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We must thwart Chinese designs unitedly

World's greatest land mafia China is at its virtual land grabbing spree once again. In 1962, amidst the high-sounding 'Panchshil' Neeti and 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' slogan of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Chinese aggressors attacked India and rolled down its war machines very close to Tezpur. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, safely located far away in Delhi, forgot about his Neeti as well as his brotherhood with China and thought it prudent to express his anguish by lamenting – 'my heart goes with the people of Assam'. His unfortunate statement, indirectly admitting that India is no match for the military might of China, not only badly dented our pride and resolve for retaliation but also pictured us as a country of coward and spineless people. Since then China continues to consider us as so and underestimates our might and ability to match their army strength, nuclear capability and variety of armaments. After 1962, there was a lull for some time as China started reorienting their priorities and strategies of hijacking land and resources of other comparatively weaker countries. Being a permanent member of the Security Council of UNO, which was offered to them on a platter by our gracious and great apostle of peace PM Nehru, China adopted a policy of diplomatic aggression as a first step towards their ultimate objective. Their plan was to diplomatically unsettle the opponent first, then intimidate them with the show of strength, and lastly go to war to destroy them.

China successfully applied this strategy and gobbled the most peace loving nation Tibet, the universally acknowledged seat of Buddhism. They tried the same tactics for thirteen other countries with limited success. They involved themselves in a pitched battle with Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Bhutan, Singapore, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal, Laos, Myanmar, Tibet and Mongolia. The most that concerns us is our Arunachal Pradesh and Doclam in Sikkim. China's deliberate mischief mongering showed ascendancy after 2006 amidst military buildup on our borders, when the Chinese Ambassador to India claimed that all of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory. The Chinese government referred to the location of the sites in Arunachal Pradesh as "Zangnan" or "south Tibet", which is how it refers to Arunachal Pradesh. China claims as much as 90,000 sq km in the eastern sector of the India-China boundary, covering the entire State of Arunachal. In 2017, China issued a list of six names while in 2021 it "renamed" 15 places in Arunachal Pradesh.

The eastern border, between Burma and Bhutan, comprises the present Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, formerly the North-East Frontier Agency. Both of these regions were overrun by China in the 1962 conflict.

On April 2, 2023 the Chinese government announced that it would "standardise" the names of 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh. The Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing published a list of 11 places along with a map showing the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh as a part of China's Tibet Autonomous Region. The Chinese move comes after it skipped G20 meet in Arunachal Pradesh in March, 2023. Beijing's "claim" on Arunachal Pradesh particularly Tawang is aimed at legitimizing its control over Tibet as the sixth Dalai Lama was born in Tawang and the current Dalai Lama fled to India via Tawang. Although the Government of India has stoutly rejected China's move to "rename" 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh and asserted that the state has been and will always be an integral part of India. The Hon'ble Prime Minister and the bold and brave Home Minister are aggressively developing border roads, bridges and Tunnels to forestall any movement bottleneck. India is setting up villages on the border areas like the Chinese and are procuring the best available armaments for the Army and Air Force. India is also projecting the Indo-China situation for world support and is getting the same in ample quantity.

Politically well informed people consider the renaming exercise as a symbolic stance on the part of Chinese Government which is unlikely to have any tangible impact on our national integrity. However this will definitely have ground impact on the border dispute as the hardening of Chinese stance, in all likelihood, will adversely impact the meaningful progress of the long-running talks, as well as the improvement of current strained relations between the neighbors.

What we should do at this point of time is to extend both moral and physical support to our Government to do their job. At the same time we should identify the China lovers like Rahul Gandhi and the pseudo Communists and exert our total might to keep them at bay. The people of Kivitu, the village adjacent to China border, has recently brought out a procession to tell China that they are Indians and will remain so come what may. We should follow them in act and intent and stand firmly behind our Government. □□

Romen Chakraborty

Chief Editor

GUWAHATI ANTI-CONVERSION RALLY

–A spectacle of mass support

Exhibition of support for a cause is quite common now a days, but it is seldom seen that the entire populace of an area or a region rise and congregate at one place to register their opposition to an unjust and unreasonable constitutional dispensation that allows a section of people to derive double advantage after abandoning their age old religious faith, tradition and culture. The dispensation seems to reward those who convert to a foreign origin religion by legally offering them advantages originally meant exclusively for the tribal communities of India who practice traditional indigenous faith. .

The gathering of thousands of tribal populace, whom the constitution of India granted Schedule Tribe (ST) status, congregated at Khanapara field of Guwahati, the virtual capital of northeast India, on 26 March 2023, can only be seen to be believed. They were protesting in one voice against Scheduled Tribe status enjoyed by the converted tribal individuals, and are afraid that scenario has the potential to influence the socio-cultural and political scenario of the region in the coming days. Organised by Janajati Dharma-Sanskriti Suraksha Manch (JDSSM-Assam), the unique rally witnessed the participation of over 55,000 tribal people from 30 districts of Assam.

Wearing traditional attire, the participants also carried folk musical instruments in the rally titled ‘Chalo Dispur’ and raised voices against the religious conversion among the tribals in the region and insisted on removing those ST individuals, who had undergone a religious conversion, from the list of beneficiaries under various relevant government facilities.

On various occasions, Janajati Suraksha Manch (JSM) leaders claim that the ST status is given to them to protect their traditional, cultural and linguistic identities. But a large number of tribal families have adopted foreign religions like Christianity and Islam in recent decades. Maintaining the movement for over 18 years across the country, the national body remains clear in mind that the families, who convert into Christianity and Islam, should not enjoy the benefits of reservation and other government endorsed facilities meant for the ST people.

They expressed concern that the relentless religious conversion among the ST families has been ruining the tribal people. They highlighted that the religious conversion continues to increase alarmingly in Assam where the tribals emerge as vulnerable to the process. The 2011 census indicated that 87.93% of Nagaland’s

population were practicing Christians. Their population accounts 87.16% (of total populace) in Mizoram, 74.59% in Meghalaya, 41.29% in Manipur, 30.26% in Arunachal Pradesh and 3.74% in Assam.

Advocating to prevent unethical religious conversion, the forum also urges both the Union and concerned State governments for amending Article 342 A of the Constitution (where the matter of benefits to socially and educationally backward classes is highlighted) and equalize with Article 341 for Scheduled Caste (if any SC





person is converted to any other religion, he/she should be automatically delisted from the reservation parameter).

“We are not against any religion or anybody getting converted by their own wishes as it is permitted by the Constitution. We are only concerned about protecting our culture, custom, ritual and languages,” said Binud Kumbang, co-convenor of JDSSM-Assam. Speaking to this writer recently, Kumbang also added that many converted ST families gradually change their religious, cultural and other customary traditional practices, but they continue taking benefits meant for the ST people.

A major objective of the rally was to insist on delisting the converted ST families, who have

completely given up their tribal culture, customs, rituals, traditions and their original way of life in due course of time after conversion, said Manturam Kohram, convenor of JDSSM-Assam, adding that the organisation has been sending separate memorandums to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi via Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria highlighting their core demands.

The splendid rally was also graced by a number of nationally acclaimed personalities like Surya Narayan Suri (Akhil Bharatiya Sangathan Mantri- JSM), Satyendra Singh (JSM central observer), Prakash Singh Uikeji and Ravindra Uike (executive members of JSM) with others. They unanimously called concerned authorities to prevent those converted individuals from contesting in various local, regional and national elections in constituencies reserved for the ST candidates.

At the beginning, tribal rituals were performed by Boro, Karbi, Tiwa, Dimasha, Rabha and Mising people, following which JDSSM-Assam president Bogiram Boro hoisted the official flag. More than ten tribal folk-dance troupes performed in the program. Community speakers like Babita Brahma, Pratap Terang, Tarun Chandra Rabha, Kameswar Pator, etc also delivered speeches on the menace of conversion that is engulfing the tribal communities.

Should not it be the time to ponder about the pertinent issue, which is extremely relevant to north-eastern States, and have a pragmatic discussion and resolution so that the beneficiaries for a particular government provision can be selected logically and legally across the vast country in its Amrit Kal. □□ *Heritage Reports*



The Bodo as an Ethnic group at stake

► Chitra Kachari

The Bodos are the single largest community among the notified Scheduled Tribes in Assam. Out of 3.12 crore population of Assam, the Bodos constitute 1.45 (4.53%) million population according to 2011 census. They are the largest ethno linguistic group in Assam. They are a part of the greater Bodo-Kachari family of ethno linguistic groups speeded across Northeast India mainly concerned in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. They are believed to be the earliest settlers of Assam. The Bodos speak Boro language of the Tibeto-Burman Family which is recognized as one of the twenty-two scheduled languages in the Indian Constitution. The Bodo along with other cognate groups of Bodo-Kachari people are prehistoric settlers who are believed to have migrated at least 3000 years ago. The Bodos are agrarian peoples who did farming for their livelihood. They had a strong tradition of fishing, rearing poultry, goats, cultivation rice, jute, betel nut, cows for farming and most importantly pigs. They are recognized as the Plain tribe in the Six Scheduled of the Indian Constitution. The Bodos follows a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal family pattern. They are an indigenous tribal group who has a distinct culture, belief, custom, traditions and religious practices of their own. They are very rich in their respective folk-culture that is believed and faith, knowledge and skill, music and musical instrument, language and literature. They are practicing their age old and aboriginal socio-cultural and educational traditions since time immemorial till date (Narzary, 2014). But with the passage of time and the coming of the new Modern era and other socio-economic, cultural and religious changes, their age old purity of traditional cultural practices has being damaged. And, most importantly, there is almost no truly written document of those rich culture and traditions as they carried their practices orally. The Bodo tribe is known in different names indifferent places-in the eastern Assam they are known as the Kacharis, in the Eastern part as Mech or Kacharais and in the Western part in N.E Bengal the same people are known as Mech. But they call themselves as ‘the Bodo’

