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COVER STORY

APATANI TRIBE OF
ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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Mother language needs protection & preservation

Like every year all the universities, most of the Colleges and many academic institutions of our state observed the International Mother Language Day, which falls on 21st February, with due sanctity and fervor. The youth participation was also very satisfactory which indicate the realization of the importance of the mother language. This is really a very encouraging sign because many of us have given up mother language medium of education and have adopted English or Hindi for one reason or the other, depriving the mother language its pride of place in our intellectual space. It is an universally accepted fact that the mother language is the second most dearest thing on earth for the humanity after the mother herself who gives birth to us. Mother language gives us our identity as a distinct human race. In recognition of these facts the the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed 21st February as the 'International Mother Language Day' on 17 November 1999 "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world."

It will not be irrelevant to know the reason behind the sanctification of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day, because it is always better to know the background. As is well-known, Pakistan was created by curving out two geographically separate parts of India: Punjab and Bengal in 1947. The two parts were very different to each other in terms of culture and language. In 1948, the then Government of Pakistan declared Urdu to be the sole national language of Pakistan. At that point of time Bengali speaking East Pakistanis were much larger in number in comparison to Urdu speaking West Pakistanis. The Bengali speaking East Pakistanis, who outnumbered the Urdu speaking West Pakistani people, protested because they were not ready to forsake their mother language Bangali and adopt Urdu language. They demanded Bangali to be at least one of the national languages in addition to Urdu, but the Pakistani (Read West Pakistani) regime refused to oblige them. The fight for rightful place of Bengali language escalated into a war with the Pakistani forces and claimed the lives of more than twenty students and general public. Hundreds were severely wounded and injured but the Pakistani regime did not relent. The stir for Bengali language grew manifold. Ultimately, in 1952, it achieved its goal by forcing the Pakistan Constituent Assembly to adopt both Bangla and Urdu as the state languages of Pakistan. This rare battle for mother language was ultimately recognized

by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/61/266 and called upon its Member States "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world". As a tribute to the movement for Mother Language initiated by the people of Bangladesh (then the East Pakistan), 21st February, the day of martyrdom of the students fighting for their mother language was adopted as the 'International Mother Language Day'.

Today there is growing acceptance that languages, especially the mother language, play a vital role in holistic development of the humanity at large. However, due to globalization processes, they are increasingly under threat or disappearing altogether. When languages fade, so does the world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity, opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression and valuable resources for ensuring a better future are also lost. Every two weeks a language disappears taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage of the concerned populace. At least 43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered. Only a few hundred languages could secure a place in education systems and less than a hundred are used in the digital world.

It is a universally accepted fact that mother languages are the most powerful instruments of holistic growth and development of young minds. Imparting education through a language far removed from mother language or adopting an alien language as medium of instruction invariably restricts natural growth of the intellect of the young and impressionable youths. A large percentage of our students today are unable to cope with the added pressure of unfamiliar languages and just manage to pass their grades. Consequently, many of the languages of our country remain neglected and are on the verge of being abandoned. As the lullabies sung by the mother in her own language and her soothing words instantly pacify a restless child, so the mother language can penetrate the heart of a most obstinate child and a reluctant learner. Mother language is the most nearest and the dearest to an individual, because to understand it no external assistance becomes necessary. It goes straight to his heart and intellect. It is therefore a sacred duty on our part to not only safeguard our mother language from extinction, but also to help it grow to the higher level of excellence. Let us start doing it without any further delay. □□

Romen Chakraborty
Chief Editor

Markings, Culture and Changes Among The Apatanis

► Dr. Tania Sen

The Apatanis first settled in the place now known as the Ziro valley. It is located at the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. The valley is well known for its beautiful landscape, pine trees, cane forests, rice cultivation and the facial markings of its aboriginals. It is this tradition of marking the face permanently and having huge nose plugs that draw photographers and scholars from across the world year after year.

According to the cultural practices which the forefathers of the community had started, the women mark their face by drawing a straight line from the tip of their nose to their hairline, all the way through the forehead, and another five parallel lines are drawn on their chin. The men on the other hand, drew one horizontal and one vertical line on their chin which might look like the Roman alphabet 'T' for the present day observers.

The thorns of a plant locally known as tiipetaru were tied together and placed at the tip of a cane stick. The thorns were then dipped into a black paste

by mixing black soot collected from the bottom of a vessel and pig or mithun fat. This cane stick was then tapped into the skin using another cane skin, as the thorns pricked the epidermal layer of the skin. This made incisions into the skin as well as left the black paste into the skin, leaving permanent marks into the face of the bearer. Undoubtedly, it was a very painful process. Friends and family members held down the hands, feet and head of the novice bearer as blood and tears trickled down their face.

The origin of the tradition is, however, vague and uncertain. It has been explained by the elders in the valley that the tradition had started ever since they settled in the valley. At the same time, different people have provided different explanations regarding why the tradition of marking the face was started in the first place. During my stay in the Ziro valley, I was able to collect quite a few different narratives which explain the reason for the marking the face. One, that the women were kidnapped by the neighbouring tribes and the tattoos helped to make them unattractive or at least identifiable by the Apatanis as one their own. Two, the tattoos were part of the beautification process. As per this narrative, faces of the young men and women were marked as soon as they were of the appropriate age, so that marriage proposals can come their way. An extension of this narrative goes on to explain that the mothers of Sun, named *Ami Niido* and *Ami Niiku* was unable to find an appropriate groom, when someone suggested her to decorate her body. That is when she put on the most exotic clothes and jewellery (which are part of the lives of Apatani women), as well as marked their faces. In this narration, the facial marks are a part of adornment and beauty standards, which stands in direct contrast to the narrative which describes the process as part of make faces ugly.

This tattooing tradition played several major roles in the Apatani society. It was much more than a mere tradition. The tattoos, which are locally known as tipe formed an essential part of the Apatani identity. Those with the mark could be easily identified as a member of the community. As the same time, it was



an age marker. When a person reached a certain age, most likely that of seven or eight, they had to get their faces marked. Girls even needed to pierce their nose, in order to insert wear nose plugs. In this sense, the marks acted as an indicator of the bearer's age. It was a coming-of-age ceremony in this sense.



Unlike the rituals and customs in other cultures, tattooing among the Apatanis were not much celebrated in the conventional sense. Female members of the family and friends group would come and hold the face and limbs of the person tightly to keep it in place and using the pricking and tapping method, the marks would be engraved into the skin. It is important to note that the lack of celebration is not to be understood as sorrow, grief or unhappiness in any way. Instead, marking of the face was integral to the Apatani society to such an extent that it was not really treated as something different or separate from the day-to-day life.

It has been reported by some of the respondents that they considered dark marks on the face as part of the beauty as well as an integral part of their identity. In fact, so important was this tradition and these 'tattoos' to the members of the community that they would not have minded going through this painful process twice or even thrice. Some Apatanis were more than happy to get their faces marked four or five times in order to ensure that the marks were dark and prominent.

However, everyone did not accept or follow the tradition without any opposition. Many of the parents, especially those who travelled outside the valley, decided not to get the faces of their children marked. Influenced by foreign cultures and mass media, many people in the mid-20th century began to oppose the tradition. This was also the time when better communication and market relations had just begun in the valley. This was the beginning of cultural exchanges. Unfortunately, such exchanges take place in a linear manner whereby the dominant culture takes over the non-dominant cultures. Local cultures are often neglected and eventually get swallowed by the foreign Western cultures. These

western cultural practices are romanticised and praised by the mass media and engraved. This biased education gets engraved into the minds of the people and they begin to choose the foreign over the local. It was due to this territoriality of cultural forms which eventually

led to the decline of the tattooing tradition among the Apatanis.

