge of pride.

“I am a proud mother. It is giving me immense satisfaction after knowing that my daughter has stood first on reciting Hindu religious scripture Gita. Credit for my daughter’s success goes to the school teachers,” her mother Arifa Biwi said.

Stating that they belonged to Damarpur village in Pattamundai block, Biwi said communal amity always prevails in their village. The majority community members live in neighbourhood and treat others like their brothers and sisters.

“This harmonious social coexistence has impacted our children. I always tell my children that all human beings have the same blood, though they may come from divergent religious beliefs”, Biwi said.

Urmila Kar, head mistress of Sovaniya residential school, said “From the very day she was enrolled here, Firdaus has shown spark of brilliance in academics. She has a sharp memory power. Boys and girls from both the Hindu and Muslim communities are studying here. Apart from text book teaching, we teach them finer points of all religions as part of moral education”.

*(The Assam Tribune 17/03/2017)*

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## Assam Cadre IPS Officer to Receive DCW Award

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Making Assam proud yet again, noted IPS officer now on deputation in National Investigation Agency (NIA), New Delhi, Sanjukta Parashar was awarded by Delhi Commission for Woman (DCW) for her immense contribution in the field of woman empowerment. She is among 30 women to receive this award.

Sanjukta is well known for her immense courage and incredible work of fighting the NDFB(S), a dreaded terrorist outfit of Assam. In just 15 months she has gunned down 16 militants, arrested over

64 and impounded tons of arms and ammunition.

It is to be mentioned here that, on Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2017, Delhi Commission for Woman honoured 30 women from different walks of the life across India on the occasion of International Women’s Day. Speaking about the award, DCW chief, Swati Maliwal said, “These awards will not only recognize the unsung heroes of our society but will also prove as an inspiration to others.”

*(<http://www.northeasttoday.in/dcw-to-honour-sanjukta-parashar-on-international-womens-day/>)*

## The Story of Christianity in Northeast

Tuting is about as far as one can go into Arunachal Pradesh without winding up in China. Twenty kilometres further, as the crow flies, is Chinese territory. To get there, you have to undertake a bone-jarring ride up from Pasighat in the Arunachal plains that, depending on your travellers luck, can take between two and three days. After Tuting, you reach the village of Geling, where the road ends. The ridge of the hill facing Geling is the Line of Actual Control, the working – and disputed boundary between India and China.

It is not exactly the busiest place. Life pretty much ends at dusk in Tuting. After that, a great, silent darkness descends on the earth.

The silence was broken on one night I was there, by a crescendo of shouts of “praise the Lord, praise the Lord”, coming from the room next to mine. It turned out to be a group of evangelists, trying to attract converts from the local Buddhist faith.

Proselytisation is a fact of life in Arunachal Pradesh. It has been the site of a competition between evangelical Christian churches, Hindu groups affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Buddhist monasteries, and adherents of local faiths, for decades. The competition for harvesting souls has reached all the way to the border with China.

To paint this competition as a picture of grand conspiracies and civilisation conflict would be easy. It is, after all, the conventional wisdom. The civilisational conflict worldview may lead one to think, in the case of northeast India, that Christian evangelists are somehow responsible for implanting the seeds of rebellion in simple tribal heads, as a recent article in *Swarajya* did. Such a thinker may even assert, like the writer of that article, Jaideep Mazumdar, that evangelists have followed a long tradition of creating a sense of alienation between newly baptised tribals and India, which then led to the birth of insurgencies.

The article went on to state that, “For Arunachal, the Christian missionaries have a more diabolic plan: to not only convert all the tribals into Christianity, but float a fraudulent theory that all of them belong to the same genetic stock as the Nagas and, hence, should join their Naga brothers in demanding that they live

together as one people under a common administrative and political setup”.

The Naga identity, Mazumdar claimed was an artificial one created by Baptist Missionaries. I disagree with this line of thinking, for a number of reasons.

The idea that a certain identity is “artificial” assumes that certain other identities must be “natural”. It would be interesting to hear from Mazumdar, or anyone else who shares his views, how the vastly diverse Indian identity is a more “natural” one than the much smaller and more homogenous Naga identity.

Identities form with the passage of time, and this is true for the Naga and Indian identities and for all others too. It may be that one identity is older than another, but time has not ended. What is now young will one day be old.

The genesis of insurgencies in Northeast India, which Mazumdar lays at the doors of Christian missionaries, is also more complex than a simple matter of religious difference. The impact of missionaries may or may not have contributed to insurgencies in Nagaland and Mizoram. I would like to hear Jaideep Mazumdar explain how Christianity was implicated in two of the most powerful insurgencies in the Northeast, in the Brahmaputra valley in Assam and the Imphal valley in Manipur, that involve populations which are not Christian.