Bathou: the indigenous religion of the Bodos

The indigenous religion of the Bodos is the Bathou. It is the ancient religion of the Bodos which they had been practicing since time immemorial (Basumatary, 2014). The word Bathou- ba means five and thou means deep, and it means five deep meaning. The elements in which the five deep meaning lies are Ha-earth, Dwi-Water, Baar-Wind, or-Fire arwokhrang-Space. The Sijou plant (Euphorbia Splenden) with five ridges is installed as the Altar of their Supreme God called “Bathou” in the north-eastern corner of their courtyard of every household. And the Sijou is regarded as the symbol of Bathou. The Bodos also believe that it is the first plant the almighty has created after the creation of earth and has in itself the five elements for which it can survive even in the desert. The number five is a significant number for the Bodo peoples. They believe that the human body is consisted of these five elements hence the Bodos have- five basic elements, five basic principles, five rule, five restrictions and five festivals. This is also evident from the Mwnthwr (hymn) of Bathou Aroj (prayer)

“Thaigirkhongakhongbaa

Sijousirisiribaa

Sigunggudunggudungbaa

Bathoubandwbandwbaa

Boroniasarabwmwnba

The literary meaning of the poem is that wood apple has five ridges, Sijou have five edges, flute has five holes, Bathou has five principles and therefore Boros also have five principles.

The religious belief is also a part of the Bodo culture. Till the first part of the 20th century they worshiped Bathou Bwrai and other Mwdais (spirits) in their religious festivities known as Kherai and Garza. The dates and occasions were decided according to the needs and situation thus arises like at the outbreak of diseases in epidemic forms the offerings to ‘Garja’ (the author of evil) is offered outside homesteads but within the village boundary, sometimes under the

shades of a big tree or sometimes near the river bank. The offering to Kherai (the author of god) is offered at the courtyard of the household or at village. They use flesh of animals as their article of food, they prepare Zou(rice-beer) and offer to god and drink and eat as well. "Their religious belief consists in the worship of two divine being-one the author of good and the author of evil. As usual among nearly all hill tribes, their religious rites consist chiefly of the propitiation of the evil spirit by means of sacrifices of fowls" (Hunter, 1982:118).

But now the Bathou practices have undergone a little change. Fleshes and Zou are not offered to the Gods. They are practicing offering flowers while praying. There are five major festivals of the Bodos which are basically related to the season. They are:

1. **BwisaguFwrwbw:** celebrated during 1st of Bwisagu/BohagMaash till 8th of Bwisagu as the coming of the New Year and peoples of all age groups participate in merry making, singing and dancing traditional folk songs with all the traditional instruments.
2. **AmmthiFwrwbw:** During 1stAashar to 7thAasar Maash Bwisumuthi (mother Earth) is believed to be in yearly menstruation course therefore any works related to mother Earth is prohibited during those days. The works can be done only after 8th day when the Gahai Douri (head priest) sprinkles Dwi Gwthar (holy water) at each household.
3. **Mainao Fwrwbw:** on the last day of the Ahin mash a lamp is lit at the paddy on the ridges of Thaigir (wood apple fruit) believing to destroy all the poisonous things creating hindrance in growing a healthy paddy.
4. **Awngkham Gwrlwi:** Celebrated on 9thAaghon Maash offering the new rice produced to Aai Mainao(goddess of wealth) and only from that day onwards the new rice are consumed at the homes.
5. **Maagw Fwrwbw:** Celebrated on the last day of Posh Maash to 1st Magh During these days they prepare all kinds of traditional Pitha(cake) and offer to BwraiBathou.

At each Fwrwbw a BathounAroj is held at the GaminThansali(village mandir). Tuesday is regarded as the purest day for the Bathou religious people since

time immemorial. On that day they do not work on the paddy, works related to earth is restricted, Ggdanai(making clothes) is restricted, it is just like a day off from the activities of earning and rearing. On that day they also practice eating veg food items leaving their most loved non-veg foods. Every Tuesday the community worship at the GamiThansali. Regarding the Tribal religion Elwin (1957) wrote "tribal religion is associated with a social ethic that unites the tribe in its discipline and undoubtedly makes for a certain nobility of conduct. The great tribal virtues are discipline, devotion to work, generosity and hospitality, truth, kindness." They classify themselves as the Hindus.

Bodos and the process of Proselytization

As believed to be the earliest settlers, the Bodos in ancient periods built powerful kingdoms in different names in different places in the present North East India including the present North Bengal and Bangladesh (Singh, 2017). They are still the rural community with their modest living on their agricultural produce. Although with some changes, their medieval practices are still carried to this day. They have neither written character nor history to reckon.

They lived amidst nature, in forest far away from modern amenities. Their living was from hand to mouth. They kept themselves aloof from education. They attributed every illness, disease and untimely death to numerous spirit and it was up to their medicine men to keep off the spirits and cure the patients with chants and mantras. The Bodos used to rear pigs and zou for their own consumption which creates a fowl smell in their entire household. They also indulge in unhealthy practice of offering chicklets to their Garja and Kherai offerings which the other Hindus detest. "The Kacharis have no scruples in the matter of diet; they eat almost any animal and like the pork most. The only flesh of which they will not partake is that of the cow, a prejudice imbibed from contact with Hindus" (Hunter, 1982:118) and that made them feel discriminated from the rest of the other communities.

The social, religious and economic conditions of the Bodos were very deplorable. There was no religious unity among the Bodos. The Bodos who gained a little awareness tried to escape embracing other faiths & transforming into others caste classification. Some of them have become Saranias after they were

proselytized as the Vaishnavs under Hindu fold. In the early part of the 20th century Kalicharan Brahma launched a parallel religious movement among the Bodos taking both the Hindu beliefs as well as the Bodo traditional religion and this Reform Movement came to be known as the “Brahma Dhwrwm.” This is the part of the larger part of the Sanskritization process. The Christian missionaries came to Assam in the first half of the 19th century with an intent of

intended to enter in all the parts of North east and profess religion. But they were convinced seeing the wretched condition of living and the social, cultural, economic, religious status of the tribals; they found them to be an easy prey to preach. So, many missions entered in North East with the aim of conversion.

The table below shows the different Christian Missions that has entered In North East India with the intent of conversion

Sl.No	Year	Name of Mission	Area
1	Sept 26, 1626	Portuguese Mission	Pandu & Hazo
2	1828	Catholic Mission	Udalguri
3	1829	Baptist of Serampore	Guwahati
4	1837	Baptist Mission	Guwahati
5	1840	Anglican Church	Tezpur
6	1841	Presbyterian	Cherrapunji
7	1843	American Baptist Mission	Undivied Darrang parts of Udalguri
8	1850	Presbyterian	Garo Hills
9	1870	Roman Catholic	Guwahati
10	1878	Welsh Mission	Mawphalang
11	1893	Catholic Mission	The Karbi & the Mishing
12	1894	Arthington Aborigines Mission	Imphal
13	1894	Arthington Aborigines Mission	Lushai Hills/Mizo Hills
14	1897	Welsh Presbyterian	Aizwal

preaching Christianity among the Bodos. They have undertaken some significant works that elevate the common peoples attraction towards Christianity. During this period the Christian missionaries considered the Bodos as an animistic and took up the initiate convert them to Christianity. They started their first activities among the Bodos of the Darrang district. As many Bodos had already embraced Christianity and therefore a greater part of their population remained illiterate and ignorant with their ancestral religion of ‘Bathou’.

It is to be mentioned that as a result of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 Assam was brought under the British rule. Even though there are records of the Christian Missionaries entering Assam before the treaty but with this Treaty of their own rule it created a golden opportunity for the Christian Missionaries to expedite conversion in the North East part of India. A unit of Serampore Mission was recorded to be the first Christian Mission to have entered Assam in 1829 after the Treaty of Yandaboo and established a center at Guwahati. At first the Christian missions

It was in 1843 onwards the American Baptist Mission tried to propagate Gospel message among the people of different tribes including the Bodos in the district of undivided Darrang. Finding no opposition or any hostility from the simple and docile uneducated Bodo community they became much determined for success. In about 1850 the church mission society was given thorough permission to educate and spread Christianity in Bodo villages of Darrang. In 1862 the SPG (Society for the Propagation of Gospel) was fully dedicated for evangelical works among the Bodos of Darrang. Although the tempo of missionary activities amongst the Bodos grew but it is only after when Rev. Sydney Endle from England arrived at Tezpur in 1864, he was entrusted with the charge of ‘Kachari Mission’. He travelled in carts and sometimes on foot visiting Bodo villages mostly in parts of Udalguri with total dedication and soon learned proficiently the Bodo language. He came to know about the social, economic and religion condition of the then Bodo people and focused in their prime needs like Health

and Education. And the first church was established at village Bengbari in 1865 by Endle to the West of Udalguri, a school was also started there but was transferred to Borigaon village in 1893. After the death of Rev. Sydney Endle, the SPG Mission suffered a great set back but in 1914 Rev. George Richard Kampher came to Doamokha Udalguri supported by twenty one persons on 27 January 1914 and baptized a large number of Bodos.