With the advent of modernization, westernization and many changes in the valley, facial marking and many traditions of the similar kind can be found to be fading away. Evolution is an evitable part of human life as well as the society they live in. The same has happened among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh. After the first colonial officer entered the valley in 1825, life and lifestyle of the Apatanis begun to take a new turn. Commercialization and transportation brought by the colonial officers brought the previously isolated tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, like the Apatanis, closer to the plains and the rest of the country.

It was in the early 1970s, that this tradition came to an end. A local organization called the Apatani Youth Association (AYA) prohibited furthering of the practice. The aims and goals of the Apatani Youth Association was to ensure progress and development of the young members of the community, so that they can participate and compete free and fairly with the rest of the world. Keeping this larger goal in mind, they formed the Apatani Youth Association, and formulated certain key objectives of the association. These objectives include (but not limited to): better education, better communication, better roads and transportation, prohibition on child marriage and also prohibition on facial markings and nose plugs. Since its very inception the AYA did not want to continue with those traditions which held them back – like the facial markings and the nose plugs.

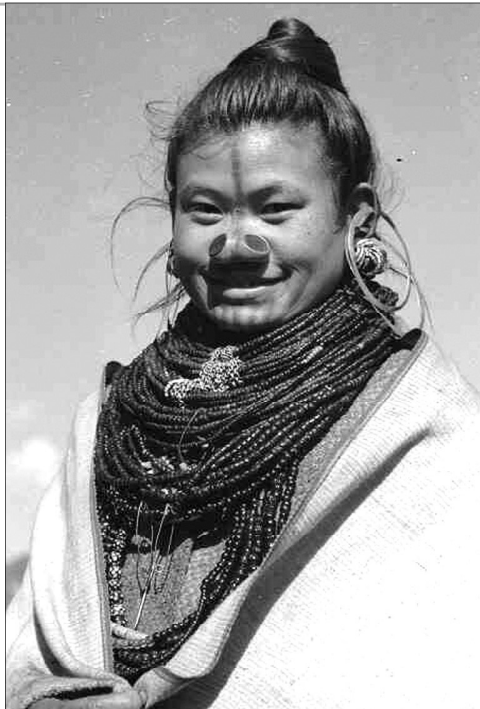
When asked about the reasons about why they did not want to continue with such an old tradition, the responses were usually quite similar. First of all, the pain that a person had to go through in order to

attain these marks were terrifying enough to prevent them from getting any. Many of those elderly respondents who have tipes on their face describe the process to be too painful and horrifying. The young members, thus, often sigh in relief that they did not have to go through the painful process. Thus, physical pain and the permanency of the marks were the two major reasons that were given for prohibiting the tradition. But other factors of stigma, cultural influence and modernization can also be found to have played a significant role.

As part of the new rule, the AYA imposed heavy fine of 50,000 rupees or one mithun (*Bos Frontalis*) on anyone found to continue with the tradition. Thus, the people of the Apatani community gradually stopped making these traditional facial tattoos after the AYA had asked them to discontinue and fine heavily if anyone was found to continue.

Many members of the community opposed the prohibition. They were unhappy over the fact that a tradition as old as the community's settlement in the valley itself, is suddenly banned by its young members. Many elders even took to the street to protest the prohibition of the traditions. However, the decision to prohibit the tradition ultimately triumphed. Today, the tradition of marking the face is on the verge of extinction and only the old members of the community can be found to have the marks on their face or the nose plugs.

This prohibition of old tradition and its replacement by newer cultural forms is not unique to the Apatani community. In fact, many societies have reported this kind of loss of culture. The reasons for such a loss are many and its impact on the society are quite complex as well. For starters, this transition is a direct result of modernization and westernization. The cravings to transition in a certain manner which will many the society's position much advanced and superior than its previous position. But prohibition from within the community is unique to the Apatanis. It is often heard that customs and traditions were



given up as part of colonization, imperialism, or part of the steps taken by the government. In the case of the Apatanis, this decision to do away with their customs was taken from within, rather than being imposed by external forces. The youth of the community decided that it would be best to discontinue and thus the prohibition was implemented.

Today, the facial marks can only be found in the faces of a very small section of the community. Additionally, these marks have also been commercialized in the present-day context. Due to the immense amount of attention from people all over the world, the bearers of

these traditional marks have now started to charge a certain amount of money for every picture taken. Such commercialization of the tradition can also be attributed to the colonizers as they were the first to introduce posa into the region.

With the culture being on the verge of extinction, these photographers are getting more valuable and the people with the facial marks being only handful. The young members of the community engage in modern forms of tattooing practices but has little to no knowledge about their tradition – what was it about and why was it practiced. The prohibition of the practices has thus impacted the Apatani society in more than commonly recognized, impacting their culture, identity and tradition. □□

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Nagamese has been for close to a century and a half the lingua franca of the people of Nagaland and parts of Assam. All of the Naga languages and its hybrid languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman family whereas Assamese is an Indo-European language. Nagamese occupies a distinct space in the region and plays a unique role serving as a connector between the various Naga tribes. It also facilitates communication between the Nagas and the Assamese.

NAGAMESE: Harbinger of Cultural Hybridity

► Dr. Antora Borah

Nagamese is a Creole spoken in the state of Nagaland and its adjacent foothill areas. The emergence of Nagamese as a hybrid language has come about owing to the unique political, historical and linguistic situation of Northeast India. The unintentional Hybridity of various languages and dialects gave rise to the Nagamese language. The present paper will try to elucidate on the emergence of Nagamese language in Nagaland. Further, it will try to explore how with the advent of the colonial ruler, the market language has become lingua franca of Nagaland and its surrounding areas. Finally, it will throw light on resistance against Nagamese among the Naga nationalists for the fact that hybrid language has become their lingua franca.

Keywords: Hybrid language, lingua franca, Nagamese, Creole.

The rapid assimilation and acculturation leads to emergence of hybrid culture. This is very natural phenomenon, when different groups live together in spite of their separate identity; they try to embrace each other's culture. It is observed that with rapid migration in different parts of the world, the study of multilingualism is the new quest. The growth of hybridization among languages can be attributed to the linguistic globalization or presence of multilingualism. In Nagaland and surrounding foothills, each ethnic group has their own mother tongue but few are dominant languages over others. However, Nagamese is the mostly widely spoken

language in the entire state of Nagaland and its surrounding foothills. Nagamese is mostly used in inter-ethnic communication where as mother tongue is used for intra-ethnic communication.

Nagamese is a Creole which is regarded as an "Alien" language among the dominant groups in the state of Nagaland and surrounding foothills. Creole language is a new language developed from simplifying and blending different languages that come into contact within a particular population, at a specific point of time. Nagamese is an amalgamation of Assamese, Hindi, English, Bengali and various other Naga languages. In spite of being English as the official language but Nagamese is the most widely spoken language in Nagaland which rules the roost across the state.

The growth of hybridization among languages can be attributed to the multiculturalism, linguistic globalization or the presence of multilingualism. Initially, the concept of mixing two languages or two cultures was looked down upon and always regarded as "inferior". However, gradually, Hybridity started to be "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of 'in-

between-ness', the straddling of two cultures and the subsequent ability to 'negotiate the difference' " (Hoogvelt, 1997, p.158). As a result, "hybrids exist when different cultures come together in the same place to create something that did not previously exist" (Dear and Burridge, 2005, p. 303). Cultural



hybridization can be defined as “the concept of cultural junctions where different cultures arrive, meet and collide with each other and ultimately deformed and reformed into a hybridized culture that has its own identity and language.” (Sabyasachi, 2012, p. 21). While defining Hybridity, Bakhtin establishes two types of Hybridity: Intentional and Unintentional. He explains the Intentional Hybridity as “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the consciousness, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor,” whereas in unintentional Hybridity the effect of language change historically “by means of a mixing of various languages co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language” (Bakhtin, 2010, p.359).