A second area of tribal rebellions against India is the belt from Telangana to Jharkhand, where Maoism has taken hold. Would Mazumdar be able to explain, using his Christian conspiracy theory, why so many tribals in that vast area also rebelled against the Indian state?

It is one thing to blame the missionaries for converting the Nagas to Christianity. The fact is that two processes occurred more or less simultaneously in the Naga Hills from the 1870s. The spread of Christianity was one. The spread, for the first time, of an Indian administration into the Naga Hills was another. Without the empire building of the British, the Nagas may not have become Christians, but it is not certain that they would have become Indians either.

Suspicion of foreign missionaries is an old thing here. Historically, the first Protestant missionary to preach the gospel in Northeast India was not a foreigner but a Bengali from the Srirampur Mission near Kolkata, named Krishna Pal, who spent eight months in 1816 around Pandua where the Khasi Hills meet the plains of East Bengal, according to "A Brief History of Christianity in North East India" by Rev Dr. Woba James.

The first contact between Baptist missionaries and an Arunachal tribe occurred before missionary contact with the Nagas of Nagaland. This was in 1839, when Mr and Mrs Miles Bronson and Mrs Jacob Thomas, who came to work among the Singphos in Jaipur in Assam, came into contact with the villagers of Namsang in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh, writes Dr James. The first mission to the Naga Hills came much later, in 1872.

The effects of Christianity on the tribes have been mixed. According to Rev. Dr James, Christianity "provided an ideology that helped the tribal people maintain their identity in the face of serious erosion of their traditional religious, social and political institutions".

However, Dr James concedes that "Western Christianity regarded their culture as the only valid expression of Christian culture. They considered everything non-Christian as the product of depraved human beings under the influence of Satan". The erosion of tribal traditions, cultures and institutions has taken place in Northeast India in sizeable measure as a consequence of this belief.

Part of the reason Christianity made rapid progress in Northeast India is because it became linked with the idea of progress. The great anthropologist and lapsed missionary Verrier Elwin, in his book "A Philosophy for NEFA" published in 1957 had noted that conversion to Christianity was often accompanied by a feeling of superiority and a foreign outlook. "I was told in Tuensang by more than one Christian youth that 'what we want is American dress, language and way of life'," he had written.

"The Hindu, despite himself, considers whether the tribal regions cannot in some way be brought within the all-embracing tolerance of Hinduism; the Christian cannot help regarding them as rivals to his own universal faith; the agnostic looks on all religions, tribal as well as others, as bound to collapse before the spread of scientific knowledge," wrote Elwin.

Elwin doubted that the NEFA tribals would accept Hinduism in any organised manner, despite obvious similarities between Hindu and traditional tribal beliefs, because "between them and that great religion stands the gentle figure of the cow".

The Puritanical strain of Hinduism, with its many taboos, was never popular in the Northeast, home to legendary Shakta and Shaiva temples. "Hindu missionaries who teach teetotalism and vegetarianism, as well as a number of other taboos hitherto unknown to the tribal mind, are as divisive of the village unity and as destructive of tribal culture and custom as the Christian missionaries", Elwin concluded.

The resultant was the advice to the government of India to keep missionaries of all hues and denominations out of Arunachal Pradesh, or NEFA, as it was then known. That wise practise could have been continued if the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978, had been implemented in the years since. Unfortunately for Arunachal, the Act, which prohibits conversion from one religious faith to any other by use of force, inducement, or fraud, did not see rules for carrying out its provisions framed in the last 39 years. Conversion as a matter of conscience is a spiritual act. Selling one's soul in exchange for food, shelter, healthcare or education is not.

The trafficking in souls, which is but a competition between proselytisers of different faiths, is largely devoid of any spiritual purpose. It is a battle between the sales and marketing teams of giant multinational organizations. Identity politics is the political end of that competition.

The trouble with such identity politics is that the categories by which it brands peoples are often too broad to be meaningful. For instance, there is a vast internal diversity within Hinduism. The same is true for Christianity and every other great world religion.

While it is true that there are puritanical vegetarian Hindus who observe multiple taboos, it is also true that there are ancient communities of meat-eating Brahmins and pot-smoking sadhus who do not observe those taboos.

Similarly, while there are evangelical, proselytising Christians who believe everyone except them is going to hell, there are also many who live good

(Contd. to Page 17)



## Cambridge University Exhibits Konyak Naga Warriors

An ongoing exhibition at Cambridge University in England is attempting to give voice to marginalized communities from India, the Naga people being one of them.

On display since March 8, 2017 the 'Another India' exhibition at the Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) showcases hundreds of objects from the Museum's historic collections as well as newly-commissioned works from contemporary sculptors.

Among the objects placed on display are a head-hunters skull, pieces of the Taj Mahal and a snake-charmer's flute.