The table below shows some of the few first converts among the Tribes in the Noth East India

Sl No	Year	Tribe	Name of the Person	Place
1	1846, 8 March	Khasi	U AmarU Rujan	Khasi Hills
2	1841	Assamese	Nidhiram	Guwahati
3	1847	Naga	Hubi	Naga Hills
4	1863	Garos	Momin&Ramkhe	Garos Hills
	1911	Bodo	ThekloBasumatary	West Assam
5	1914, 27 th January	Bodo	27 persons	DoamokhaUdalguri

The Christians used to tell that the traditional Bathou religion is not a religion of God, it is a satanic religion calling the spirits and the poor Bodos being of simple mindset people believed it to be true as there were also no written religious books nor any other documents to prove their religion to be true. With no education and no reached healthcare facilities to them as they live in the remotest of the places the missionaries established numerous schools and primary health care facilities to educate them and make them aware of health & hygiene. The ones enjoying those facilities attracted the other Bodo non-Christians and in this way the conversion process went on a full swing among the Bodos. With an aim to spread Christianity the Christian Mission has also worked on literatures of Assam to educate them on Christianity. Some of them are:

Sl No	Year	Notable books	Author
1	1819	New Testament	AtmaramSarma
2	1839	Assamese Grammar	William Robenson
3	1849	Arunodoi Newspaper	Nathan Brown
4	1911	The Kacharis	Rev. Sydney Endle
5	1959	Bodo Grammar	Rev. Sydney Endle

In Assam 3.74% of the population has been converted to Christianity. Out of the total Christian population the Bodos constitute 10.05% (census 2011). The Bodos constitute 4.53% of the total population of Assam. The conversion amongst the

Bodos has already reached at a point where the cultural and the traditional practices of those converted Bodo Christians can be differentiated simply on seeing.

The Christian Bodos have abandoned all their traditional faith and belief. Narzari, 2014 says “After the conversion to the new faith they have done away with many traditional practices like Kherai Puja, celebration of seasonal festivals, post death ceremony, wearing vermilion, offering Prasad to deities etc. rather they have started to observe

Christian traditional rituals, custom and culture”. The religion and culture are inseparable of any community; they are the two sides of a same coin. Clifford Geertz famously described

religion as a “cultural system composed of myths, rituals, symbols and beliefs created by humans as a way of giving our individual and collective lives a sense of meaning”. As there is a famous saying that “loss of religion is loss of culture and loss of culture is loss of identity”. Thus by discouraging their age old traditional practices the converted Bodo Christians can be said to have lost their culture and hence their identity has to be questioned. And at the same time it also has to be mentioned that the converted Bodos were some of the first Bodo peoples to receive education and practice hygiene. They were the first to receive healthcare facilities. And so almost all of the converted Christians are more educated than that of the traditional Bodos. And hence most of the benefits meant for the Scheduled Tribes under the

constitution of India are enjoyed by them and the traditional Bodos are deprived of their own rights.

So in order to protect the ethnicity of the Bodos the age old traditional beliefs, rituals customs should be practiced and be alive to be called as an ethnic group. Any ethnic group or individual abandoning of their age old tradition and cultural belief cannot be quoted under a same ethnic identity. Narzari, 2014 also wrote that “Most of the converted Bodo christians day to day and usual life are governed by the Christian rituals”. This clearly shows the deep rooted Christian way of

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the Christian Missionaries in making Bodo more a Christian community by being the first to work on their literature, providing better health care facilities, providing education etc. but it has always to be remembered that no matter what their intension was to spread Christianity amongst the Bodo people and make Christianity the prime religion of the Bodos. So there is need to delist those converts from the original Bodo people to protect their originality. As the Bathou believers classify themselves as the Hindus, so the Non Hindus or the converted Bodos should be delisted from the Scheduled Tribes so that the benefits meant for the Scheduled Tribes be enjoyed by the original Bodos. The process of conversion among the Bodo is also occurring in a different way. A girl of an already converted Christian family makes a Hindu boy prey and make him fall in love. During marriage the boy is either converted to the Christian religion or after marrying the Christian girl, that girl and her family member's makes that boy bound to accept Christianity leaving him no reasons to deny and making him helpless and at a later stage baptized as a Christian fellow. The boy leaves his family's culture and no more Bodo festivities are celebrated in their family. And as a result she converts all her in-laws living with them to Christianity. And vice versa with a Hindu girl when married to a Christian boy. They accepts Christianity not willingly but family's peace becomes more important to them than religion at that point. So there is so much need to stop the act of proselytism amongst the Bodos and to delist those converted Tribals the amendment of the article 342 of the Indian Constitution stating that "2A not withstanding anything contained in pragraph 2, no person who has given up tribal faith or faiths and has embraced either Christianity or Islam shall be deemed to be a member of any ST" (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders amendment Bill, 1967) is a much need of an hour to protect and safeguard their ethnic identity so as to remain pure or it doesn't seem far the Bodos losing their identity as a Scheduled Tribe.

prime identity anymore and thus hampering the originality of the Bodo tradition. Mochahary 2019

thinking and traditions amongst the Bodo Christians and the discontinuation of their traditional beliefs, customs and rituals and embracing non ethnic cultures and traditions. They have already developed a distinctive tradition of their own different from the traditional Bodo peoples by which they give a clear identification of being the Bodo Christians. Their way of greeting peoples, their way of expressing any things, their way of talking, they are so highly influenced by their new religion that they do not think culture and traditions to be their prime identity anymore and thus hampering the originality of the Bodo tradition. Mochahary 2019 also wrote that “The Bodos had no written tradition till first part of 20th century, which once spoken throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The Bodo language might have come down orally in the form of spoken language. Historically, Christian Missionaries initiated writing in Bodo has been recognized as the ‘Missionary period’ in the literature”. These shows the honour of the Bodos towards the Christian Preachers and the success of the Christian Missionaries in making Bodo more a Christian community by being the first to work on their literature, providing better health care facilities, providing education etc. but it has always to be remembered that no matter what their intension was to spread Christianity amongst the Bodo people and make Christianity the prime religion of the Bodos. So there is need to delist those converts from the original Bodo people to protect their originality. As the Bathou believers classify themselves as the Hindus, so the Non Hindus or the converted Bodos should be delisted from the Scheduled Tribes so that the benefits meant for the Scheduled Tribes be enjoyed by the original Bodos. The process of conversion among the Bodo is also occurring in a different way. A girl of an already converted Christian family makes a Hindu boy prey and make him fall in love. During marriage the boy is either converted to the Christian religion or after marrying the Christian girl, that girl and her family member’s makes that boy bound to accept Christianity leaving him no reasons to deny and making him helpless and at a later stage baptized as a Christian fellow. The boy leaves his family’s culture and no more Bodo festivities are celebrated in their family. And as a result she converts all her in-laws living with them to Christianity. And vice versa with a Hindu girl when married to a Christian boy. They accept Christianity not willingly but family’s peace becomes more important to them than religion at that point. So there

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A Glimpse of Ashok Ashtami Fair at Sualkuchi

(Contd. from Page 23)

*“Brahmaputro Mahabaho Shantanukula Nandan
Amagho Garva Sambhuto Papong Lohitto Mer Hara”*
And after offering this prayer, they take the bath by taking a dip in the river water and according to traditional beliefs, eat the “Ashok” flower and chant the verse as stated below-
*“Tabam Shok Haravisto Madhumah Sambhudbhaha
Pibami Shok Shantapo Mamashokong Sada Kuru”*

It is believed that “*Asthi Bisarjan*” in the holy water of river Brahmaputra on this day help a soul attain “*moksha*” and make its way to heaven. Therefore, the death ritual ceremony “*Asthi Bisarjan*” has also been traditionally taking place on this day.

The highlight of the fair, however, remains the local and indigenous products which are sold here. Various handicraft items made of bamboo, wood, cane and other natural items like “dried berries, garlic, species, etc.” are sold by sellers of Sualkuchi as well as of places like Hajo, Ramdia, Palashbari, Sarthebari and Guwahati. These items highly attract the buyers and therefore, a huge crowd is found at the fair from both in and outside Sualkuchi that really gives a feeling of festivity on this day. Earlier, this fair was held for just one day but later on, due to its popularity and attraction of buyers by the sellers, the number of days has been increased to two. This fair is a unity ground for diverse communities, where everyone comes together to celebrate the festivity of “Ashok Ashtami”. Given all due attention with necessary measures, this fair in Sualkuchi has the potential to be turned into a heritage festival as it continues to exist from several generations now with all local beliefs and indigenous elements which are still intact in the contemporary age make it a sight of attraction. □□

Misings of Assam in the verse of conversion Next!

► Binud Kumbang

Mising people of Assam are a branch of 'Tani' clan, Tani people are mainly distributed in Tibetan autonomous region (TAR) of South West of China, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam of India. Misings of Assam are recorded as 'Miri' tribe in the constitution of India though most Mising people hesitate to be called themselves as Miris. Many feel the name 'Miri' is not close to their soul, does not represent their true characteristics and the forced identity given by the non-Mising is stonewashing the souls of Misings since centuries. Recently many Mising organizations are struggling to correct the name 'Miri' to 'Mising' in the constitution. There is no written history of Misings but their migration history was passed down orally in the form of folk songs like 'A:bang' and 'folklores' by the ancestors from generation to generation.

Mising people were hills dwellers before reaching plains of Assam. They probably reached plains of Assam centuries before the Ahom king 'Sukapha' reached to the region in 1228 AD. Territorial conflicts between Miri's and Ahom's near Sadia region during 1600-1700AD and the raids executed by the Mising in Ahom areas mentioned in Ahom history book indicates the same. The Mising tribe is the 2nd largest tribe of Assam and are the river dwellers. They are a peace-loving community, whose civilization has taken shape thousands of years ago alongside the rivers like- T'sangpo - Siyang – Brahmaputra - Subansiri and Jiya Bhuruli. Mising community is known for their vibrant culture and customs. They like to live at the river banks forming small cluster villages. The social systems and customary laws are effectively followed by each member of the village. They do not have class system, very hardworking and helpful in nature. They have very strict nuptial rules like - marriage amongst cousins or same surname are prohibited. Earlier, polygamy or more than one wife was allowed but now a day's such cases are very few.