The emergence of Nagamese as a hybrid language has come about owing to the unique political, historical and linguistic situation of Northeast India. The unintentional Hybridity of various languages and dialects gave rise to the Nagamese language. Nagamese has been for close to a century and a half the lingua franca of the people of Nagaland and parts of Assam. All of the Naga languages and its hybrid languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman family whereas Assamese is an Indo-European language. Nagamese occupies a distinct space in the region and plays a unique role serving as a connector between the various Naga tribes. It also facilitates communication between the Nagas and the Assamese.

During my PhD fieldwork in the foothills of Nagaland, I had encountered with an Assamese publication. What drew my attention was the title “Moitri Muromor Kotha” of the Assamese novel. Though the Novel is about the Merapani war and it is published in Assamese language, surprisingly its title is a popular Nagamese phrase. It clearly shows that the use of Nagamese language as its title will draw attention of the wider population in Assam, Nagaland and foothills.

When I contacted the author, he also highlighted the importance of Nagamese in everyday social world of Merapani. A verbatim record, of the author

who used to be a local correspondent for several Assamese dailies will highlight the importance and birth of Nagamese in the region.

“British official needs a language to rule different Naga tribes in their territory. This leads to the birth of Nagamese. It was not easy for British officers and their officials from Hindi belt and Bengali speakers to learn different Naga languages spoken by different Naga tribes. As such these rulers started speaking a language which was a mixture of Hindi, Assamese and Bengali and later on that was name as Nagamese. This was a language which established relationship between rulers and the ruled in the Naga Hills. Apart from that the Nagas in order to strengthen their cordial relation with the rulers of valley like Ahom and Kachari, they were already using a mixed language like Nagamese before the advent of the British in the region. Later on in order to establish good relation and business ties with their neighbour the usage of Nagamese became part of their everyday life. But there is a strong opposition from young Naga groups for Nagamese. But it was because of Nagamese, Naga nationalism was able to creep in the Naga society. I feel Nagamese is a very important language in this region.”

The growth of Nagamese as a lingua franca of Nagaland and its foothills can be dated back to the Pre-British era. There are about twenty-three Naga languages, all mutually unintelligible. The Naga tribes live in close proximity to each other but within a geographical territory a specific tribe lives in. As such, there was no common tongue for them. But gradually, a common medium of communication emerged between the Naga tribes which later termed as Nagamese. Centuries of contact between the Nagas and Assamese had ensured that a few Nagas from the many tribes had a degree of knowledge of Assamese. Various factors such as the growth of tea plantations in Assam, the establishment of a military

garrison at Kohima, the inroads made by missionaries into Nagaland led to creation of such circumstances in which various Naga tribes had to interact with each other and even with the Assamese. It was in such a situation that a new language, later to be called Nagamese, emerged, and soon began to be used widely.

There are various testimonies about the existence of Nagamese even before the British expedition in the region. Lt. Bigges's Tour Diary (1841) provides insights about the first British expedition of 1893 into Nagaland. In the aforementioned document, the author mentions the existence of a pidgin that sounds like Assamese before the British set their foot in Naga Hills (Avtans, 2008). It is likely that the British observed that a tongue that sounded something like the Assamese they had been exposed to, was already practiced in the Naga areas. The changes brought by British such as construction of roads, railway lines etc. enhanced the contacts among various Naga tribes and the outside world which gave pace to the Nagamese language for its wider currency.

In his monumental Linguistic Survey of India (published between 1903 and 1928, the section on Naga languages was published in 1904), George Abraham Grierson talks of Assamese or Naga pidgins as being spoken in parts of Assam (Nagaland was then part of undivided Assam). Venkatesh (2018) opine that the section dealing with the Naga languages in the document of Linguistic Survey of India was completed in the last decade of the 19th century, and by that time Nagamese was widely used in the Naga Hills and adjacent areas which is evident from the accounts of various British anthropologist or administrators. But clearly, Grierson considered the language as less than important as he did not record it like he did with the many other languages of the sub-continent (ibid).

The anthropologists who flocked to Nagaland in British times also mentioned the presence of a language among the Nagas which was clearly identifiable as Nagamese. J.H. Hutton's work on the Angami Nagas published in 1921 talks of 'broken Assamese' being spoken in the Naga Hills. It can be assumed that Hutton record is the earliest record which clearly mention about the existence of Nagamese in the Naga Hills. He says, "...the Assamese as spoken in the Naga Hills is peculiarly well adapted for the reproduction of Naga idioms as a vehicle of interpretation. It makes a better lingua franca for the Hills than Hindustani or English would, the substitution of which for Assamese has been occasionally suggested." (cited in Avtans, 2008). Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf, in his work on the Naked Nagas published in 1939, again mentions that many people including children spoke fluent Nagamese, which he terms 'the lingua franca of (the) entire Naga Hills' (ibid). Clearly, by then Nagamese had been given a name, had stabilized as a tongue and was being widely used. The heavy influence of Assamese on the language is evident in these observations. But besides Assamese, Nagamese has also borrowed words from Hindi and English and a few from Bengali.

After the formation of Nagaland, the Assamese that was extensively taught in schools in Nagaland was then replaced by English, which was proclaimed as the official language of the new state. But surprisingly, the position of Nagamese underwent a peculiar change in these circumstances. Unlike other unions of India, the Nagaland was not formed on the basis of a language. Thus, the Nagamese was never considered as a state language of Nagaland. However, the practical requirements of running a state has led the Nagamese language to become something of a uniting factor in the state.

DO YOU KNOW

Creole is a language that develops from the process of different languages simplifying and mixing into a new form and then that form expanding and elaborating into a full-fledged language with native speakers, all within a fairly brief period of time. Few creole languages spoken in India include: Nagamese, Andaman creole Hindi, Bishnupriya Manipuri and Korlai Portuguese.

(Source: Wikipedia)

Gradually, the language is getting recognised in intelligentsia with its growing popularity in communication. Nagamese Dictionaries are widely circulated both in Nagaland and Assam which were written by both Naga and Assamese scholars. Dr. N. Khashito Aye, a Naga linguist has written the *Anglo-Nagamese Grammar: The lingua franca of Nagaland* in 2007 and revised edition in 2015 which is already circulated all over Nagaland and the Burma where Naga population dwells. Today Nagamese is the widely used medium for inter-lingual communications such as schools, markets, hospitals, churches and even in legislative assembly. Nagamese also began to be used in radio broadcasts. In 2013, a Nagamese newspaper (in the Roman script) *Nagamese Khobor* was launched and continues to run. The new generation is also accepting the Nagamese as it is widely represented in the popular culture such as music videos, drama, local publications, etc. For instance, the popular musicians of Assam composed Bihu songs in Nagamese. The various Nagamese literatures like poems, drama, novels are also making their space in the literary world of both Nagaland and Assam. Moreover the emergence of a unified Naga identity irrespective of tribal affiliations has led to situations where it has acquired the role of a mother tongue for the children born out of wedlock of people from two different communities. Gradually, Nagamese is acquiring its strong hold in informal conversations though formal discourse is still conducted in English or any other indigenous languages.

However, in recent times the Nagamese language has met with oppositions owing to its feature of Hybridity. Various sections of Nagas object on the use of Nagamese as a lingua franca of Nagaland and its foothills. Naga student Federation (NSF), the apex student body of the state was the first to raise its voice against the Centre's move to make Nagamese as second official language of the state (*The New Indian Express*, February 7, 2016). They believe that it could dilute the culture and social fabrics of the Naga society. They also argue that Nagamese is a "market language" which doesn't have any origin and any attempt to promote such language will also lead to extinction of various indigenous languages of the Naga tribe (ibid).