The collection of Naga exhibits include a 'head-taker's skull,' which the description says "was worn on the chest by a Konyak warrior who had captured an enemy head." The monkey skull, with red, white and black hair woven into the crown, was collected by JH Hutton, Deputy Commissioner of Assam (then including the Naga Hills) and later a Professor of Anthropology at Cambridge, who put it in a glass jar and kept it in his office until he retired.

The collection also includes photos of Naga men in their 80s and 90s displaying their tattooed faces and bodies.

'Another India' tells the stories behind a remarkable collection of artefacts while confronting head-on the role played by Empire and colonialism in the gathering together of this material. The exhibition also features 23 works acquired by its

curator Mark Elliott, using a New Collecting Award from Art Fund.

"This is an exhibition about the India – or the many India's – that most people in the UK don't know," said Mark Elliott. "It's about 100 million people of Indigenous or Adivasi backgrounds who are marginalised by majority populations and the state. It's an exhibition about identity, diversity and belonging; and the role that objects play in creating a sense of who we are.

"These are issues that affect all of us, particularly now when Identity – who we are, where we come from and where we belong – is being fought over here in Britain. Another important story is how these things came to Cambridge in the first place. Many of the artefacts were acquired through colonialism: sometimes fair exchanges, sometimes gifts, sometimes not. This is about legacies of empire for people in the UK and India," he added.

'Another India' is the centre piece of the University's wider celebrations entitled India Unboxed. To mark the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, the University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Garden, are hosting a shared season on the theme of India with a programme of exhibitions, events, digital encounters, discussions, installations and more within the museums and the city of Cambridge. Rooted in the Cambridge collections, the programme will explore themes of identity and connectivity for audiences in both UK and India.

(<http://www.nelive.in/nagaland/news/nagaland-konyak-warrior-finds-place-cambridge-universitys-exhibition>)

(Contd. from Page 16)

## The Story of Christianity in Northeast

Christian lives without becoming zealots.

A lot of people in this country have studied in 'convent' schools over the years. I was one of them. In my 12 years in that Catholic school, I do not recall anyone ever trying to convert me.

About half the students in my class in school were Hindus. To the best of my knowledge, they all remained Hindus after 10 or 12 years of schooling.

Over the decades, lakhs of Hindu students have graduated from some school or college whose name

starts with "Saint" without being induced or coerced to adopt Christianity. Perhaps Jaideep Mazumdar himself was one such student.

The service and grace of many should not be forgotten in the face of the proselytising zeal of the few. That would be a disservice to both Christianity and Hinduism. More importantly, it would be a disservice to humanity.

(<https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/there-is-more-than-one-version-to-the-story-of-christianity-in-northeast>)

## Social Evils and Empowering Women

- Kritanjali Kashyap

Between 2010 and 2012, about 358 cases of domestic violence, bigamy, maintenance, dowry, rape, kidnapping, sexual harassment, land disputes and miscellaneous matters were registered with the women's commission, the break up being 148 cases of domestic violence, 20 cases of bigamy and 16 cases of maintenance, 30 dowry cases, 17 rape cases, seven kidnapping cases, two sexual harassment cases, 20 land-related cases and 98 miscellaneous cases.

As per the NCBR report (2015), Assam ranks second (123.4) after Delhi (169.1) in the country in crime against women including 4,293 incidents of assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty and 499 cases of sexual harassment. Indicators say crime against women is increasing but the exact cause behind its rise is still not known.

Although the world leaders are concentrating on 'gender equality and women's empowerment' in recent decades but the gender equality remains a persistent challenge for countries worldwide and the lack of such equality is a major obstacle to sustainable development. However it is a matter of satisfaction that girls' access to education has improved; the rate of child marriage declined and progress was made in the area of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including fewer maternal deaths.

In 2015, the world leaders adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, placing gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Achievement of the goals, including ending poverty, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, reducing inequalities within and between countries, and achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, rests upon unlocking the full potential of women in the world of work.

Measures that are key to ensuring women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work must include bridging the gender pay gap, which stands at 24% globally, recognizing women's unpaid care and domestic work and

addressing the gender deficit in care work, as well as addressing the gender gaps in leadership, entrepreneurship and access to social protection and ensuring gender-responsive economic policies for job creation, poverty reduction and sustainable, inclusive growth.

Additionally, policies must count for the overwhelming majority of women in the informal economy, promote women's access to innovative technologies and practices, decent work and climate-resilient jobs and protect women from violence in the work place.

As we observe this year's International Women's Day, it is time to reflect on the progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities. Empowerment involves an element of control and choice in power structures that exist in household communities, nations worldwide. Women empowerment involves their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally.