As per census (2011) the total population of Mising is **6,80,424** which mainly inhabit in the

following districts of Assam like – Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Tinisukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, Golaghat, Majuli and Sonitpur etc. The literacy rate of Mising tribe is 78% among males and 59% among women averaging to be 68.8%.

Mising people are very much conscious and possessive about their originality, culture, customs, rituals and language. But unorganized and having been a small community, they are going through a tough time to get recognition of their language, customs and other constitutional rights through the government.



Misings are also known as singing and dancing community. They literally express their migration history, happiness, love, sorrows by their folk songs & dances. Despite having no written scripts till the early 70's of 19th century, the Mising people have preserved and inherited their original culture, customs, rituals and language in oral forms, for example, the **A:bangs** – songs ('Mibu'-priest) on genesis, spirituality, philosophy of life; **Oi Ni:tom** - Songs to express Beauty of Love and Mother Nature; **Kaban** - Songs to express sorrows of human miseries; **Folk Dances-Se'lloiya, Le're'li and Gumrag** etc. expresses migration, way of life, culture and love. The Misings worship ancestors and the Mother Nature. The traditional belief system is called '**Do:nyi Po:loism**', which worships the Sun, the Moon god, along with revering the different expressions of Nature, with a belief that all the visible or invisible elements on the Earth or the Universe do have spirit

and must be respected accordingly. This is the basis of almost every indigenous faith which are the oldest religion of human race. Worship of the Nature or **5 elements- ‘Pancha Tattwa’**. Misings calls them- **Angun, Igang, Esar, Asi, Kedeng**.

Unfortunately, now the modernization and hegemonic forces are influencing Mising people to adopt new culture and customs which are posing a great threat to its original identity and existence. Many Misings did adopt some aspects of Vaishnavism called **‘Kewalia’** panth after the Bhakti movement that was started by **Sankardeva**, (1449-1568 A.D.), the saint-poet of Assam. Mising are very possessive to their own culture and customs; they symbolically adopted Kewalia panth but still observe their own rituals too in a dual context, and are till today practicing -Dodgang, Urom, Do:bur, Taleng-Wuyu etc. simultaneously which are not in Vaishnavism. Mising people continued with their original culture, customs and birth, marriage and death rituals along with added rituals of Kewalia panth. Therefore Misings are affected by the high-cost to follow all the rituals, which is weakening Mising economy too. However, Kewalia panth adopted by Misings is one the of the main reasons despite Christianity stepping in **18th century** to Assam, failed to convert them to their fold significantly in 19th century.

by the missionaries and many other complicated factors the threshold of resistance have been broken, the conversion to Christianity rate has increased drastically in last decades which is approximately rising up to **12%** in Mising community, mainly hitting the villages of Majuli, Jorhat, Tinisukia, Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur. The new census may reveal shocking figures to us as like neighboring states are almost completely got converted and have lost their original culture, customs, rituals in time space.

State Name	Total Population	2011	% of Total	Significance
Nagaland	1,978,502	1,739,651	87.93%	Majority
Mizoram	1,097,206	956,331	87.16%	Majority
Meghalaya	2,966,889	2,213,027	74.59%	Majority
Manipur	2,855,794	1,179,043	41.29%	Significant
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	418,732	30.26%	Majority
Assam	31,205,576	1,165,868	3.74%	Alarming

Why it is alarming for us being Mising? Our identity being Mising tribe is for our own unique culture, customs, rituals and language specially the traditions we follow during birth, marriage and death. Once Misings are converted to **Christianity** or **Islam** they are bound to follow Christian or Muslim rituals and traditions which will eventually transformed the converted one to follow different culture, customs, ritual and traditions. Those converted Misings with different culture customs and traditions can't be member of the original Mising community.

Tribes	Christians	Percent
Garos	1,54,353	95.63%
Boro	1,36,869	10.05%
Karbi	75,883	17.63%
Kuki	31,573	94.53%
Naga	19,924	66.93%
Hmar	15,557	98.81%
Khasi	13,956	87.58%
Rabha	9,845	3.32%
Mising	5,984	0.88%
Lalung	2,808	15.38%
Sonowal	1,416	0.56%
Dimasa	1,144	1.11%

Misings of Majuli in the Hit list of conversion by Missionaries:

Christianity is a religion with a belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The Christian missionaries made several attempts to establish its impact upon the Misings ever since the British rule began in this part of the country. Exploiting the poor economy and illiteracy the missionaries left no stone unturned to convert them in to Christianity. It was therefore mainly the poor who embrace Christianity. There are 243 villages in Majuli in total, the Mising dominated village is numbered at 108.

Christian missionary work began in the Mising inhabited areas for the first time in 1836 at Sadiya subsequently at North Lakhimpur in 1894 and at Pthalipam in 1895; their efforts proved futile. Their efforts and the resultant failure are

But sadly, century long continuous efforts

recorded as: “At the beginning of 1897, Paul toured again from village to village along the Subansiri river. John, the local preacher, having discouraged due to deceit and cunning ways of the Miris (Misings), returned to his native town.



arrival of Larson Sangma as the first missionary in Majuli around 1981. Larson Sangma along with some Mising converts like Bilash Pegu, Buddhe Pegu, Dhan Doley, Parma Pegu and others preached Christianity from door to door especially in the Borpomua village of Majuli.

Nevertheless, Paul managed to reach many villages and found interest hearers. In November again, Paul went out and camped in the midst of several Miri villages. Several young men were convinced and were willing to give up Hinduism, but the separation from houses and friends that stood in the way of their acceptance of Christianity...After that Paul went back to Sivasagar and met Mrs. Gureney, Petrick, Swanson and Firth, who seeing his weakness advised him to stay in the Dibrugarh station”. It is only in the first half of the 20th century the conversion activities of the Christian missionaries bore fruit among the Misings.

As per available records it is found that a section of Mising people comprising of 38 numbers belonging to Lakhimpur district showed willingness to embrace Christianity as their religion for the first time in their history during the period **1921-1930 A.D.** However, the Missionaries were not totally successful in converting them and it is only in the post- independence period they could gain some popularity as they imparted training to some Mising youths in the theological colleges. In the year 1980 A.D. a section of Missionaries started their activities in the Mising inhabited villages of Majuli, Sadiya, Telam, Silapathar, Akajan and Tarajan by means of **opening up English medium school.** Christianity in Majuli is divided in to Catholic, Baptist and Believer’s Church. The epicenter of Christianity in the Island ‘is the Jengramukh area with its cradle at the Kumarbari Lakhimi Gaon’ and the Borpomua Lakhimi Gaon. The first conversion towards Christianity in the Island took place in the **year 1971.** Kamleswari Doley, Bindra Doley and Late Purdoi Doley were the first to get baptized. They were baptized in Baptist Mission, Tezpur. All of them were nurse by profession and they were said to have been funded by the missionaries. Since than it gathered momentum in the late 1980s. This happened with the

The attempts of the missionaries took a new turn with the establishment of a Missionary School. The missionaries established the St. Paul’s School in 1987 in Jengramukh, Majuli. The Misings of the locality saw the first school of this kind. This was led by Fr. Jose Varghese. The establishment of this school made the people acquainted with English education as well as new religion i.e. Christianity. It is to be noted here that it enabled the missionaries to influence the people through their ‘charitable’ works. Based on the nature of conversion it can well be assumed that the target of the missionaries seems to be to get hold of the economically weaker sections of the Island. The failure of the missionaries to influence the people in the 1970s seemed to have made them to review their policy in the Island. Now, their main target was on the tribal families. This was probably because of the casual approach of the tribal people towards their religious beliefs and practices. However, it cannot be ignored that the Mising tribes were also more or less under Vaishnavism influence but with mixed devotion towards it. Some of the factors that are instrumental in converting the people towards Christianity may be surmised as follows:

The Misings are cultivators by occupation and therefore their entire economy is dependent on agricultural products. The Island was once a prosperous place with rich production of crops like rice, potato, mustard, black pulses, sugarcane, jute etc. But the constant flood has caused tremendous erosion and destruction thereby severely affecting the people and its livelihood. This situation seems to have been used to their advantage by the missionaries as the poor people are offered free **supply of food stuffs, clothing, education and facilities relating to their health and hygiene, distribution of seeds, hand carts, cow, pig** etc. According to records of the Circle Office of Majuli, Government of Assam and as per an estimate by a leading Assamese daily since the year 1972 A.D. the Island has lost 2,72,183

bighas of land. It is also revealed that a total number of 10,314 families have been turned homeless and landless in subsequent years due to perennial flood and erosion.

Another factor responsible for conversion is the indifferent attitude of the Hindus towards the Misings. Although the Misings came into contact with the Vaishnavism and practices long before, the Satras have failed miserably to bring the community within their fold. The lower social status granted to the Misings by the Satriya society have been greatly responsible. The religious heads of these Satras have paid little attention to the religious aspects of the tribe. Deviating from the teachings of **Sankardeva** and **Madhavdeva**, a large section of the Vaishnava's showed their reluctance to give the due honor to their inmates. There are many instances to this like, not taking food offered by the Misings, showering pure water in the house after a Mising people have entered as they consider it to be as impure, throwing away that portion of the dried rice in which a Mising shadow have fallen etc.