The UNESCO Atlas of Languages in Danger has recognised 6500 languages in the world. But ironically, no less than 40 per cent of known languages are either extinct or endangered (UNESCO, 2016). According to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger 2009, India has around 196 endangered languages, including about 80 in the Northeast (ibid). In an interview given to *Indian Express* by the Indian Linguist and literary critic Ganesh Naryan Devy mentioned about the documentation of 780 Indian languages while conducting the People's Linguistic Survey of India in 2010. He further mentioned that 600 of these languages were dying. He added close to 250 languages in India had already died over the past 60 years (*The Indian Express*, May 3, 2020). So, if Nagamese is made the second official language of the state Nagaland and included it in the Eight Schedule then there is a possibility of other Naga language would get endangered/extinct very soon as most of the Naga languages are classified as venerable for extinct by UNESCO. At the same time, Nagamese is a driver of economic pursuit within Nagaland. It improves social interactions to business dealing between Nagas and non-Nagas and within Naga groups also. The Nagamese speaker also finds it very easy to adopt other languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, etc. as Nagamese has borrowed words from them. Even Naga linguist like Dr. N. Khashito Aye, is a staunch supporter of Nagamese. He also said that the importance of Nagamese is also laid down by some colonial anthropologists like W.B. Smith, Hutton and Verrier Elwin (Khashito, 2016). The use of Nagamese cannot be denied in administrative purpose for ethnically diverse state like Nagaland. The Nagaland Legislative Assembly Rules and Procedure and conduct of Business in Nagaland Legislative Assembly Chapter V11 rules 28 says - "The Business of the Assembly shall be transacted in English or in Naga-Assamese (Nagamese)" (cited in Khashito, 2016). Even, the Naga nationalists in their camps use Nagamese for communication.

The Nagamese, which was a market language emerge out of colonial pre-occupation in the Naga Hills gradually turned out to be the lingua franca

of the state. It is not only served as a connector between various groups in the fringe but also a harbinger of cultural hybridity especially in the foothill areas of Assam-Nagaland. In spite of its rapid use among several Naga and non-Naga communities, there is a constant opposition against Nagamese among the Naga nationalists for the fact that hybrid language has become their lingua franca. It is fact that the Naga groups are using Nagamese to fulfil their basic needs. It can be argued that the cultural hybridity which is surfaced is manufactured out of crisis.

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Endangered languages in North East Bharat

As much as 25 languages in the North East have been categorised as *endangered languages*, a few among which have less than a thousand speakers. These endangered languages are: *Singpho, Khamiyang, Sherdukpen, Simong, Khampiti, Naa, Tangam, Liju, Bangro, Dirang Monpa and Khamba* of Arunachal Pradesh; *Phakial and Mayor / Zakhring* of Assam; *Chiru, Aimol, Purum, Chothe, Moyon and Lamkang* of Manipur; *Atong* of Meghalaya; *Ralte and Baite/Biate* of Mizoram; *Thapa* of Sikkim and *Uchai, Ranglong and Darlong* of Tripura.

(Source: Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Dept. of Higher Education, Govt. of India)

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Climate Change in Bangladesh

Domestic, Regional and Global Implications

► Dr. Rupak Bhattacharjee

The climate displacement could also exacerbate Bangladesh's existing communal tensions. Bangladesh's several rural areas have long been witnessing anti-minority communal violence. Studies reveal that armed attacks by Islamic fundamentalist elements on minorities especially Hindus and indigenous ethnic groups, have close linkages with 'politics' and 'land grabbing'.

■ Abstract

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, and has been confronting some of its worst impacts. The South Asian country, which is centrally located in the Bay of Bengal, has been regularly experiencing extreme weather conditions like high floods and tropical cyclones and slow-onset events, including rising sea-level, riverbank erosion and drought, displacing millions of people particularly from the south-western coastal region. This paper seeks to analyse all the drivers of the climate change displacement in Bangladesh, evaluate the nature and extent of Bangladesh's internal and external migration caused by extreme weather events and changing climate, examine the linkages between the climate change displacement and the country's persisting challenges of governance and other pressing issues, and analyse both traditional and non-traditional threats posed by huge migration of Bangladeshi climate refugees. The paper will also try to examine the patterns of internal and external migration of Bangladeshi climate refugees, analyse the evolving crisis of displacement against the backdrop of the country's political dynamics, assess the regional and global implications of the migration of Bangladeshi climate refugees and evaluate the climate change displacement mitigation efforts, and will conclude the study with its major findings.

Key words: climate displacement, food security, non-traditional threats, sea-level rise, tidal floods, climate hotspots, intrusion of salinity, tropical cyclones and riverbank erosion.

■ Introduction

Human displacement caused by climate change and environmental disasters is fast emerging as a global crisis raising concern over the plight of the

people who have been forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods. Experts say by 2050, climate change will turn several parts of Asia and Africa uninhabitable. They apprehend that many adverse effects of climate change, including global warming, drought, desertification, increased flood and intrusion of saline water into wells and fields due to rise in sea-level could trigger migration the size of which the world has never seen before¹. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has also noted that "climate change is the defining crisis of our time and disaster displacement one of its most devastating consequences"².

Bangladesh has drawn the attention of the international community as it is currently facing the climate change induced displacement more than any other nation in the world. The country is extremely vulnerable to climate change owing to its low elevation, high density of population, over-reliance on agriculture and inadequate infrastructure. All these factors have made the South Asian nation an epicentre of the climate change impacts. For the last two decades, the Global Climate Change Risk Index has rated Bangladesh as the seventh most affected country in the world from extreme weather events³.

■ Definition of climate refugees

Millions of people are displaced every year across the world due to natural catastrophes and the impacts of climate change. Many refer such displaced people as "climate refugees". However, from a legal perspective, such reference is not acceptable. The UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 defines "refugee" as a person who has crossed an international border "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group

or political opinion”. According to the UNHCR, climate change affects people inside their own countries, and results internal displacement before it reaches a level where it displaces people across the borders. Nevertheless, the UNHCR does not endorse the term “climate refugee”, saying it is more accurate to refer to “persons displaced in the context disasters and climate change”⁴.

The environmentalists across the globe are currently engaged in constructing a definition of climate refugees and a legal framework for their rights. They argue that refugee status is vital for climate migrants, as it will empower them with more rights while drawing attention to the issue. At present, climate migration is largely under-reported while refugee movements hog the headlines. Granting the status of climate refugee is expected to sharpen international focus and mobilise resources to address the challenge⁵.



In an effort in this direction, London-based Environmental Justice Foundation has tried to define climate refugees as “Persons or group of persons, who for reasons of sudden and progressive climate-related change in environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within the country or abroad”⁶.

■ Drivers, nature and extent of displacement

The creation of a legal framework on climate/ environmental refugees is crucial for a developing country like Bangladesh which has been identified as a climate change hotspot zone of the world. As Bangladesh is primarily a deltaic country, people have been experiencing climate catastrophes for generations, and they have always resorted to migration as a survival strategy. However, due to climate change, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and their consequences have been unprecedented. The issues causing people’s displacement in Bangladesh include tidal

flooding, intrusion of salinity, riverbank erosion, monsoon flooding, tropical storms, cyclones, drought, river pollution and landslides.

These climate change effects pose serious threats to Bangladesh’s food security, livelihoods and living conditions. Scientists view Bangladesh as ground zero of all the adverse effects of climate change. The climate change is regulating the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events in Bangladesh where the estuaries of some of South Asia’s big rivers like Ganges and Brahmaputra are located. A large part of Bangladesh sits at an elevation of less than 20 feet above the sea-level, and the south-western coastal region, which is positioned even lower, is home to more than 50 million people⁷.

About one-third of Bangladesh’s 165 million people living in the coastal region are threatened by sea-level rise due to global warming. Studies have unravelled that nearly 17% of Bangladesh’s territory in the coastal region will be permanently flooded displacing an estimated 20 to 30 million people by mid-century. In fact, the process is underway, and both government and non-government organisation (NGO) sources estimate that approximately 10 million have already been affected by annual floods and tropical storms severely damaging river and coastal islands. Many of them have turned into “climate refugees” in their own country⁸.