Subhalakshmi, a student of Jorhat's JB College, had drawn huge support on the social media after she put up the post outlining her harrowing experience. People from different walks of life got together in the city to extend their support for Subhalakshmi. Students and other organizations took to the streets seeking justice and safety for girls and women. They also condemned the State Transport Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary for making 'callous' remarks on the girl. Patowary had not only criticized the girl for putting up her complaint on Facebook, he had also dismissed her as a member of the Students' Federation of India (SFI).

Article 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution guarantee the absence of discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, etc. Women have got full

(Contd. to Page 21)

## Christian Population in 2 NE States on the Upswing

Christian population in Arunachal Pradesh rose from less than 1% in 1971 to more than 30% in 2011, official census data show, numbers which appear to back Union minister Kiren Rijiju comments about a radical demographic change in the north-eastern state.

Manipur, another state in the region, also saw Christian population rise from 19% in 1961 to more than 41% in 2011, census data showed.

Rijiju had sparked a controversy after referring to the growing Christian numbers in Arunachal Pradesh—his home state—and linking them to conversions. “Hindu population is reducing in India because Hindus never convert people,” he had said.

However, there is no clear official reason for the rise in the Christian population in these states. While Rijiju cited religious conversion as a possible reason, some experts say this could be because of migration.

Opposition parties had slammed Rijiju for his comments and the Congress had accused the BJP of “converting Arunachal into a Hindu state”.

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

In Arunachal Pradesh, the biggest state in the region, the share of ‘Other Religions’ category which comprised two-thirds of Arunachalis in 1971 dropped to 26% in 2011 from as much as 64% in four decades ago.

The decadal growth rate of Christian population in the state has been more than 100% all through.

### MANIPUR

In Manipur, with a population of 2.8 million, the Christian numbers have surged. Hindus constituted 62% share of the Manipuri population in 1961 while Christians had a 19% share. In 2011, both Christians and Hindus have almost equal share — 41%. For the RSS, these findings buttress

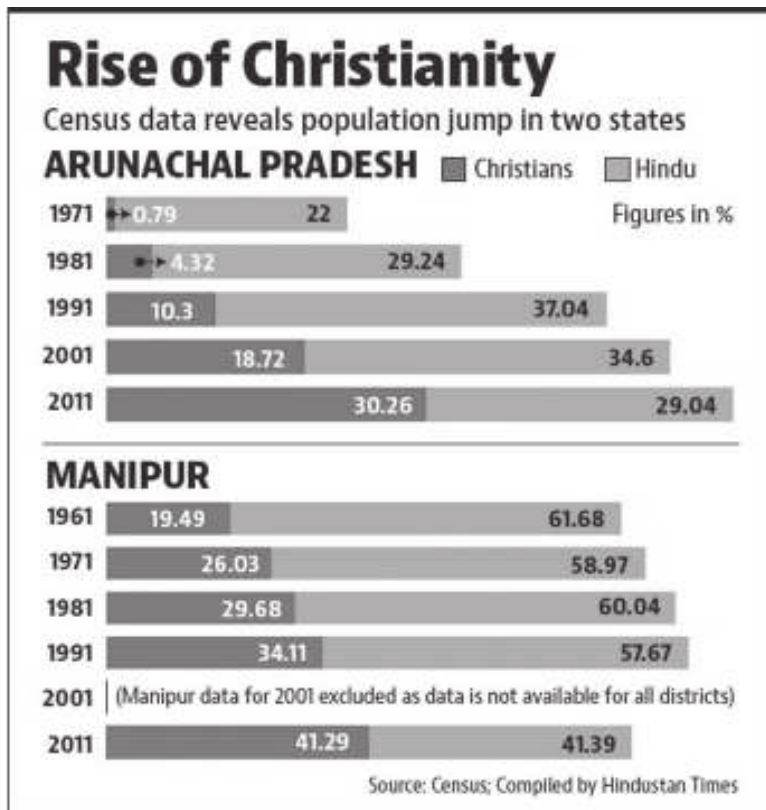
their claims and concerns of an imbalance in growth rates and the so-called shrinking of Hindu population.

“As the Census figures show, there is a huge disparity in the way the Christian population has grown and the Hindu population has shrunk. There is no denying the role of missionaries who convert people. But of late there is an awakening of the indigenous people and the Sangh is

only making them aware of this (conversions),” Arunachal unit State Secretary of the RSS Nido Sakter told HT adding there have been regular reports of conversions by force.

However, Amitabh Kundu, professor at Institute for Human Development, said, “One needs to take a closer look at migration figures and check how much of this increase can be attributed to in-migration of Christians from other states ...”