Another aspect of conversion is the fact that the Misings are very possessive about their own culture, customs, rituals and language but casual in approach in terms of practicing it. Even in traditional practices they seem to be more concerned about the feasts involved than the main ritual. As a result, the youth fail to learn the real devotion involved in it. Most of the youths are getting converted without their parents' knowledge. This has made the task of the missionaries easier since it gives them a chance to impress the people through their '**charitable**' works. The uneducated Mising youths are often sent to places like Kerala, Hyderabad etc. to pursue certain vocational courses. The Mising youths are greatly excited by the prospects of visiting new places and accordingly obey to the instruction of the missionaries. Many a time missionaries brainwash Misings that they are following the path of Devils, the darkness of wisdom etc. and the Christianity is the only way of salvation. They create doubts amongst the Mising people and make them believe that Misings do not have their own religion at all.

The Missionaries initiated a number of schemes to



help the people, especially the poor, in **times of disaster** and **in times of need**. The service of the western missionaries through education and care of the sick and sufferers, sympathetic and enduring at the time of distress has a role to play in this connection. The means they apply are social service, education, medical aid,

financial assistance etc. Likewise, they build houses for the economically weaker sections, distributed relief materials like rice, dal, boats, mosquito nets, ploughing materials, seeds, etc. in times of disaster. The Believers' Church and the Baptist Missionary seem to be playing an aggressive role in converting the Misings towards Christianity. Most of the Mising converts who have by now turned preachers have little or no education but were attracted to this field by easy availability of money. Some noted preachers of the Island are mainly from Jengraimukh. Most of them are under-matriculate and only very few of them have received graduation.

The conversion towards Christianity is increasing at a rapid pace. In the Ujani Majuli block currently **23 churches** are in operation, the first being established in **1989**. The Believers' Church which started in the Island since 1997 is spreading at a more rapid pace in comparison to the other two forms. **Dairing Doley**, District Supervisor of the Believers' Church of Majuli reveals that there are 20 Churches and more than 4500 converts alone of this faith. Apart from Jengraimukh which is the main base, their Churches are located in Mohrichuk, Nangonchuk, Cherpaikhowa, Gejera etc. They have also more than 400 Mising pastors and every year 100 students are trained as Pastors for a period of two years.

Finally, the alarm bell is ringing in front of the Mising community for preserving their original culture, custom, ritual and language. It is said popularly that change of religion means change of culture, loss of culture means lose of identity, which the Misings must not forget in order to protect and promote their age-old faith at the face of this competitive world. Whereas education and economic development is equally important but not the cost of stonewashed salvation!! ☐☐

Religious Conversion and Tiwa society: an observation

► Ankur Jyoti Dewri

Introduction: The modern term culture is derived from the writings of Cicero, an ancient Roman orator, wherein he describes it as an agricultural metaphor for the development of a philosophical soul, understood as the highest possible ideal of human development. Culture is inextricably linked to people's traditional knowledge, their experiences with the natural environment. Through culture, human beings become fully human, in true sense. Religion is one amongst the basic components of culture, especially those of Indigenous cultures, which shape multiple aspects of a society. Today, civilisations across the globe are testament to the multidimensional impacts of religion, in diverse spheres of the human world ranging from institutions of polity to economics since its inception, over a few unknown millennia. Every human being is identified with some set of religious-cultural attributes that are synonymous with the society she is born into, and these can be referred to as the prerequisites for her identity amidst other societies. It would not be an exaggeration to say that without all those cultural and religious elements that a person is recognised with, she would rather be devoid of her identity.

Tiwa, also referred to as the Lalungs in the Assamese *Buranjis* and in colonial literatures, is a Janajati community belonging to the Bodo Kachari section of ethnic groups of North East Bharat. Most of them are inhabitants of the Districts of Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup (M), West Karbi Anglong of Assam and Ri-Bhoi of Meghalaya. The Tiwas, marked by their vibrant festivals with joyous dances and lively music and also the peculiar system of divisions into clans and sub-clans amounting as much as to 61, were recognised as Scheduled Tribes through the First Constitution Order (1950) in the State of Assam excluding the Autonomous Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. Later in 2002 the tiwas living in those autonomous districts were also given Scheduled Tribe Status. Another notable characteristic of Tiwa society is that women are worshiped as deities and are allowed to perform religious rites on many occasions.

Christianity in Tiwa society:

American Baptist missionaries had made attempts to spread their conversion activities from 1859 onwards in Karbi Anglong district with poor results up until the 1920s. In 1914, a group of six Karbis led by Mr. Lantuk Hanse, from Marjong, close to the present parish of Umswai, trekked across to Umtyrkhang in Khasi Hills beyond the river Umiam, to be baptized by Christopher Becker. Thus the first Catholic Christians of Umswai and of Karbi Anglong was born. The year 1916 had seen the establishment of Saint Mary's Church in Marjong Tiwa village of present-day West Karbi Anglong District of Assam. Saint Joseph Church was established in 1932 which converted peoples of Pandurimakha, Sikdamakha and Amsobra villages of the hill district. The Catholic Celestial Missionary also converted a large number of Tiwa people to Christianity. The Presbyterian Missionary also followed suit and converted Tiwa villagers of Romphom, Maulen, Amsetri, Pantalu, Roman Mayong and Amkhashi into Christianity. In Meghalaya, a large number of the Tiwa population is reported to have accepted Christianity abandoning the religious and cultural practices passed on to them by their ancestors.

By the mid nineteenth century, Umswai valley's population was concentrated into two large villages, namely: Bormarjong and Amsai. Now the valley hosts 15 distinct settlements, of which seven are Tiwa Speaking villages with Christianity in different denominations.

Languages and religious denominations in villages of Umswai valley

Sl.	VILLAGE	LANGUAGE	RELIGION
1	Amchabra	Tiwa	Catholic
2	Arlang Luri	-do-	-do-
3	Chikda Makha	-do-	-do-
4	Punduri Makha	-do-	-do-
5	Thaulau	-do-	-do-
6	Mawlen	-do-	Presbyterian
7	Umsetri	-do-	-do-

Setting up of the Catholic mission in the valley in 1975 saw a rising number of push and pull factors

for demographic movements. The Missionaries started to offer free schooling and health care to villagers which were interestingly not reserved for Christian villages, thereby convincing many non-Christians that converting and living in Christian villages could open the floodgates to more benefits. As Christian villages had been set up, those who refused to convert to Christianity were expelled from such villages. The principle of total separation, through which only one religious affiliation is tolerated in a locality, was in fact a prime contributor to the soaring number of religious conversions.

Michael Balawan published the first book in Tiwa language, that too a Christian hymnal and prayer book titled “Mindei Khrum” in 1962. He also translated the New Testament into Tiwa with the title *Khorong Kodal* (1972) with an aim to sustain and spread Christian faith.

Implications:

These slow but steady rates of conversion into Christianity brought about inevitable implications in Tiwa societies across the state. Gradual loss of Chamadi (Village youth dormitory) in Tiwa villages dominated by Christians is one such instance. Vibrant festive occasions rich with traditions and heritage are also being discarded by the Christians. Of all these, the most unfortunate is the internal division stemming up among the Tiwas due to conversions resulting in the replacement of the ethnic tradition and culture with a “modern”, western one. After accepting Christianity, there were huge loss of faith in folk culture and traditions too.

The Tiwa community, like any other indigenous community in the country, has their own sets of belief systems, customary laws, justice delivery system and various other political institutions threaded intrinsically with their ancient traditional beliefs and customs. The traditional judiciary system of the Tiwas owes its origins to their kings/chiefs, with customary law prevalent in the socio-religious sphere. There are three tier systems of justice, i.e., Khel (lowest level), Village level and Baro Khelia Bichar system, a powerful system of justice delivery. If all three levels fail to settle dispute, the matter is brought before the king whose decision is considered final. There is also a provision of Jury system, wherein Tiwa judiciary system consists of three members to decide a dispute. Some of the important features of the customary law are, viz., no corporal punishment and no death penalty and different types

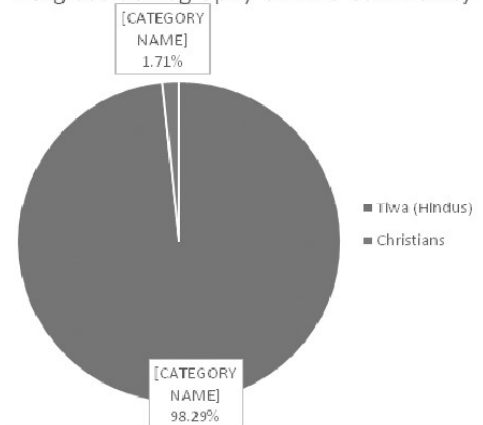
of penalty imposed in accordance with the gravity of the offence.

The onslaught of aggressive missionary activities prominently conversion by means of threat, allurements and social exclusion sees a rapid annihilation of all those sets of values and beliefs sacred to the Tiwas, thereby causing immeasurable damage not only to the social fabric of the nation, but also the holistic eco-social world view of such indigenous communities, a phenomenon observed across globe.

Way out

One of the most important issues arising out of the crisis of conversion is about reservation and other benefits provided to Scheduled Tribes by the constitution of India. Needless to say that In India, Christians as well as Muslims enjoy reservation and various other benefits given under minority quota of the Govt. But there are no provisions made in the Constitution of India to identify converted Christians who also hold Scheduled tribe certificates. This leads to the exploitation of opportunities meant for helpless, downtrodden *Janajati* peoples by Converted STs because now they technically belong not only to the ST category, but also that of the Minority. With such loopholes in the system damaging the sacred tenets of the nation which hold us all together, it is important for us *Bharatiyas* to try to find a way out of these challenging situations.