Bangladesh is currently facing the worst effects of climate change including slippage of brackish water and unusual height of tidal waves. The storm surges propelled by tropical cyclones have tremendously affected mangrove forest in the Sunderbans. Moreover, numerous small river islands (chars in local parlance) had been completely washed away every five to ten years. The river island inhabitants are terribly affected by climate change. Bangladesh’s major rivers are continuously creating and retaking land depending on the season⁹. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, rise in sea-level will wipe out more arable land in Bangladesh than anywhere in the world. The

problem assumes significance as Bangladesh's economy is predominantly agrarian, with about two-third of country's work force being engaged in agriculture and allied activities¹⁰.

Increase in salt level has a debilitating impact on the vegetation and farming in the coastal belt. Reports say brackish water from the Bay of Bengal is fast encroaching, swelling Bangladesh's several fresh water rivers, penetrating deep into the soil, contaminating ponds and underground water supply on which millions of people depend for drinking and cultivation. Bangladesh faces growing soil salinity that could retard country's food production¹¹. The IPCC in its recent report says by 2050, rice production in Bangladesh is expected to fall by 10% and wheat production by 30%. Moreover, the intrusion of saline water is also destroying the fishing areas thereby reducing the income opportunities of Bangladesh's fairly large fishing communities¹².

Monsoon flooding is also a major cause of internal displacement in Bangladesh. About one-fifth of the country's territory is easily submerged by flood water during monsoon. Studies say monsoon flooding is likely to become more frequent and severe due to climate change, as rainfall both increases and turns more erratic. Environmentalists caution that climate change is displacing more people in Bangladesh than any other country in the world. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), during the last one decade, nearly 700,000 Bangladeshis were displaced on average each year by climate disasters¹³.

In addition to annual flood, melting of ice in the Tibetan plateau, where most of South Asia's transboundary rivers originate, is coming down through rivers, increasing the volume of water resulting in alarming rise of riverbank erosion. It is estimated that nearly 10,000 hectares of land is lost in Bangladesh every year because of riverbank erosion—a prime driver of internal displacement. The people living in numerous river islands that are located within the major river systems of Bangladesh are particularly



vulnerable to erosion. The Bangladesh government considers the residents of such islands as "immediately threatened" and their number exceeds four million¹⁴.

The pitiable conditions of the key transboundary rivers, including Ganges, Brahmaputra and Teesta are also responsible for displacement as large numbers of people in Bangladesh engaged in agricultural activities and fishing have been affected. Bangladesh's environment and river rights activists have long been highlighting that upper riparian country India continues to divert water away from their country's rivers leading to environmental hazards. Such diversions have reduced the average river flow to a great extent. The condition worsens in the lean season when the flows often fall below the minimum required level to keep the rivers alive. When India opens all the barrage gates during monsoon, the shallow rivers cannot carry all the waters resulting in widening of rivers and bank erosion¹⁵.

The cross-boundary river pollution is also turning more serious with the passage of time. Despite the Ganges being considered holy in India, the river is polluted with 500 litres of industrial waste and 1.5 billion litres of untreated sewage each day. Such pollution is now entering Bangladesh further damaging the livelihoods of people who mostly rely on water resources. Bangladesh's industries are also polluting the country's several rivers by dumping colossal waste further worsening the situation.

Bangladesh's river activists are concerned over the building of large number of industries on the banks of the country's major river systems without environment clearance. Besides, rivers in Bangladesh suffer from growing encroachment and dumping of untreated sewage¹⁶.

The numbers of Bangladeshi migrants have been increased over the years also due to the disastrous consequences of severe cyclones like Sidr and Aila. Reports say 75% of total global casualties caused by tropical storms occur in three Bay of

Bengal littoral states—India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Among them, Bangladesh accounts for maximum deaths. In November 2007, cyclone Sidr devastated the south-western coastal region, claiming more than 4000 lives, displacing two million people and totally incapacitating crop lands and destroying 1.8 million tonnes of rice—Bangladesh’s staple food. On the whole, Sidr inflicted a damage of \$ 1.7 billion on the population. The situation was further aggravated by cyclone Ailain 2009, destroying thousands of homes and farm lands in the coastal region, displacing millions and killing more than 200 people¹⁷.

Bangladesh’s coastal areas have been confronting tropical storms with greater frequency and severity, damaging property and infrastructure and disrupting agriculture and other livelihoods. In 2016, the Bay of Bengal witnessed four cyclones, namely, Roanu, Kyant, Nada and Vardah, while usually there is only one in a year. A Bangladeshi meteorologist says in 2016, the quantity of storm warnings was more than other years in the Bay of Bengal. Usually two or three depressions happen, but that year there were seven or eight, and four cyclones. Moreover, Bangladesh has a history of encountering tornadoes and other catastrophes though not visited the country recently¹⁸.

The world’s largest mangrove forest in the Sunderbans, which plays the role of natural protector for Bangladesh’s four coastal districts, namely, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira and Barguna, from raging cyclones, is at risk of inundation from sea-level rise. The forest is also suffering from increased salinity due to rise in sea-level and reduced fresh water supply. Bangladesh’s wildlife activists have flagged concern that the Sunderbans’ unique biodiversity and ecological quality of the forest are declining. Despite Bangladesh government’s preservation commitments and actions, the Sunderbans is facing threats from both climatic and man-made sources¹⁹.

Bangladesh’s infrastructure and industrial development programmes in the relatively backward south-western coastal region could cause environmental hazards adversely affecting coastal habitants’ livelihoods and living conditions²⁰. The ecosystem of the Sunderbans has become fragile because of continuous pollution from about 150 ongoing industrial projects around the reserve forests. These developments have prompted the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is

the official advisor on Natural World Heritage, to recommend that the Sunderbans be classified as “World Heritage in Danger”²¹.

The Climate change effects too pose potent threat to the distinctive forest of the Sunderbans. According to reports, an anthropogenic 45 cm rise in sea-level by the end of twenty-first century, combined with other forms of anthropogenic stress on forest, could result in the destruction of the Sunderban mangroves²². The depletion of mangrove forest will lead to the loss of the protective biological shield against cyclones and tsunamis. This will make the coastal communities more vulnerable to extreme weather events and rise of sea-level. The submergence of landmass has rendered about 6,000 families homeless and around 70,000 people are immediately threatened with the same²³.

Increased soil salinity caused by sea-level rise will force hundreds and thousands of coastal habitants to migrate to inland areas, particularly those living in and around the Sunderbans. A recent International Food Policy Research Institute’s (IFPRI) study observes that in Bangladesh, nearly 200,000 people living in the coastal region may be forced to move to inland areas in search of alternative livelihoods. Given changes in the amplitude and frequency of sea-level extremes, further aggravated by poor availability of high-saline tolerant crop varieties, increased soil salinity will push nearly 40,000 coastal residents to migrate to another location within their district, and about 60,000 would move to another district²⁴.

While tropical storms, cyclones, high tidal waves, monsoon flooding and riverbank erosion continue to wreck havoc in Bangladesh due to significant change in rainfall pattern, the north-western region has been experiencing drought for some decades threatening crops and livelihoods. In the 1990s, Bangladesh for the first time recognised land degradation as well as seasonal and long rainless period, as emerging threats to living conditions and income opportunities. Currently, this is not a key driver of displacement in Bangladesh, but the risk is likely to increase as climate change progresses²⁵.

Another major factor responsible for the emerging drought like situation in Bangladesh’s is the reduced flow of the Teesta river from upper riparian India²⁶. The gradual decline in the flow of water has threatened the livelihood of many people in the northern districts of the country. Recent studies

say 9.15 million Bangladeshis are heavily dependent on the Teesta for employment opportunities. The shortage of the Teesta water has not only caused severe hardships to the Bangladeshi farmers and fishermen but also resulted in siltation of the river bed. The environmentalists have cautioned that if the ongoing crisis is allowed to precipitate further, the river may completely dry up in Bangladesh²⁷.