*(Hindustan Times, 08/03/2017)*



## Child Trafficking

It's an irony that not enough is being done to combat child trafficking in Assam. Though child trafficking is prevalent all over the country, its incidence is quite high in Assam. The ever-rising number of cases involving human trafficking in the State has become a matter of grave concern. Statistics paint a grim picture. As many as 130 children of the State have been trafficked in 2016. The figure stood at 129 in 2015. The figures were released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. That all is not well in the State becomes evident from the fact that during the same period, only 21 child trafficking cases were reported from the other North-eastern States. However, without making a fuss over the exact numbers, child trafficking is an issue which needs to be taken up seriously to ensure that such incidents do not keep recurring over and over again. So far the State is concerned; it has always been targeted by the human traffickers. Taking advantage of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, the human traffickers conjuring up dreams of a bright future have been successfully carrying on with their nefarious activities. The culprits behind it should be identified and strong deterrent action be initiated. The conviction procedure related to child labour and trafficking is very poor which in turn has emboldened the child traffickers. All the North-eastern States

should come together and chalk out a coordinated strategy to tackle the menace of human trafficking head on.

The Supreme Court has already given directives to the Government in this regard – mandatory registration of FIR in regard to missing children, formation of a special juvenile police unit in the States, etc. A 'track child' portal at the national level has already been made operational. The States like Assam where child trafficking is rampant can use it as the details of the missing children is updated on it and it in turn will help in tracking them down. It's an irony that in spite of the clamour raised in different quarters of the State, there is no stopping to this criminal activity, which is being carried on with impunity. It is high time the law-enforcing agencies coordinate their activities to tackle the menace of human trafficking head on. The vulnerable areas should be identified and awareness campaigns be conducted with the help of voluntary agencies. A strong vigil by the village elders and NGOs can go in a long way in thwarting the activities of the traffickers. A strong deterrent action against the traffickers on a consistent basis would definitely help in containing this crime against humanity.

*(The Assam Tribune Editorial 15/03/2017)*

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## Assam's Disastrous Sterilization Drive

Young RTI Activist from Assam, Sri Amarjyoti Borthakur and Sri Saumitra Goswami has exposed gross anomaly and criminal imbalance in male and female sterilization of people of Assam on religious lines. The state which is reeling under intense pressure of illegal Bangladeshi influx, has only aggressively implemented family planning/sterilization drive amongst the Hindu population only.

With such a highly disturbing data in hand, Amarjyoti is seriously exploring various ways to eliminate this gross imbalance. He smells the conspiracy behind this imbalance is aimed at marginalising the already dwindling Hindu population of Assam.

While talking in Guwahati, Amarjyoti asked few

awkward questions to the Government of Assam regarding its seriousness about the changing scenario in religious demographics of Assam. He asked whether this imbalance in sterilization drive was meticulously planned or just administrative snag? Whatever he has derived through RTI, is really serious in nature and even after BJP came to power last year, the scenario might not have changed much as the government machinery which is enforcing such drives on the ground being what it is.

Something must be done to avert the dangerous situation looming before us.

*(<http://pseudo-secularism.blogspot.in/2017/03/assam-sterilization-religious-imbalance.html>)*

## Uttarakhand High Court accords status of 'living entities' to Ganga, Yamuna

In a landmark judgement, the Uttarakhand High Court on Monday accorded the status of "living human entities" to the Ganga and Yamuna, two of India's most sacred rivers.

Exercising extraordinary jurisdiction vested in the court, a division bench of Justices Rajeev Sharma and Alok Singh of the High Court said, "Holy Rivers Ganga and Yamuna have been declared to be treated as living human entities."

Agreeing with advocate MC Pant, the court cited the example of river Whanganui in New Zealand which has been given such status.

Giving the "legal status" of living humans to the holy rivers, the court ordered that the Director, Namami Ganga project for cleaning and rejuvenating the river, the Chief Secretary and the Advocate General of Uttarakhand will act as the "legal parents" of the holy rivers and work as a the human face to protect, conserve and preserve them and their tributaries.

These officers will be bound to "uphold the status" of the two rivers and also promote their "health and well being", the court said.

The matter related to mining and stone crushing along the banks of the Ganga.

On a PIL filed by Haridwar resident Mohammad Salim, the court ordered the Dehradun District Magistrate to remove encroachment from the Shakti canal of the Ganga at Dhakrani within the next 72 hours. It ordered that the DM be suspended if he failed to comply with the directive.

The petitioner contended that though the holy rivers connect the two states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, there is "no effective distribution of properties attached to their tributaries between them".

The court also ordered the authorities to work out the division of various properties between the neighbouring states under Uttar Pradesh Re-Organization Act, 2000, a matter pending since the inception of Uttarakhand in the year 2000.

The court also directed the government to form a Ganga Management Board within the next eight weeks in accordance with an earlier order of the court in December 2016.

*(The Sentinel 22/03/2017)*

(Contd. from Page 18)

### Social Evils and Empowering Women

rights of franchise like men, as per the Directive Principles of State Policy. Parliament has enacted laws giving equal rights to women in marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc. In spite of the above constitutional provisions, women are still unable to get out of the shackles.