Religious demography of Tiwa community



Delisting

Delisting, which refers to abrogation of Scheduled Tribe status of converted Christians who previously were STs, will be a historic and holistic approach towards resolving the crisis afflicting Janajati

societies such as Tiwa, for as much as five long decades. Mananiya Late Kartik Oraon, who was a Member of the Lok Sabha, stood firm and raised his voice against this injustice. It is because of his undaunted efforts, a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was formed in 1967 which recommended the following amendments:

“2A. Notwithstanding anything contained in Paragraph 2, no person who has given up tribal faith or and has embraced either Christianity or Islam shall be deemed to be a member of any Scheduled Tribes (Vide Para 2A, page 29, line 38 of the Schedule II of the report).

Significantly, similar amendment in the constitution had already been provided for scheduled castes through Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Bill, 1956. The amendments are:

“3. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Paragraph 2, no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu or Sikh Religion shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Castes”

Besides, Late Kartik Oraon also put his best efforts in trying to bring this issue to the attention of the then regime including the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, to whom he wrote a few letters regarding this and submitted memoranda too. Unfortunately, his selfless efforts and hard work stood overlooked for reasons best known to the then Govt. Therefore, the *Janajati Suraksha Manch* took on this challenging task that remained unaccomplished, on its broad shoulders, and has been organising various events and initiatives across the country raising awareness amongst masses.

It is important to mention here that there are few essential characteristics referred to in the Constitution for specification of the Scheduled Tribes:

- 1) Primitive Traits
- 2) Geographical isolation
- 3) Distinct culture
- 4) Shy of contact with community at large
- 5) economically underdeveloped, etc.

Few Important Supreme Court judgements:

After Change of faith, whether a person ceases to be a member of Scheduled tribe or not, it has to be

established that a person who has embraced another religion is still suffering from social disability and is also following the customs, tradition and rituals of the community which he earlier belonged to. (**State of Kerala vs Chandramohan, AIR 2004 SC 1672**)

A Converted Christian (tribal) cannot contest in election for the post of a Dolloi (Traditional village headman) as he cannot perform religious and administrative work at a time which the Dolloi has to do as per customs. (**Ewanlankei Rymbei vs Jayantia Hills District Council and Others, 2006 Scale 3**).

In view of all these findings, it appears therefore, that the onus is on the lawmakers of the nation to undo the historical mistake, by taking effective measures for implementation of *Delisting* at the earliest through means best suited to the law and justice mechanisms of the nation, thereby allowing all the deserving members of STs to be benefitted from privileges such as reservations, providing them with the opportunity to live their lives with dignity as envisaged in the Constitution of India, i.e., Bharat. And this, as we believe, would lead to accomplishment of the mantra *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* propounded by our Hon'ble Prime Minister ☐☐

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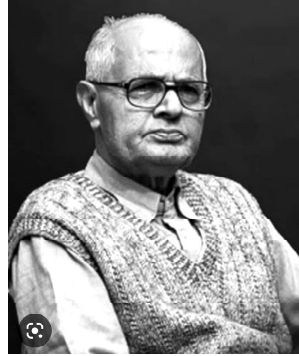
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POETRY AND POET

Departure of an Extraordinary Poet

► **Dr. Ranga Ranjan Das**

On 29th January 2023, I have been invited to conduct a poets' meet at Bhagawati Prasad Barua Bhawan of Asom Sahitya Sabha at Guwahati. It happens due to penning down inner expressions in the form of some lines, appears as 'poetry' in printed form and participation in poets' meet organized by various social-cultural and literary forums and organizations. The interest on this creative genre of literature is not inherent. Perhaps, ten years ago after the school life. In high school, my first and last poem was published in our school magazine. Thereafter, during the academic life, I never dared to do so and it was of immense difficult to express the happenings around surroundings within a few lines. In later phases, while growth and development as a researcher cum writer, attempt has been made to explore inner skills and extended literary exercise creating and articulating different poems from time to time. It regenerates and redevelops the habits of reading poems of different poets of English and Hindi literature in general and Assamese literature in particular. In the process, efforts have also been made to read and interpret the theoretical understandings of poem. It is a creative art that develop by artistic expressions of feelings. Various exponents of literature and poets try to explain and conceptualize 'poem' or 'poetry' and 'poet' in their own words. William Wordsworth says, 'poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility'. Randall Jarrel observes 'a good poet is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times, a dozen or two dozen times and he is great'. According to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds'. Elaborating poetry, T.S Elliot reveals that: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things'. In the words of Carl Sandburg, 'poetry is the journal of a sea animal



living on land, wanting to fly in the air'. For Matthew Arnold, 'poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance'. Dylan Thomas expresses the practical utility of poetry when it notes: "Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry prickle, be silent, makes your toe nails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or nothing, makes you know that you are alone in the unknown world,

that your bliss and suffering is forever shared and forever all your own". Alison Nastasi (2013) cites (see flavorwire.com) nicely about the poet and poem in a note. It states, "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and cites Alexander that reveals: 'the poem is an invention that exists in spite of history - in a time of violence, the task of poetry is in some way to reconcile us to our world and to allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist.Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world-not to accept it at face value or to assent to things that are wrong, but to reconcile one in a larger sense, to return us in love, the province of the imagination, to the scope of our mortal lives". Scholars (Mark Flanagan, thoughtco.com) observe that: 'Perhaps the characteristic most central to the definition of poetry is its unwillingness to be defined, labeled or nailed down. Poetry is the chiseled marble of language. It is a paint-spattered canvas but the poet uses words instead of paint, and the canvas is you'. Such thematic conceptualizations are transformed in to reality irrespective of culture and language. The treasure of Assamese culture and literature is enriched by a number of poets in different generations. Some of them have left for heavenly abode.

One of the most celebrated poets and Jnanpith awardees, Nilmani Phookan quit physical existence on 19th January 2023 at the age of 89. His poems written in Assamese language categorically depicts all the elements of a remarkable poetry. He was a serious art critic and was also referred to as 'Kavya Rishi'. He was born at Dergaon in Golaghat district of Assam in 1933. He served as Lecturer at Arya

Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati. Prior to that, he worked as teacher at several schools. He completed his education from Cotton College and Gauhati University. His contribution to Assamese literature is immense. His first anthology 'Surya Henu Nami Ahe Ei Nodiyedi' was published in 1963. His other anthologies include: *Nirjanataar Shabda*, *Aru ki Naishabda*, *Phuli Thaka Suryamukhi phultor Phale*, *Kaint aru Golap aru kaint*, *Golapi Jamur Lagno*, *Kavita*, *Nrityarata Prithivi*, *Sagar Talir Sankha*, *Alop Agote Ami ki kotha Patiasilo and Sampurna Kavita*. Apart from anthologies, he has five translation works: *Japani Kavita*, *Garchia Lorar Kabita*, *Aranyar Gaan*, *Sina Kabita* and *Anushristi*; one edited book; *Kuri Shatikar Asomiya Kavita* (published by Publication Board Assam in 1977); seven collection of articles: *Loka Kalpa Dristi*, *Rup Barna Bak*, *Silpakala Darshan*, *Paati Sonarur Phul* (a memoir), *Bichitra Lekha*, *Silpakalar Upalabdhi Aru Ananda* (a complete write up on art), and *Paahoribo Nuwarilu Ji* (a memoir). His works were translated in different languages including English and Bengali. In earlier days, he served as the editor of *Monideep*, a monthly magazine. Due to his larger contribution, he was feted with various awards from time to time: *Raghunath Choudhary award* by *Asam Sahitya Sabha*, *Assam Prakashan Parishad Award* for his anthology 'Kaint Aru Golap Aru Kaint', *Sahitya Akademi Award*, *Padma Shri Award*, *Assam Valley Literary Award*, *Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award*, *Sahitya Akademi Fellowship*, *Sahityacharya Honour* by *Asam Sahitya Sabha*, *Lifetime Achievement Award* in literature from *Publication Board, Assam*, and finally the biggest literary award of the country, i.e., the 56th *Jnanpith Award* in 2021 for his poetry. Receiving this award *Nilmani Phookan* provided a speech that echoed his entire feelings of inner mind transforming into poetic rendition, his journey and life. It is wonderfully edited and translated by *Abhishek Kumar Sharma* (See 'On Poems, Life and the World, *The Assam Tribune*, January 22, 2023, p.6). I have gone through several times and try to understand the inner psyche of a great poet:-

"O dear pleasant men born from the beaming eyes of the sun, at the outset, I offer my humble obeisance to your august assembly. The *Jnanpith Award* for the year 2021 had been bestowed upon this cipher. This is an award of an immeasurable pedigree. It's a paramount accolade for my poetry. As a person penning down poems in Assamese, I am solaced for

my selection by the concerned committee for this esteemed honour".

It further notes: "There's violence everywhere - all around there is unabashed torture of mankind. This little news of mine doesn't match with the news of hostilities and atrocities all around us. The insanity of religious blindness, the connivances amidst politicians, the sporadic rise of global climate nausea, I wonder whether this pleasing news from my end would be able to breathe in this global predicament".

It also adds: "With a fistful of hope, I left for Guwahati from my unheard settlement in *Sokial* long ago. A lush green tranquility rhyming inside me and a pinch of golden hue brushing my face, I left a pleasant yet remote settlement. Hadn't the mammoth temple of *Negheriting*, the majestic inscriptions of *Deopahar* and a pious stream called *Gelabi* ruled my inner kingdom, I can assure that I could've never dared to leave such as soothing place....Echoing from a poem by *Jaroslav Seifart*, I would like to mention that I have only added a handful of poems to the sea of countless and nameless poems, it bears no talks of wisdom than the sound of cicadas. Even after spending decades in urban hues, the aroma from my village still oozes out from myriads of bittersweet tales and guises in the stillness of night, shaking my heart and my mind immensely. As if I am still standing beside the cool stream flowing through my village, staring agape at the flock of herons vanishing in the horizon. Beneath these tall wild trees, I lift my hands. From where to where I reached through these massive forests, lakes, seas, deserts, meadows and hills. As if I lost myself completely and found myself anew. I, appeared as an ingredient of everyone's unfettered will, storming tales of victories and defeats, mirth and miseries. Till when the world is infested with mankind, with these alive and inanimate entities, with fire and rain, the sky would be studded with the astral assembly of all our smiles and tears".

