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## Himalayan Tribes

# HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

**Editor : K. WARIKOO**





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# CONTRIBUTORS

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## HIMALAYAN TRIBES

# The Balti Scheduled Tribe in Ladakh: A Look Back After Partition

*Mohd Sharif* and *Rajeev Kumar Singh*

ABSTRACT

*The practice of classifying specific demographics and territories in India with different designations to facilitate effective administration and development can be traced back to the colonial era. In the post-independence period, these groups and territories were officially designated as "Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas". The region of Ladakh, situated in the northern part of India, is not only characterised by its cold and arid climate but is also noteworthy for being the dwelling place of a number of India's prominent tribal communities, such as the Balti, Brokpa/Drokpa/Dard/Shin, Boto, Changpa, Garra, Mon, and Beda, among others. The present study endeavours to comprehend the Balti community of India residing in this Himalayan region of Ladakh. This study is a post-partition analysis of the cultural identity of Baltis in the region, utilising their traditions and examining current challenges in the Union Territory of Ladakh. The present study also undertakes an analysis of the categorization of the Balti tribe as a Scheduled Tribe in accordance with the Indian Constitution and its implications.*

**Keywords**: *Balti; Ladakh; Tribe; Scheduled Tribe*

## INTRODUCTION

The etymology of the term 'tribe' can be traced back to its Latin root word, 'tribus' which initially denoted one of the three regional factions that united to establish the city of Rome. Numerous anthropologists have made efforts to establish a comprehensive definition of the term, however, a universally accepted definition has yet to be attained. The variation in the attributes that identify a particular community as a tribe are not uniform across all regions, resulting in diverse definitions by several scholars to elucidate the

concept. The meaning of the term 'tribe' has undergone various transformations over time and across different regions since the era of the Roman Empire. In contemporary usage, the Oxford Dictionary defines a tribe as "A group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor." Throughout its evolution, the term has been subject to interpretation and definition by scholars based on their individual understanding and beliefs, encompassing both ontological and epistemological perspectives. As per the definition provided by W.J. Perry, tribes are characterized as "A group speaking a common dialect and inhabiting a common territory."[1] According to D.N. Majumder, tribes can be defined as "A collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, occupying the same territory, speaking the same language, observing certain taboos regarding marriage, profession, or occupation, and having developed a well-established system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation."[2] The ancient Indian literary works and practices indicate the existence of certain groups of individuals who were excluded from the dominant Hindu social hierarchy. The term 'Avarnas' refers to individuals or groups who are not included in any of the four categories of the 'Varna' classification in Hindu society. During the colonial era, census-taking was utilised to gather various types of information, including the interests of colonial authorities with respect to the subjugated territories and their inhabitants. It is pertinent to note that certain actions taken during the colonial era subsequently served as the foundation for numerous significant constitutional provisions pertaining to tribal administration and development: (a). The Scheduled District Act of 1874 brought about an amendment to the Government of India Act of 1858, wherein specific regions were identified and designated as 'Scheduled Districts'; (b). The Government of India Act of 1935 confers authority upon governors to promulgate regulations pertaining to any region within a province that is presently designated as an 'excluded area'. The precise delineation and explication of the term 'tribe' in India remained ambiguous until the 1940s. The definition of a tribe was first introduced in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* in 1891, which stated that it is "A collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to

occupy a common territory". Various terminologies were employed to classify distinct cohorts of individuals from the colonial era to the initial stages of the post-independence epoch. Prior to 1919, individuals in India belonging to this group were referred to as the 'depressed class'. In the 1931 census, these groups were categorized as 'primitive tribes' followed by 'tribes' in the 1941 census, and ultimately designated as 'Scheduled Tribes' in the 1951 census.[3] According to Vidyarthi and Rai's (1976), publication on *Tribal Culture of India*, the tribes of Kashmir have been largely neglected in academic studies, with only a limited amount of attention given to their folklore. As a result, there is dearth of literature available on various tribes of Kashmir. The authors have asserted that the works of Dhir (1969), B. Sen (1969), D. Kapoor (1969), and B.N. Saraswati (1969) in the form of exploratory papers have demonstrated the need for a comprehensive ethnographic study of the three major regions in the north-western Himalayas, thereby emphasizing the urgency of the matter. B.N. Saraswati's suggestion of an anthropo-historical study of Ladakh in the context of Indian culture and religion may explain the detachment of Ladakhi culture and its multi-ethnic community from the larger discourse.[4]

This paper is based on empirical evidences collected through observation and informal interviews. The primary evidence was supplemented by the existing literature and an extensive study about the Balti tribe in Kargil, Ladakh.