There is an urgent need to create awareness among the women about the social evils prevalent in the present day society. Women are so much cocooned by various social customs and taboos that they often cannot and do not want to bring changes in their own traditional lifestyles. It is therefore highly essential to promote socio-political consciousness among women without any further delay. No amount of government help can really achieve the desired results, unless the women themselves and men

realize the need of such a change. The urge to liberate themselves, to fight against the social ills, should come from within. The government along with voluntary organizations should take up concrete steps, to uplift the status of women by providing safe, secured and peaceful life for women.

It is high time to take hard and tough decisions in case of all gender related violence. While bold Subhalakshmi deserves praise for bringing the truth to the forefront, this indignation must be transformed into a movement. The society needs more Subhalakshmis to come forward and express their resentment towards gender-related violence and strive to alter the attitude of the society towards women.

*(The Assam Tribune 15/03/2017)*

## The World can Learn Living in Harmony from India

Japanese author Mariko Shinju believes the world can learn to live in peace from the Indian way of “living together happily” despite cultural and linguistic diversity.

“India has diverse languages and cultures. And I think the world could learn something from Indians as they live together happily despite differences,” Shinju, who was here for a book reading event of her Mottainai Grandma series, said today.

Shinju said she was inspired to write a book on Mottainai, a Japanese term about living in harmony with the environment, for her 4-year-old son.

The author said that although the closest translation of the word mottainai is do not waste! It is not the only meaning of the word.

“Mottainai does not just mean don’t waste but it has many meanings like respect, gratitude, love and compassion towards other people, environment and other living creatures.

“Since my son couldn’t understand the long explanation, I decided to draw pictures to represent the meanings in a better way,” Shinju said.

Three of the author’s books in the Mottainai Grandma series are being translated in Hindi by the National Book Trust.

Shinju believes the books will help Indian kids to “understand the value of their environment”.

“This time, I hope Indian children to understand the meaning of mottainai. I hope the concept of Mottainai will help them to understand, respect and become like their environment.”

She also said that Indians also have their “own mottainai-type ideology”, which gives them wisdom to “live in harmony” with their environment.

Recalling a conversation with Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize awardee Wangari Maathai, Shinju said that Maathai believed the “world could be a better place” if everybody understood the concept of mottainai.

“Maathai once told me that mottainai has universal meaning and it could help people to get together with respect for each other. The world of mottainai is the world of peace,” Shinju said.

The event, held in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan, was part of several events under 2017 the year of Japan-India Friendly Exchanges.

Shinju said she was curious about “Indian lifestyle” and hoped to explore the country more in her latest trip..

*(The Assam Tribune 17/03/2017)*

(Contd. from Page 9)

## Religion and Spirituality

various benefits to be obtained from the supernatural deities. One had to go through severe penance to gain the desired object.

Hence it seems that religion depends on various forms of rituals. Even today we perform pujas of various deities for some personal benefit. It is believed that rituals are very necessary to propitiate the gods and goddesses. In fact whenever we worship any God or Goddess, it is always with the hope of some gain. It is only natural, as we are ordinary human beings and our wants are many and our prayers are connected with our desire for something. Spiritualism may be present in religion in the sense that the deities are conceived as

spiritual beings, who remain in a transcendental region. But religion is also based on earthly phenomena and desire of the worshippers.

In spiritualism there is no place for earthly gains or benefits. The person who practices spiritualism is totally devoid of any earthly considerations. His only aim is to attain the Supreme Reality and to gain liberation from the world. There is no ritualism or code of conduct in spiritualism. It is a kind of concentration and meditation on the Supreme Being. Hence we may say that religion and spirituality cannot be regarded as identical.

*(The Sentinel 29/01/2017)*

## Diwali Declared Holiday in USA Schools

Hindus have welcomed the reported inclusion of Diwali, most popular of their festivals, as holiday by East Williston Union Free School District (EWUFSD) in New York State on its School Calendar for 2017-2018.

Nearby Syosset Central School District, East Meadow School District and Half Hollow Hills Central School District recently declared Diwali as an official holiday, while Mineola Union Free School District announced that no home work or examinations would be given on Diwali, reports suggest.

Distinguished Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada today, describing it as a step in the right direction, urged all other public school districts and private-charter-independent schools in New York State to do the same.

Zed, who is the President of Universal Society of Hinduism, pointed out that it would be a positive thing to do in view of presence of a substantial number of Hindu students in schools around the state, as it was important to meet the religious and spiritual needs of these pupils.

Rajan Zed indicated that schools should make efforts to accommodate the religious requirements of Hindu students and show respect to their faith by not conducting regular business and scheduling classes on Diwali. We did not want our students to be put at an unnecessary disadvantage for missing tests/examinations/papers, assignments, class work, etc., by taking a day-off to observe Diwali.