About poetry, it expresses:

"Poetry is not only an art of words, but also of lives. The words of poetry stem from the understanding of society and its history. Yet, in the end, they renounce the precinct of languages and verbs and get mixed in our flesh and veins. Have I written any such poem which is beyond the periphery of verbs, which is pure like nectar, a resonance of soul, a reflection of life! Where the melodies of a grand life reverberate! After all these quests I reach a maudlin equilibrium of emotions, pen down any poem and yet there's a disgruntle. As if it's a sheer failure. Again, there's a

long wait for the rain to pour and cleanse my mind. All these different forms of arts seek to make the best out of mankind, including poetry. To empower our creativity, our feelings and our blessings, to turn a person into a visionary, into a creator. All the poets in this world probably wish furtively that the entire mankind should be poets, should be rebels, should be lovers. To venerate the undivided will of life is the quest of a poet. And poems are a tool to manifest love, power, unison, creativity and beauty in the entire mankind. That is why, it is indestructible and eternal. All the poems are a human anecdote of woe and happiness that terminates in the absurdity of conscience. Poems are the reverberations of mankind. If you stretch out your ears, you will hear such melodies humming sweetness and beauty inside your soul.”

Phookan was aware of all the incidents happening in and around. So he wrote: on the basis on Nellie Massacre (in Assam), ‘Mur Xapunar Surjyar Manuh’:
Kunu nai eyat sishu nari briddhya / Pratyakei mrita/
Akou khihat apunghati hol / Hingkha pratihingka
ghrinar juit/ Jale akal rati/ Siyal kukur artanaa jurat/
Dexor nari vuruhar / Hai toi matir manuh / Mur tejor
xunar manuh toi /Saku meli sa /Mrityur dapunat sa
tuk / Satpuruxiya gulamik piranak /Puxanak sa /
Manuhar mukha pindhi bate ggate/Kala saya apssaya
/ Bhayangkar khei pixasar apun / Santan bhaxan / Kar
tej dhali bare bare/Tiyale mati / Kar murar laukholat
phulai / Afuranta basantar phul/Muk Jen Etia kuneu /
Eku nukhudhe /Mritoi mritoi Alingan / Jibitar babe
mritar usupani / Mur muror opart / Pitri pitamohar
agneya hat /O mur xapunar surjyar manuh / Saku meli
sa /Saku mudi sa/ Mrityur dapunat sa tuk (narrates
entire situation observed after bloodshed). While
analyzing the nature (when it is dark, sun comes
down...), Phookan echoed: Rati hale/Surya henu name
ahe ei nadiyedi /Durare para dekhiba kidare /Nadir
panit eti-eti koi xare /Xurarangi tarabur /Thik jen paka
angurar dare / Bhoi khale saba, misa hoi jaba /Etiau
nixa ase /Surjai kotha kaba /Surjai eta amak uttar
diba.....(through this river). His thought and
expression through his poems connect common people
very nicely. A person of extraordinary skills of
expression, Nilmani Phookan left behind, a treasure
of creativity in the field of Assamese literature. An
editorial published in the Assam Tribune on Jan 21,
2023 refers to his demise as the ‘end of an era’ and
notes:

“The curtains have come down on an era with the passing of Nilmani Phookan, arguably the most

influential modern Assamese poet. An exceptional poet and no less an exception as a person, Phookan’s creative genius and sensitivity combined to weave a poignant trail in words that has influenced and will continue to influence generations of poets. If there was one person whose gentle, caring and receptive unique saint-like person for whom poetry was mediation. Drawing from the world around him, he let his master craftsmanship in words to tell poignant tales-be it the haunting beauty of a bountiful natural world including the idyllic charm of his native village, or the hopes and aspirations and sorrows and pathos of his fellow beings. An undercurrent of broad humanism is palpable across his creations and even in his most despondent words can one discover a tinge of hope that springs eternal in the human heart. The master wordsmith that he was, Phookan was very selective and careful about the words to be used in his verse and each word carried a weight that best portrayed his feelings. Indeed, his poems in a way reverberate with the sensations emanating from the innermost recesses of the human heart.....As someone who took great pride in his Assamese identity, Phookan’s poetry is also replete with the vibes of the nature-scape and folklore of his homeland. He believed mother tongue to be sacrosanct and the most fundamental ingredient of one’s identity. A resonance of Assamese nationalism is another marked trait in his poetry. Many of his poetic works apparently look simple but are invariably cloaked in many layers of deep meaning. His liberal ethos, humanism, insight, and his own varied experiences all have enriched his creative works, lending those a rare, mystic appeal. For him, the sources of his poetry were all-pervasive and omnipresent in the world around him and he drew ingredients liberally from this vast foundation. For him, poetry was much more than any spontaneous outburst of emotion but was rather a much-refined product shaped by his inquisitiveness, sensitivity and his connect with man and nature. He also used images to a great extent in his poetry which also stand out for their spontaneity. As a doyen of modern poetry in Assam who strode the cultural arena like a colossus, Phookan can be credited with-aside from leaving behind an unparalleled creative legacy-shaping a conducive climate for pursuance of poetry for young aspiring poets”.

Hope, the present generation carry forward the legacy of Nilmani Phookan in creative literature and go on increasing treasure of Assamese literature in one way or other. □□

A Glimpse of Ashok Ashtami Fair at Sualkuchi

► **Monalisha Medhi**

Ashok Ashtami is an auspicious Hindu festival celebrated in India with great fervour and enthusiasm. As per Hindu Calendar, it is observed on the *Ashtami* (eighth day) during the *Shukla Paksha* (the waxing phase of the moon) in the month of “*Chaitra*” which falls during the propitious “*Chaitra Navaratri*” festival. According to the Gregorian calendar, it corresponds from March to April.

There are various legends behind why this day is observed. One such is mentioned in the book “*Saraswati Kanthabharan*”. In ancient times with the arrival of spring, a festival named “*Ashok Dohoda*” was celebrated in the kings’ palaces during the thirteenth lunation of “*Chait*” (the last month of the Assamese calendar) month. The then societies believed that the young girls with the touch of their feet could make a flower named “*Ashok*” (Scientific name: *Saraca asoca*) bloom. Therefore, on a specific day in kings’ palaces, they would touch the flower to make it bloom. Thus, it was considered that the celebration of the Ashok Ashtami festival began from such an ancient tradition.

Another legend states King Ashok started a big fair-like festival during the *Shukla Paksha* of *Chait* month after elaborate fasting. This festival came to be known after the name of the king- Ashok Ashtami.

The third legend states that, according to the suggestion of his father, great Sage Parasurama to get rid of the sin of beheading his mother, took a holy bath at “*Brahmakunda*” and by cutting one of its banks made the flow of sacred water, named “*Brahmaputra*”. He made a journey along with this Brahmaputra. And meanwhile, when they reached Nilachal of Pragjyotishpur, Parasurama went to visit Kamakhya and asked the Brahmaputra to stop the flow. However, when he returned after his visit, he saw that failing to abide by what he said, Brahmaputra continued to flow. He was furious to see this and cursed the river to lose its sanctity. The Brahmaputra pleaded with him to make it get rid of the curse. Finally, the great sage gave it a boon that during the “*Shukla Ashtami Tithi*” of the fourth lunar asterism of springtime, the water of Brahmaputra will be

able to make sorrow-ridden people devoid of all grief and pain. Very early in the morning, a dip in the water of Brahmaputra on this day will make people attain divinity. Thus, “*Ashok Ashtami*” festival is being celebrated according to traditions followed from such legends. From generation after generation now, people have been taking bath in Brahmaputra on this day to get rid of the sins and attain divinity. There is a common folk belief of eating the flower “*Ashok*” after the bath. The term “*Ashoka*” implies “*devoid of sorrow*” and the flower “*Ashok*” blooms during this time of the year. Hence, people believe that eating this flower after bath will take away their sorrows for the whole year then.

Sualkuchi is a village, commonly known as “*Manchester of East*”, situated in the northern bank of river Brahmaputra. Ashok Ashtami religious festival is being celebrated here since time immemorial. According to the beliefs as stated in legends, people have been participating in attaining divinity by taking dip in the scared water of river Brahmaputra on “*Ashtami*” during the *Shukla Paksha* in the month of “*Chaitra*”. This has been traditionally going on now. However, there is another significant aspect of Sualkuchi Ashok Ashtami festival. Divine lords of Sualkuchi and adjacent areas are brought to Brahmaputra for a holy bath on this day. These are- *Hayagrib Madhab*, *Kedar* and *Kameshwar* from Hajo, *Bhringeshwar* from Bongshor, *Dhareshwar* from Bamundi-Silguri, and *Siddheswar* and *Ganesh Bigras* from Sualkuchi. It is carried out in a procession accompanied by folk musical instruments like- “*Dhol, Khol, Bor Kah, Sankha, Ghanta*, etc.” After the bath all the seven lords are placed together for devotees to take blessings. This place in Sualkuchi is now named as “*Ashok Ashtami Kshetra*”. A fair as a part of the celebration of the religious festival is held and have been

traditionally going on in the Ashoka Ashtami Kshetra on this day from many years now. This fair is popularly known as “*Ashok Ashtami Mahamela*”.