Frequent landslides too pose threat to unprepared people in Bangladesh. In 2017, more than 160 people were killed in a landslide as result of over development on eroding land. Landslides caused by increasingly erratic rainfall disrupt normal life in the hilly north-eastern and south-eastern regions of Bangladesh could also trigger displacement by destroying homes and property, and negatively impacting agriculture. Like drought, landslide is presently not a primary driver of migration in Bangladesh, but scientists maintain that they are expected to be more severe and frequent in the coming years as a result of climate change.

(Article Contd. to Next Issue)

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- damage of the rare mangrove forest according to a 2016 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report. See n. 19.
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40. See Hasan and Geoffrey's, "How Climate Change Deepens Bangladesh's Fragility", n. 3.
41. See Wernick, n.7; and n. 1.
42. See Hasan and Geoffrey's, "How Climate Change Deepens Bangladesh's Fragility", n. 3.
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(End Note Contd. to Next Issue)

On the occasion of the 74th Republic day of India, highest civilian awards of the country namely the Padma Awards (Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan and Padma Shri) were announced and a total of 106 eminent personalities from different walks of society across the country will accordingly be conferred with the awards in different categories by the President of India. Ramkuiwangbe Newme, a pioneer of the movement for indigenous faith across the north east, is one amongst the distinguished persons who will be honoured with the Padma Shri this year, in the category of social work. Following is a brief account of his works and contribution to society.

RAMKUIWANGBE NEWME

Torch Bearer of Indigenous Faith Movement

► Dr. Widonlule Newme

Shri Ramkuiwangbe Newme alias Ramkuiji, son of a renowned political leader Incekambe Newme is a religious leader, social reformer and Patron of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, North-East, India. Newme is well known for his assiduous contribution towards preserving the indigenous Heraka faith and culture; and women empowerment.

Shri Newme was born in a Zeme Naga Heraka noble family to Shri Incekambe Newme and Smt. Nramtuile Newme on May 25, 1947 at Boro Henam Village, 30 Kms. West of Haflong, N.C.Hills District, Assam. He is the fourth child and the eldest son of his parents out of eight children. As a child, he was very gentle and kind by personality. Since tender age, he was very much influenced by his father about his vision on social outlook. His father was not only a great politician but also a very intellectual person known for his able and upright character.



With family members

Shri Newme did his schooling and High School from Government Boys' High School, Haflong. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree

from Shillong Government College in 1975. After graduation, Shri Newme was appointed as Personal Assistant to Ranima Gaidinliu in 1977 and served for 1½ years. Shri Newme got married with Smt. Nrisongle Ngame at the age of 36. The spouse has no biological child however adopted 2 children of his younger brother Idambe. The couple are foster parents of 3 children of his younger brother as his brother passed away early.

Ramkuiji live a frugal lifestyle and is a workaholic. In 1980, Shri Newme was appointed as the Sub-Inspector of Schools under the North Cachar Hills District Council in Haflong. During his service he was influential in starting 10 primary schools in 9 villages. Besides, he worked relentlessly on girls' education. Being from an educational field by occupation, he took it as a mission to create awareness among the villagers to appreciate the significance of girls' education and give them equal status in the society. He and his wife started the first Vishwa Hindu Parishad girls' hostel of the region with 22 boarders at his own residence. In addition, he initiated to set up Rani Gaidinliu Memorial Junior College at Boro Haflong under Heraka Seva Trust to encourage education.

Nonetheless, he has always supported and raised





With the then P.M. Indira Gandhi

many deprived and impoverished students at his own residence and help them achieve their dreams. His relentless efforts on girls' education curtailed down the hesitance on their education that was prevalent in the region thereby facilitating the privilege to education. Shri Newme retired from his service as District Primary Education Officer in 2011. Shri Newme has stepped his journey towards serving people since young age. He was the founder General Secretary of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, North East India in 1974. He condemns apostasy and revolted against forceful religious conversion in the North-East region and propagates indigenous culture and faith. His endless efforts have shone a ray of hope in the clouded minds of his people to accomplish the vision of Rani Ma. In the struggle for religious freedom, Ramkuiji had faced many hindrances and intimidation from the extremists but he never gave up rather kept a humble spirit and went on speaking for his people welfare. His fearless guts and self-determination encourages his people to step forward and fight back for their rights.

Shri Newme is also associated with various Hindu Organizations and held key positions in the

organizations with remarkable success. He persistently walks alongside the organization and works for the best interest of the society. He was nominated as the Court member of Dibrugarh University, Assam. Presently, he is the president of Lodi High School Committee and of Rani Gaidinliu Memorial Junior College Committee, Haflong.

Shri Newme transcribed the Holy book Tingwang Hingde and authored the book Biography of Rani Ma Gaidinliu. Shri Newme is a recipient of numerous prestigious

awards. He has been conferred Shri Guruji Samaj Prabadhan Puruskar (1997) by Jana Kalyan Samati of Pune, Bombay in the name of Zeliangrong Heraka Association for preserving and promoting indigenous Heraka faith and culture and for social upliftment in the North-East region. Bhaorao Deoraj Smrity Sewa Samman (2010), Lucknow for his selfless service in protecting Heraka custom and religion. Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture Sanman (2015), Guwahati for his tireless efforts in inspiring several communities to re-connect with their ancestral faith and for nurturing inter-community and inter-regional



With N. Biren Singh, CM, Manipur

bonds with his national vision. Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) from NITTE University (2018), Mangalore for his substantial contribution for gender empowerment and overall development of North Eastern society.

Shri Newme's tremendous selfless service for his people and society is remarkable and can't be defined in words. The

kind of stature manifest in his service to society is rare to find and will be revered by everyone. It is in recognition to such invaluable contributions that he would be honoured with Padma Shri, the fourth highest civil award of the country. □□

Janajati people of the North-East have realized that without culture, their identity is in danger

► **Arunabh Barman**

I was fortunate enough to visit different parts of the state as I was involved in research project under the Department of Arunachal Pradesh. I was fascinated by the hospitality of the simple and straightforward people. Some of these experiences touched my mind and brain heavily. It was sad to see how they were about to lose their rich culture by abandoning their own religion. I could feel how the locals have become disconnected from their roots after they stopped celebrating traditional festivals associated with their religion and culture. Many of the victims told us that they had converted to a foreign religion and burnt their religious and cultural objects at the instigation of that religion.

Whenever I visiting various parts of the North East that were victims of conversion many of those who can never give up the importance of their religion helplessly admitted an important fact that the majority of converts are imprisoned in the hope of receiving government benefits. I had already heard this being discussed in different parts of India but even in reality I understood the depth of the issue. I have done some reading in this context and tried to share some things with the readers.

Culture defines a person's identity. A group of natives live and conduct their lives according to their traditions. Different communities have different cultures, which are passed down from one generation to the next either orally or in writing. Cultures are the shared perspectives, attitudes, values, morals, aims, and practises of a given society. It is a comprehensive pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that belongs to a specific sect. It is an art form that uses literature, art, music, dance, and other forms of expression to describe, demonstrate, or perform events that represent the customs or way of life of a particular group of people.

Society and culture are the two sides of a same coin. A more comprehensive assertion of the concept of culture is that it is a complex whole that includes

knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, society, and any other habits acquired as a member of that particular society. Culture is conceptualised as a 'man-made part of environment, 'a composite mixture of artefacts (man-made products), agrofacts (products of cultivation), socifacts (social organisation, social institutions), and mentifacts (religious institutions). Folk tradition includes verbal literature, which Bascom often referred to as 'verbal art,' Material Culture, social folk customs (which include all the rituals connected with birth, puberty, marriage, and death ceremonies), and performing folk arts (folk songs, dance and drama also considered as intangible heritage).