If schools had declared other religious holidays, why not Diwali, Zed asked. Holidays of all major religions should be honoured and no one should be penalized for practicing their religion, Zed added.

Rajan Zed suggested all New York State schools, public-private-charter-independent, to seriously look into declaring Diwali as an official holiday, thus recognizing the intersection of

spirituality and education. Zed noted that awareness about other religions thus created by such holidays like Diwali would make New York State students well-nurtured, well-balanced, and enlightened citizens of tomorrow.

Zed urged New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, New York State Education Department Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa and New York State Commissioner of Education Maryellen Elia to work towards adding Diwali as an official holiday in all the 728 school districts, and persuading the private-charter-independent schools to follow.

Rajan Zed further said that Hinduism is rich in festivals and religious festivals are very dear and sacred to Hindus. Diwali, the festival of lights, aims at dispelling the darkness and lighting up the lives and symbolizes the victory of good over evil. Besides Hindus; Sikhs and Jains and some Buddhists also celebrate Diwali, which falls on October 19 in 2017.

Zed thanked EWUFSD Board of Education President Mark Kamberg and other Board members for supporting Diwali holiday. EWUFSD headquartered in Old Westbury of New York; reportedly serves East Williston and parts of Albertson, Mineola, Old Westbury, and Roslyn Heights in Nassau County. It claims to gear its educational program "to encourage critical thinking and a love of learning". Its Mission includes: "to nurture the best in each child morally, intellectually, socially, artistically, emotionally and physically". Dr. Elaine Kanas is Superintendent.

Hinduism is the oldest and third largest religion of the world with about one billion adherents and Moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. There are about three million Hindus in USA.

(<https://www.hindujagruti.org/news>)



# HERITAGE FOUNDATION

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Ph. No. 0361-2636365, 94351-99796 Email: [ourheritage123@gmail.com](mailto:ourheritage123@gmail.com)

Date: 02.04.2017

**Dear Readers,**

**Subject:** Request for an article on the topic '**Traditional Preservation Systems of Bio-diversity**' for our Special Issue of Heritage Explorer to be published on the occasion of Independence Day 2017.

Adarneeeya Mahoday/ Mahodaya,

Sadar Panam.

Hope, you are in good health and spirit with the grace of Almighty.

You must be aware that **Heritage Explorer** is being published regularly on monthly intervals with a Special Issue every year on the occasion of Independence Day. Each of its Special Issues use to concentrate upon a particular topic to depict its overall views and its socio-cultural impact of this region.

This time, on the occasion of Independence Day 2017, we have planned to publish it on the topic- '**Traditional Preservation Systems of Bio-diversity**'.

India's North East is rich in biodiversity. The region is blessed by nature. It is believed that systematic utilization of traditional knowledge may play an important role in economic development of traditional communities. In a situation where modern economy captures, penetrate and influences nook and corner across the world and raises challenges for survival for indigenous culture, some of them are still maintaining indigenous knowledge.

The Northeast is the home of various ethnic groups with their diverse socio-cultural practices evolved due to close nexus with the surrounding environment. Literally and practically, they are rich in 'indigenous knowledge on bio-diversity' reflected in their traditional way of life, viz indigenous system of cultivation, irrigation, soil conservation and its fertility management. Traditionally, the management of natural resources including land-use, land protection, forests, planting, harvesting and distribution practices were based on their perception of man-environment relationship. They met their needs through a long tradition of carefully maintaining forest resources. Self-sufficient economy and sustainable livelihood is the by-products of indigenous knowledge system as seen among various indigenous communities.

Traditional knowledge is community specific. It is that part of knowledge system which their forefather supplemented as a successor. The uniqueness of every group or region is reflected in their traditional knowledge system. It helps them to lead a sustainable livelihood. They have developed the art of symbiotic co-existence and build a harmonious relationship with nature.

The concept of 'sacred grooves' among the Khasis is interesting so far as forest conservation is concerned. In a religious context, the Khasis belief that sacred grooves are the places where spirits dwell, a spirits who look upon the active of the different life forms in the natural world, and



these spirits are called in different name as *ki lei kyntang* (gods of the forest). The Khasi seek permission by offering prayer before cutting down the tree, or even before hunting any animals from the forest. There is a mutual respect that exists between man and nature in the traditional beliefs of the Khasi. Religion helps in fostering ecological consciousness in the people, so the Khasi traditional wisdom helps them in preserving their nature.

Further Nyishi tradition says that a person who destroys any culturally restricted plant species or killing any traditionally prohibited animals, he or she is believe to be carried away by a *yapam-sangpam* or *nyobii-yachum* (a miraculous human-like creatures ) to distant land for many days. It acts as deterrent for the people.