## THE PAST

The Balti tribe's origin can be traced back to Baltistan (Baltyul), a region currently under the occupation of Pakistan. The Balti tribe is recognised as an ethnic group with ancestral ties to Tibet. Different sources have defined their genesis. According to Drew (1875), the ethnic groups of "Dogras, Paharis, Chabhalis, and Dards are classified as Aryans, whereas Baltis, Ladakhis, and Champas are categorized as Tibetans."[5] According to the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1891), it has been stated that "The Baltis are of the same stock as the Ladakhis. They have Mongolian features, high cheekbones, and eyes drawn out at the corners, but the nose is not as depressed as is the case with Bhotis of Ladakh."Based on historical sources,

it has been determined that the Balti community did not originate from present-day Ladakh. Rather, they migrated from Baltistan to Purig (Kargil) and Ladakh (Leh) over a period of time. As per the scholarly work of Veena Bhasin titled *Tribals of Ladakh: Ecology, Human Settlements, and Health*, it is established that the Baltis are the indigenous populace of Skardu region in Baltistan and are presently residing in particular areas of Kargil and Leh district in Ladakh.[6] The author proceeds to assert that their religious affiliation is Shia Islam, while their ethnic background is a blend of Dard and Mongoloid lineage. According to some historical accounts, a significant number of Balti Muslims reportedly relocated from Baltistan and Purig (currently known as Kargil) to the Chushot and Shey areas within the contemporary Leh district during the reign of Ladakhi monarch, Namgyal. These accounts maintained that certain individuals of Balti origin in Leh region can trace their ancestry back to the companions who accompanied the Balti Princess during her nuptials to Ladakhi monarch Jamyang Namgyal.[7] In addition to these perspectives, it has been posited that during the seventeenth to eighteenth century, the Balti people might have encountered economic hardship and adversity in their native territory Baltistan, therefore they moved to present Ladakh.[8]The political division of India resulted in a territorial conflict that has led to the permanent division of the Balti cultural community across the border lines. The Balti community, having relocated from Baltistan or Baltyul to Ladakh as a result of economic and diplomatic relations between the two regions in the past, can be found in selected villages within the present Union territory of Ladakh in the Union of India.[9] The Balti people can be observed inhabiting the villages of Hardass, Lato, and Karkitchu, situated on the left bank of the river Drass, as well as specific locations within Kargil town in Ladakh. The Nubra region and certain areas within Leh town are primarily occupied by Baltis in the Leh district. The constitutional recognition of the community has been established through the enactment of the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order in the year 1989.

## BALTI IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL TRIBAL POLICY AND CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Two important developmental approaches based on tribes emerged after independence. Verrier Elwin, India's first prime minister, J.L. Nehru's tribal advisor, endorsed the isolation strategy, which held that tribal people should be isolated from the outside world. On the other hand, G. S. Ghurye (1980), who considered tribals as Hindus, advocated for the total integration of "Backward Hindus or imperfectly integrated classes of Hindus." Contrary to these extreme tactics, social and policy professionals and bureaucrats demonstrated the integration plan for tribal advancement via their activities and constitutional requirements. It's a way to include tribes in national and regional settings while preserving and promoting their culture.The first prime minister of India, J.L. Nehru, stated that "We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take interest in them. In the world of today that is not possible or desirable. At the same time, we should avoid over administering these areas and in particular sending too many outsiders into the tribal territory." In addition to expressing his views on tribals, he introduced the Tribal sub-plan strategy to make them a reality.The policies of integration emanate from the constitutional provisions and legal guarantees. The qualifying requirements for "scheduled tribes" are defined and specified under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. The document also details the official channels for notifying and de-notifying the scheduled tribes in the country. The interests of the scheduled tribes in areas like public employment, economic development, and cultural preservation are safeguarded and advanced under the Indian Constitution. These necessities are specified in Articles 15, 16, 19, 46, and 335. Articles 330, 332, 334, 243D, and 243T of the Indian Constitution guarantee political, economic, and social protections for India's scheduled tribes. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) was established by the 89$^{th}$ Constitutional Amendment in 2003, which amended Article 338 and added Article 338A. Preceding the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019, the region of Ladakh, which is currently a Union territory, formerly comprised of two districts within the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Constitution

(Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1989 has, therefore, recognized the tribal status of all eligible communities, including the Ladakh-based Balti tribe.One can see that the Baltis are left to fend for themselves when it comes to protecting and promoting their cultural identity, despite the lofty national policies and legal provisions for the socio-cultural development of tribals. This is especially true when considering the state of Balti cultural identity in Ladakh. Even after almost three decades of its designation as scheduled tribe, tribal policies and provisions are unable to effectively support Balti community in restoring and using their original script other than Persian and Urdu letters, which do not exist in Tibetan and have become unavoidable in some cases.The recent education policy of the Indian government mandates that primary education should be imparted in the mother tongue to facilitate better comprehension among children. However, it is regrettable that the Balti community in Ladakh has been unable to exercise this right owing to the lack of institutional initiatives aimed at reviving their language and its original script. Consequently, they are compelled to rely on the prevalent regional and religious languages for their educational needs.Bhoti, a sister dialect of Balti, with 80-90% literary and grammatical resemblance is widely spoken in Leh and has been effectively taught in schools while Balti has yet to find a forum for its restoration.

## BALTI: A LINGUISTIC CULTURAL COMMUNITY IN LADAKH

The mountainous region of northern Pakistan is home to a number of distinct languages and dialects, including *Burushaski* and *Shina*, although only Balti is part of the 'Tibeto-Burman' branch of the 'Sino-Tibetan' family of languages.The community in question employs the use of a language variety known as the 'Balti dialect' which is classified as a member of the Tibetan language family and is named after the community and the archaic characters and pronunciation have been preserved by them.[10]Veena Bhasin asserted that Balti is a language that lacks a script, but she acknowledged that the language had a script during the Buddhist era.[11]The Balti people, who adhere to the Islamic faith, utilize the Urdu and Persian scripts for written communication, while maintaining relatively genuine traits in their

spoken language. In his book *Tarikh-i-Ladakh*, Mohammad Ali Khan Khasman, a Balti writer hailing from Turtuk, Ladakh, espouses a comparable perspective on the Balti language. Originally penned in Urdu, Khasman's work characterizes Balti as a dialect of Baltistan, a Tibetan offshoot. The speaker made reference to the fact that, in addition to Baltistan, the aforementioned language is also used in Ladakh, Purig, and various other neighbouring regions near Baltistan. In addition, the speaker noted that the primary script of the Balti language is derived from the 'Bodhi Sanskrit' script, which was adapted from Sanskrit Devanagari and traditionally written in a left-to-right format similar to the English script. The term '*Yige*' is a commonly used local designation for this particular script. As per the observations made by M.A. Khan Khasman, the emergence of Islam and the waning of Buddhism in Baltistan has resulted in the gradual abandonment of the indigenous script of Balti, which has been erroneously referred to as the 'Bodhi' script.[12] At present, with the exception of a small group of intellectuals, the majority of the populace in Baltistan has no recollection of this script. Due to lack of proficiency in Persian, the individuals in question were compelled to devise an alternative writing system that would align with their religious obligations. Consequently, they produced numerous booklets commonly referred to as *Bayaz* in the Balti language, utilizing the locally recognized Urdu script.[13] Balti culture has also been affected by modernity. Manifest effects of contemporary pressures include a preference for western clothes over local apparel and the need to acquire Urdu, Persian, Arabic, English, and Hindi without being able to create their own indigenous script at the elementary school level.

## RELIGION AND EDUCATION

At present, the majority of the Balti community residing in Ladakh adhere to the Shia Islamic faith. However, prior to the arrival of Islam in the region, the Balti people were known to practice Bonism and Buddhism.[14]The Balti community has undergone several changes in matters of faith, including the abandonment of the Buddhist beverage known as Chang, modifications to their life-cycle rituals and annual calendar of