It exists in the context of society such as various aspects Oral literature such as various prose narratives that depict myths, legends, stories, faith narratives, proverbs, wisdom-tales, folk songs, beliefs and beliefs, priests, chanting of oaths and mantras is another important aspect Each traditional group has some traditional knowledge holders, specialists in certain areas. They are Custodian of cultural heritage. Such experts and their work are useful for future generations. If we talk about Mizoram today, we will see that the traditional youth dormitory system of the Mizos disappeared due to the invasion of Christians. As a result, the age old knowledge system of the Mizos gradually disappeared. In other places where conversion has also occurred, Janajati people have moved away from their own culture and forgotten their identity. Therefore, people who believe in their own religion are facing difficult challenges including the dual benefits of constitution.

A government order of the State of Meghalaya was justified and validated by the High Court of Guwahati and later by the Supreme Court of India on the grounds that a (tribal) village head must perform both traditional ceremonies and administrative duties and a tribe converted to Christianity can't do both of them together. (Ewanlangki-E-Rymbai vs Jaintia Hills District Council and Others-2006).

A study conducted by the Center for Policy Studies also established that tribals, especially converts to Christianity, have taken away the basic benefits of reservations meant for scheduled tribes despite the fact that they have eschewed their true tribal identity and adopted another faith and religious practice.

The Janajati people now understand how they are being converted in the name of education and health services. The initiation of armed insurrection in the name of conversion is even worse. The wide-ranging spread of Christianity in the North-East in the decades before and after independence was largely motivated and encouraged by the Church. The militant assertion of sub-national identities led to various movements that began in the region with the advent of independence.

Creating artificially constructed racial and ethnic divisions has been a time-tested tool for achieving the evangelical design of the church. In the process, every trace of indigenous culture has been eroded and eventually eliminated first by subtle means and if such means do not work violent methods have been resorted to. Coincidentally, starting in the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, when one hill state after another in the northeast fell under the influence of the Church, ethnic clashes broke out simultaneously for centuries between the various Vanvasi communities living here.

within the Indian Union. A greater number of armed militant groups means a greater flow of weapons and arms into the region. Its proximity to Myanmar is noteworthy in this context. In Manipur, a conflict broke out between the Kukis and Nagas on the one hand and the Kukis and Paites on the other. Mizoram was passing through a period of direct conflict between the newly converted Christian Mizos on the one hand and the Buddhist Chakma and Hindu Reang communities on the other.

Meanwhile, Tripura saw a conflict between the Vanvasi ('Adivasi') population on the one hand and the non-Vanvasi (non-tribal) population on the other, led by the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) which wanted to secede from India and the establishment of an independent Tripuri state. Aravindan Neelakandan in an article titled 'Hindu Genocide' in Tripura clearly writes that the Baptist Church of Tripura is not only the ideological patron of the NLFT, but also supplies arms and ammunition to the NLFT for the soldiers of the Holy Crusade. The religious institutions of Tripura's Jamaatias, who have opposed Christian conversion, have been prime targets of the NLFT rebels. It is also clear who is behind the militant problems in Assam and Nagaland.

The public awareness against the way in which the seeds of Jesus are planted and forced to neglect their

No.	Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	State	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1	Assam	0.41	0.59	0.9	1.42	-	2	2.43	2.61	2.96	3.32	3.7	3.74
2	Tripura	0.08	0.06	0.61	0.68	-	0.82	0.88	1.01	1.21	1.69	3.2	4.35
3	Meghalaya	6.16	9.31	11.54	15.71	-	24.67	35.21	46.98	52.62	64.58	70.25	74.59
4	Mizoram	0.05	2.7	28.17	47.52	-	90.5	86.64	86.09	83.31	85.73	86.97	67.16
5	Manipur	-	-	-	-	-	18.44	19.49	26.03	29.68	34.11	34.04	41.29
6	Nagaland	0.59	2.22	5.5	12.81	-	46.05	52.98	66.76	80.21	87.47	89.97	87.93
7	Arunachal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.79	4.32	10.3	18.72	30.26
8	Sikkim	0.23	0.32	0.45	0.25	-	0.22	1.73	0.79	2.22	3.3	6.68	9.91

**The above table shows the increasing data of converted tribals*

The insurgency soon began to ravage the relatively peaceful states of Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

The 1990s saw a new phenomenon in many parts of North-East India, with several ethnic communities taking up arms and raising demands for autonomy

own religion (a religion that worships the sun, moon, mountains, rivers, etc.) is truly promising. There is now a strong public opinion among the Janajati people in favor of the 'De-listing campaign'. Janajati People are expecting this will surely enable the Janajati people suffering from existential crisis to find the right path. □□

Dynamism of Women of Northeast India

- Bishaldeep Kakati
- Bagmita Borthakur

The decoding of the term ‘society’ often brings into limelight various analytical views and perception, that have over the years been forwarded by social scientists. But the general analysis of this term actually confabulates about a complex process of synthesis and integration of concepts and ideas mainly between the male and the female. It is taken into consideration that man and women have equal say in the formation and development of a society, but the critical analysis of the same portrays a picture where the male section somewhere down the line still dominates in many forms and women are made to suffer the effects of patriarchy, hardship and suppression. In recent times, with proper reservations, legislations and change in mindset a lot has been done to establish the equilibrium and the efforts to establish the equilibrium also gave rise to the concept of Feminism, and the concept appeared in India in and around 1980 after the Towards Equality Report, but the ground root reality still remains contradictory.

However, even after been crippled by various societal approaches and attitudes, women have played central and cardinal roles in not only giving a proper shape to the designing of the society but also in bringing revolutionary changes. In this context, the women of North East India also have a major influence, especially in radically reframing the socio economic outlook of the Northeastern society. Even though the faith, belief and working dynamics of the various Northeastern tribal societies are heterogeneous in nature, but it is the homogenous thought process of these women in various aspects and actions, that actually have strengthened the pillars of the Northeastern society at large.

History has in its tales that the women of Northeast India

have not taken a back step when the question of raising their voices against injustice in the society or against any kind of oppression against them came forth. The Nupi Lan movement in Manipur against various derogatory policies undertaken by the British, the Meira Pabi movement and Irom Sharmila’s protest against AFSPA in Manipur, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkawm Pawl’s movement against Mizo Marriage Bill 2013, The Mizo Inheritance Bill 2013 and the Mizo Divorce Bill 2013, Naga Mothers’ Association’s Shed No More Blood Movement, Asam Mahila Samiti’s movement in Assam against violence against women are just a few of the exemplary incidents of dynamism of women in Northeast India to bring about noteworthy changes. Along with it, the women of this region also lay impetus on upholding their homes by performing the household chores as well as in boosting the prospects of empowerment and economic viability of the region.

The women of Northeast India are often found to be independent as they are capable of finding their own avenues of employment. These women possess elementary skills like weaving, fishing, cultivation, handicraft to name a few. As a result of which, the local markets are often flooded with women selling various items from food to wardrobe. In this regard, the famous Silk Industry of Assam is a live example, as the industry is flourishing mainly because of the



weavers who are mostly the women section. Furthermore, many famous local markets of Assam as well as famous 'Melas' like Jonbeel Mela, Chandubi Mela witness the active participation of women in selling local food, wardrobe or traditional items related to crockery. In Manipur, the century old market known as 'Ima Keithal' is known to be one of the largest women run market, and this market plays a vital role in boosting Manipur's economy to a large extent. In fact, the all women market that has a history of five hundred years has approximately 3615 licensed female vendors who are registered with the Imphal Municipal Corporation. Padma Shri Lakhimi Baruah from Assam, is another exemplary woman from Northeast India, who provided employment to over a hundred women by establishing a bank especially meant for the women, known as 'Konoklata Mahila Urban Co-operative Bank'. Along with it, the women of Northeast India are also associated with many self help groups that has over the years helped sections of marginalized women get financially self-sustainable. Over the years, it has also been observed that women of the region have managed to establish a balance between their professional and personal livelihoods. The 2011 census recorded the female literacy rate of Northeast India as 59.94%, but even after possessing an impressive literacy rate which is significant, the women of the region continue to challenge the traditional gender norms set by the society by never compromising with their traditional and cultural roots. Therefore, this unique trait of the Northeastern women in itself is a symbolic representation of their social and economic empowerment, both regionally and globally.