The first thing that people do is that they get into the river very early in the morning and offer prayer to the river by chanting the following verse-

(Contd. to Page 12)



Dr Ranga Ranjan Das, IN-CHARGE OF THE LAW RESEARCH INSTITUTE, EASTERN REGION, GAUHATI HIGH COURT BRINGS OUT SIX BOOKS ON CUSTOMARY LAWS OF SIX DIFFERENT TRIBES OF N.E. REGION.

EXPLORING SOCIO-LEGAL HERITAGE OF NORTH EASTERN REGION

The Law Research Institute (LRI) of Gauhati High Court has been undertaking empirical studies among diverse ethnic groups-exploring their customary laws and practices for the last four decades or so. The north eastern region is the home of diverse ethnic groups with their vibrant culture and customary laws. It is indeed a fact that customary laws still play an important role in justice delivery system. The Constitution of India also provide adequate space for validating 'custom' and practices of indigenous groups by keeping provisions of Sixth Schedule and articles related to special provisions for the states of Nagaland and Mizoram. It is stated that most of the customary laws and practices are passed across the generations in oral forms in the context of particular societies. These societies possess own self-regulating mechanisms in the form of traditional institutions that acts as a custodian of customary laws. Customary laws are mostly embedded in culture, need to be document for preservation as well as utilitarian purpose, as modern laws requires written records. The Law Research Institute has been undertaking documentation work since its' inception. It has accomplished documentation of more than fifty tribal groups that come up as valuable books. The LRI was established in 5th of April, 1973 while Gauhati High Court was celebrating its' Silver Jubilee of its' existence. At present the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court is celebrating its' Platinum Jubilee. At the auspicious occasion, the Law Research Institute, under the supervision of Dr Ranga Ranjan Das, a well known researcher, writer of this region and in charge of LRI, brought out six valuable books on customary laws of six different tribes of this region under the aegis of Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India and it is released by Sri Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Cabinet

Minister, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, and Ministry of Ayush on 6th of April in the function celebrating Platinum Jubilee of Gauhati High Court. These books are yield of field based work on four ethnic groups of Assam such as Boros, Rabhas, Tiwas and Zeme Nagas, Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh and Halam of Tripura, in the context of ethnography and culture. The name of the six books are: *The Boros of Assam: Ethnography, Culture and Customary Laws*, *The Rabhas of North East India- Ethnography, Culture and Customary Laws*, *The Tiwas of Assam: Ethnography, Culture and Customary Laws*, *The Zeme Nagas of Assam- Ethnography, Culture and Customary Laws*, *The Halams of Tripura- Ethnography, Culture and Customary Laws and Discourse of a tribe of Arunachal Pradesh- The Nyishis- Ethnography, Culture and Customary Laws*. The books are result of field work carried out by Bulumoni Rabha, Nabam Kuma, Chiraiibe Kuame, Laldomthanga Kaipeng and Jitul Kalita. Technical support is provided by Parasmani Bordoloi and Trilochan Kumar Gautam from Law Research Institute. The entire project of documentation of customary laws is monitored by Shri B.Chandra Mohiyar, Director (Access to Justice and Legal Aid to Poor), with the project monitoring, evaluation and co-ordinating team comprising Sri Ashutosh Srivastava, Project Manager, Dr Seram Rojesh, Program Associate, Ms Mahima Sharma and others. The Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, under the leadership of Sri Kirin Rijiju, Hon'ble Union Minister, Ministry of Law and Justice. Attending the Platinum Jubilee celebration of Gauhati High Court, Mr Rijiju also highlights the significance of customary laws and practices prevailing among the different tribal groups of this region. He also appreciated the efforts of Law Research Institute and Department of Justice. □□

PM Modi pays tribute to Bodofa Upendranath Brahma on his birth anniversary

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi paid tributes to Bodofa Upendranath Brahma on his birth anniversary, i.e. 31st March. Shri Modi said that the life of Bodofa Upendranath Brahma was devoted to the welfare of people. The Government of India and Assam Government are making numerous efforts to realise his dreams and work for the empowerment of the wonderful Bodo people, the Prime Minister further added. Upendranath Brahma was a social activist and former president of All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) who worked diligently for education and wellbeing of the Bodo community. Notably the Government of Assam has dedicated 31st March as Students' day which to be celebrated at all educational institutions across the state. □

World's tallest pier railway bridge in Manipur nears completion

The world's tallest pier railway bridge, with a height of 141 metres which is part of Jiribam-Imphal railway project achieved has 93.30 per cent completion. With the completion of the 111-km-long Jiribam-Imphal railway project by December this year, Manipur capital would come

onto the Indian Railways network, making Imphal the fourth capital city in the north-eastern region to have a rail link. The Jiribam-Imphal Railway Project comprises multiple tunnels and bridges in tough terrains stretched at more than 111 Km long. The total length of tunnels in this project is 61.32 km out of which 59.11 km of tunnelling works have already been completed. The project will have a total of 11 major bridges and 137 minor bridges. Out of which five major bridges and 101 minor bridges have been completed so far. □

Lovlina Borgohain Wins World Champion Title

Lovlina Borgohain won her maiden World Championships gold medal on Sunday, March 26 in New Delhi. The Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist defeated Australia's Caitlin Parker via a split decision in a closely-fought 75kg final bout at KD Jadhav Indoor Stadium. Lovlina Borgohain, who also had won the World Championships Bronze in 2018 and 2019, put behind the disappointment of losing in the quarter-final stage of the Commonwealth Games last year to reign supreme in New Delhi. Lovlina confirmed India's 4th medal at the IBA Women's World Boxing Championships in New Delhi and all of them turned out to be Gold. Earlier on Sunday, Nikhat Zareen won her second World Championships Gold medal, dominating the 50kg final. Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and Saweety Boora had won the Gold medals in their respective weight categories on Saturday in New Delhi. □

New species of Catfish discovered in Arunachal

A new catfish species has been discovered by scientists of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in Arunachal Pradesh, a statement said. The new species has been named 'Exostoma Dhritiae' after Dhriti Banerjee, the first woman director of the ZSI, as a mark of honour for her contributions to research on the fauna of the country, it stated. The new species was found in Siking stream, a tributary of the Siang River in the Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. □

Assigning of 'invented' names to Arunachal locations by China not first

China producing a list of 11 "standardised" names for locations within Arunachal Pradesh this week wasn't exactly a novel move. This is, after all, the third time since 2017 that China has sought to "rename" places in the Indian state, a tactic that serves to assert its territorial claims. "We have seen such reports. This is not first time China has made such an attempt. We reject this outright. Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India. Attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality" spokesperson for MEA Arindam Bagchi said in response to the move.

Previously in 2018 and 2021, China had released two such lists. Additionally, it also issued a list of six names in 2017, while in 2021 it renamed 15 places in Arunachal Pradesh. □

B20 delegates look forward to explore Nagaland

Nagaland is all set to host the fourth and final event of B20 being organised in north-east region, which is the official G20 dialogue forum for the global business community. The B20 conference scheduled to be held in Kohima from April 4-6 will witness 64 overseas delegates from 29 countries, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Monday told reporters at Chumoukedima.

The main Business 20 conference on Wednesday will be graced by Union Minister of State for External Affairs Dr Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, he said.

Rio said his government is making elaborate arrangements, not only to showcase investment and partnership opportunities in the state but also to provide a unique experience for visiting delegates with exposure to Nagaland's culture, local cuisine, art, festivities, and scenic beauty.

Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) along with the government departments are preparing a list of investible projects on varied themes and sectors to be pitched for attracting potential investors in the state, he said. □

Vibrant Village Programme a milestone in the development of border villages

With an aim to strengthen the security grid on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) while focusing on the development of our border villages, the recently announced Vibrant village Programme is expected to be a milestone in the development of border villages and the progress of the Himalayan states. The Centrally sponsored scheme announced in the Union Budget 2022-23 (to 2025-26) is aimed at development of villages on the northern borders of the country, improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages. Covering the border areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh, the scheme will be a major step forward towards identification and

development of the economic drivers based on local, natural, human and other resources of the border villages. Based on 'hub and spoke model' through promotion of social entrepreneurship, empowerment of youth and women through skill development and entrepreneurship, the scheme will boost development of growth centres. Amidst a slew of incidents including the naming of various places of Arunachal Pradesh by Chinese authorities and the rise of infrastructure projects on the other side of the border, the Vibrant Village programme with seven new ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police) battalions and allocated of funds worth Rs. 4,800 crore, is very important as far as the security and safety of the country is concerned. □

Mizoram's Ngopa village bags National Panchayat Award

Ngopa, a remote village in northeast Mizoram's Saitual district, has bagged the National Panchayat Award, the first village in the state to have received the prestigious award, an official said on Saturday. The National Panchayat Awards 2023 for different categories were announced by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on Friday. Ngopa stood second as the best performing gram panchayat in overall performance in 9 LSGD themes, including poverty free and enhanced livelihoods panchayat, clean and green panchayat and panchayat with good governance after Karnataka's Mullusoge under the Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikar Puraskar (NDSPPSVP) category, he said. The first prize under NDSPPSVP category carries a cash prize of Rs 1.5 crore, Rs 1.25 crore for the second prize and Rs 1 crore for the third prize, he said. □

Guwahati Tea Auction Centre to celebrate 200 years of Assam tea industry

With the completion of 200 years of Assam tea industry, the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre is set to celebrate the glorious history with a slew a year-long programmes starting in May. As per officials of the Tea Auction Centre, the Assam government has extended its cooperation to the centre in its celebrations marked by various events including seminars, road shows, and tasting sessions of Assam tea. Accordingly, officials from tea auction centres around the world have been invited to participate in year-long the festivities. Further, the Guwahati Tea Auction Buyers' Association plans to organise a seminar in October-November 2023 to discuss the impact of climate change on the tea industry. Buyers, sellers, tea tasters, and stakeholders from across the world will be invited to the events. □