Among the Karbis of Assam, it is found that they prohibit for felling the mango, jackfruit and pearl trees locally known as *Thabir Arot*, *Jhongphong Arot* and *Air Arot* respectively. These trees cannot be destroyed without the sanction of the village councils authorities. The Karbis refer to these trees as *Thengpi Asar* which means old man and old women. If someone destroys these trees one is likely to fall ill and might die also. They never use these sanctified trees for the construction of their houses.

Every indigenous groups of the region is self sufficient. The existence of self-sufficient economy is the outcome of traditional knowledge system in preservation of bio-diversity. They are leading a sustainable livelihood that needs no elements of outside agencies. Traditional knowledge, often exist in the domain of a respective community. But there are some traditional knowledge holders who are asset of the community.

Here in this issue we have to deal in some specific fields only so that the publication may be useful in that specific knowledge. So, it is requested to kindly concentrate in the following aspects only:

1. Agriculture and horticulture; irrigation, soil conservation and its fertility management
2. Water resources i.e. rivers, ponds, tanks, springs etc.
3. Forest and forest produce including forest animals, birds etc.

In this way there may be several other good and useful systems too among several communities which should be concentrated for the knowledge of our countrymen. Such writings will also serve as important records for all time to come.

Thanking you.

Yours,



**(Amarendra Brahma)**  
Editor, Heritage Explorer

**Note:**

1. We expect to have this write-up from you before 31st June 2017
2. Kindly send a copy of your photograph with the article along with a short bio-data.
3. An original write-up of your own will be appreciated. For this, elders and knowledgeable persons should be consulted and their names and village must be mentioned in the article. It will carry more value for the write-up.
4. Some photographs should be sent, if possible, in relation to your article.
5. Article may be sent to The Editor, **Heritage Foundation, 30 F.C. Road, Uzan Bazar, Post Box No.73, Guwahati-781001** or e-mail to: **ourheritage123@gmail.com**

## The Brahmin and the Cobra

There was a Brahmin called Haridatta who had a farm in a certain town. He was hard-working. But despite his hard work on his farm, his farm did not produce enough for him to prosper.

One day, while working in the farm, he could not bear the heat anymore and decided to rest under the shade of a tree in his farm. Beside the tree, there was an anthill. While he was resting there, a cobra emerged from the anthill with his hood raised.

Observing this, he thought, "This cobra must be the deity of the farm. From today, I will worship and offer oblations to the cobra. Perhaps, the cobra will bless the farm with a rich produce."

The Brahmin brought milk on a plate and offered it in front of the anthill and said, "I was not aware of your presence, O protector of my farm, please forgive me and accept my offering."

As was the tradition, he went home after he made the offering. The next day, when he came to the anthill, he saw a gold coin on the plate he had offered milk in. He accepted the gold coin as a blessing from the cobra.

This went on for a long time. Every day, the Brahmin would offer milk to the cobra and received a gold coin in the plate he offered the milk in. He started growing rich.

After some time, the Brahmin needed to visit another village. In order that the worship of the cobra was not hampered, he instructed his son to offer milk to the cobra every day, and keep the blessing the cobra gives in return.

Following his instructions, the Brahmin's son did offer milk to the cobra in due time and went home. When he returned next day, he was astonished to find a gold coin lying in the plate.

He thought, "If the cobra gives a gold coin every day, there must be lots of gold coins inside the anthill. I can take out all the gold coins if I kill the cobra."

The next morning, instead of offering milk, the Brahmin's son waited for the cobra to emerge from the anthill and hit the cobra with a stick in an attempt to kill him. The cobra fought back angrily as it was not a deadly blow, and bit the Brahmin's son. He died from the poison, and his body was cremated in the very farm by their relatives.

When the Brahmin returned, he heard what had happened and that his son had died. His relatives wanted to kill the cobra for revenge.

The Brahmin was indeed aggrieved for his son's death, but did not favour his behaviour that led to his death. He did not blame the cobra, and defended the cobra's action.

The next morning, the Brahmin went to offer milk to the cobra as usual. He stood near the anthill and started praying. On hearing this, the cobra came out of the anthill and confronted him.

The cobra said, "Look at yourself. You have even forgotten your son's death and have come here out of the greed for a gold coin! You do not come here out of respect, but for greed. Our friendship cannot last any longer now".

The cobra continued, "I bit your son in retaliation to his attack. He got greedy for gold and died. What he did was out of his youthful rashness, but how can you forget his death? Take a look at the funeral pyre, and take a look at my injured hood."

The cobra gifted the Brahmin with a diamond this time, and said, "Shattered love cannot be restored with a display of affection. Never come here again!"

The Brahmin went home with the diamond, and grieved his son's foolishness and his death, and did not return to the cobra again.

**The wise indeed say:**

**Greed crosses all borders of reasoning and ends in disaster.**



Konyak Tribes of Nagaland



*With Best Wishes for the upcoming  
Rangali Bihu*