The Northeastern women have over the years also smashed the taboo relating to participation of women

in majorly men dominated sports like boxing, weightlifting, wrestling etc. The women of this region have brought laurels to the country by bringing international medals in Olympics, Commonwealth etc. Athletes like M.C. Mary Kom, Lovlina Buragohain, Mirabai Chanu, Hima Das are just a few examples of numerous sportswomen from the region to thrive at the international arena. Thus, in the arena of sports as well, the women of Northeast India stand as inspiration to the denizens at large. But even after having multifaceted dynamics, the women of the region continue to face hurdles at a



larger prospect, only because of the societal approach relating to their gender.

The societal norms prevalent in the Northeastern societies, gives an impression that the women of this region do not play a vital role in maintenance of the society. For instance, in the matrilineal societies of Khasi, Garos and Jaintias, it is the male section that decides on important matters. The women of Northeast India have also been subject to witch hunting and are also barred from many ritual ceremonies and sacred duties, thus making them a target of social contempt. In fact, the norms, customs, taboos, traditions, values and moral standards that are still existent in society are derogatory against the women and that actually remains the main reason for their substandard stratum in the society. However, with the modernistic approach, although, the approach towards the women has changed to an extent, but the women of the region are still made to be behind the deep rooted patriarchal society. As such, in the era of equality, liberty and justice, the customary laws need to be questioned in order to realize the immense potential of the women of this region as well as to fulfill the true agenda of holistic empowerment of women. □□

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History scripted with 42 lakh essays on Mahabir Lachit Borphukan, Sets Guinness World Record

As part of various initiatives taken by the government of Assam to honour and pay tributes to Lachit Barphukan, essays on the great heroic military general were called for on the web portal and Lachit Borphukan app launched by the government on



the occasion his 400th birth anniversary. The enthusiastic response received from general public with a whopping 42 lakh essays in different languages including Assamese, English, Hindi, Bengali, Bodo, Karbi, Manipuri, etc., has made into the Guinness Book of world records as the largest online photo album of handwritten notes.

Exhibition on role of women in India's freedom struggle

A two-day photo exhibition on the topic *Role of women in India's freedom struggle* was organised by the Bureau of Communications, Arunachal Pradesh at the office premises of All India Radio, Itanagar on 7th March 2023. The second day of the exhibition was marked by a children's painting competition. Mentionable that all the women who attended the event were felicitated with mementoes as a token of honour. With a view to celebrate contributions, achievements and success of women, the exhibition was organised in line with International Women's Day celebration.

PM Modi Refers Traditional Artisans of India As 'Vishwakarmas'

On Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that improving the workforce's skills, emphasizing traditional handicrafts, and fostering craftsmen at the village level will be crucial to the prosperity of the nation. The 12th and final webinar in the post-budget series was remotely addressed by the PM. He claimed that accomplished artisans are representations of the true ethos of independent India. He mentioned that these small artists are crucial to the creation of regional crafts.

He claimed that PM Vishwakarma Yojana aims to give them more influence. The PM said, "Skilled craftspeople are icons of the true spirit of independent India, and our administration considers such individuals to be the Vishwakarma of modern India. On February 1, 2023, the PM Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman Yojana (PM VIKAS) was introduced as part of the federal budget for 2023–2024. The program attempts to increase the value of traditional products by integrating them into the MSME value chain to improve their quality, scalability, and reach.

Yaoshang festival kicks off in Manipur

The festival of Yaoshang, also known as Holi, has started in Manipur with fervour and joy among the masses. The five-day celebration of the festival is joined by a large number of people, including women and children. Spanning up to 5 days, Yaoshang is one of the largest festivals of the state which represent its rich culture and traditions.

Manipur to host first international friendly football match in March

Manipur will host Hero Tri-Nation, an international friendly football tournament featuring India, Kyrgyz Republic and Myanmar from March 20 to 28. Chief Minister Biren Singh said the All India Football Federation has given an opportunity of hosting the tri-nation tournament to the State acknowledging the contributions of the State's player to the country's football scenario.

Arunachal: People from the state have created their own identity, says President Droupadi Murmu

On her first visit to the land of the rising sun on the occasion of the 37th statehood day, President Smt. Droupadi Murmu addressed colourful celebrations and



attended a civic reception hosted in her honour. While appreciating the culture and beauty of the state, President Murmu extends her greetings of statehood day to the people of the state. She also hailed the women from the state for achieving feats in different sectors.

Nagaland civic body polls with 33% reservation for women on May 16

The State Election Commission, Nagaland on Thursday issued notification for the conduct of elections to three municipal councils and 36 town councils in the state with 33% reservation of seats for women on May 16. Notifying the election programme, state election commissioner T Mhabemo Yanthan said publication of the election programme has been fixed on March 9, period of filing of nominations from April 3 to April 10. The scrutiny of nomination papers will be carried out on April 12 and April 13 and the posting of the list of validly nominated candidates will be on April 14. The application for revision of the order of the authority scrutinising the nominations is from April 17 to April 20, and the decision on the revision application April 21. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is April 24 and the publication of the list of contesting candidates and the list of polling stations is April 24.

Chapar Kut festival joined by G20 delegates

Celebrated in the month of March after Jhum cultivation is over, the festival of Chapchar Kut is one of the prominent agricultural festivals celebrated in Mizoram. This year, people of all age groups joined the festival that was held at Lammual or Assam Rifles ground and took part in the cultural fervour of the event. This time the festival witnessed the participation of G20 delegates. Chief Minister Zoramthanga appreciated the ambassadors of G20 for taking a part in the celebrations of the festival. Performance of Cheraw Kan or bamboo dance made the festival a magnificent sight to witness.



Ekta Diwas celebrated in Sikkim

People of Sikkim have participated with fervour and joy in the Ekta Diwas celebration along with Holi. President of the Joint Action Council, which called for the celebration, has also extended his greetings of Holi and International Women's Day to the gathered masses.

24 March, 2023

NEHU Professor nominated as council member, Sahitya Sabha

Dr Crystal Cornelious D Marak, an Assistant Professor in the Department Garo, North Eastern Hill University, is nominated as a member of the General Council of the Sahitya Akademi to represent the state of Meghalaya. He has published two books and has to his credit contributions to different journals and magazines. He is also recipient of the State Literary Award for his novel Singkam (2009). Besides writing novels, Marak's areas of interest are poetry, drama and folklore. He actively participates in social activities and is a life member of registered organisations like A-chik Literature Society, Garo Graduates' Union, etc.

Manipur: Three Northeast CMs discuss growth of region

In a rare meeting, three Chief Ministers of the northeastern states – Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur, reportedly talked about the peace and development of the region in general and their states in particular. They also talked about Northeast India which has an unwavering faith and trust in the BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "We are on the path to becoming a major contributor towards the growth of the nation as the North-east continues to prosper and grow," they opined. Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh, after meeting with his counterparts of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh said that the developmental talks with them always made enlightened his mind and heart of him.

Manipur Chief Minister tweeted, "A moment with Hon'ble CM Arunachal Pradesh Shri Pema Khandu Ji, and Hon'ble CM Sikkim Shri Prem Singh Tamang Ji before attending the swearing-in ceremony of the new Government of Tripura at Agartala. It's always enlightening to have a conversation with them."

Zachunu Keyho of Nagaland receives Sangeet Natak Akademi

Folk artist Zachunu Keyho of Nagaland has brought laurels to the state as he receives the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar for folk music. Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards, which are the highest national recognition given to artists, has been presented this year by President Murmu.