fairs and festivals, complete renunciation of polyandry, and the adoption of the *Muta* system and *Nikah-i-Daimi*. These changes suggest a departure from their Buddhist past and an attempt to adapt to the Islamic present.[15] In comparison to the mainstream, the education level within tribal communities is typically lower. The social characteristics of tribes, such as their historical background, worldview, myths and legends regarding their origin and existence, equitable status within the social hierarchy, and frequent interactions with neighbouring groups to facilitate business transactions, are contributing factors to their collective identity. Through informal interviews, it was discovered that in the post-independence period, the Balti community in Ladakh prioritized religious education over modern education, resulting in a small percentage of individuals pursuing the latter. The underlying cause for this phenomenon can be attributed to the prevailing social traits that were distinctive of the Balti populace. During that period, the formal education of Baltis, particularly of women was significantly impacted. The initial religious instruction for individuals is typically provided within the household or at an elementary Muslim religious institution known as *Maktab*. Subsequently, individuals may pursue further religious education at institutes such as ISK (Islamia School, Kargil) and IKMT (Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust, Kargil), among others. After concluding their initial religious education at local institutes, scholars pursue advanced religious studies by traveling to foreign countries such as Iran and Iraq. These countries are widely recognized as hubs of Shia Muslim scholarship worldwide.

Presently, Balti community in Ladakh gives equal importance to acquire both secular and religious education equally to both female as well as male children.The community is now providing their children with secular education through the integrated education system implemented by the Government of India. The students are receiving education that encompasses primary school to university level, both within and outside the Union Territory.The recognition of Balti, along with other ethnic groups, as a scheduled tribe in India marked a crucial turning point in their subsequent advancement in education, social status, and economic growth. Despite the unavailability of any particular official data on Balti's

development, an examination of the socio-economic progress of Baltis subsequent to their classification as a scheduled tribe reveals that they have experienced significant improvement in their social well-being over the past three decades. This conclusion is based on informal interviews with activists and personal observations of the targeted community, which indicate that Baltis have benefited from various state and central government scheduled tribe welfare programmes. The operation of scheduled tribe rights, such as reservation in admission to educational institutes, employment, and various scholarships and fellowships, has facilitated the Balti community in improving their educational status and subsequently, their economic condition. Currently, they are rendering their services across various domains, encompassing not only the Union Territory but also other regions of the nation. The aforementioned transformation not only facilitated the educational and economic progress of the Balti community but also resulted in their integration and enhancement within the administrative sector. In the past thirty years, several young individuals from the Balti community have achieved success in qualifying for different administrative gazetted positions via the Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Services. However, there has been a lack of comparable advancement in regards to the esteemed national-level examination offered by the Union Public Service Commission. In contrast to the Boto community, several other communities such as Balti, Purig, Dard, and Brokpa, who reside collectively in Ladakh, have a limited number of individuals who have successfully cleared the civil service examination, which can be counted on fingers. This phenomenon may be attributed to financial limitations and inadequate mentorship and prospects; however, the current circumstances are undergoing a transformation. Numerous students are presently engaged in preparing for civil services. Residential academies situated in various universities throughout the country, as well as platforms that specifically target scheduled tribes in the Union Territory and the country, are furnishing the necessary foundation for their inclusion and upliftment. This is not only helpful for administrative services but also to the other services as well.

## CULTURE AND ECONOMY

According to Vidyarthi (1976), the interdependent relationship between nature, man, and spirit is integral to the unique way of life observed by tribal communities. The Balti community is considered to be a prominent group among the various tribes of Ladakh, owing to their significant cultural and social heritage. They possess a unique socio-cultural and linguistic identity in contrast to the other communities of Ladakh. The Balti community establishes and affirms their distinct identity through various cultural markers such as their unique language, regional affiliation, food practices, artistic expressions, attire, customary practices, and rituals. The emergence of forces of modernity worldwide compels individuals to embrace and adjust to modern lifestyles, regardless of their openness, across various facets of life. This phenomenon is also evident in the Balti community residing in Ladakh. However, there exist certain activists and intellectuals who are conscious of identity, both within and outside the community. These individuals are actively contributing to the preservation of this culturally rich heritage through their literary works and practical efforts. Ladakh villages such as Latoo, Turtuk, and Tyakshi continue to observe traditional Balti customs and rituals during their various festivals and celebrations. They have their own folklore, sports (polo and archery), musical instruments (surna and damn), folk dances, folk melodies.[16] Dr. B.R. Rizvi (1993) posits that the transformation of Balti culture is not a unidirectional or sequential process. Instead, the trajectory of change indicates three distinct phases: (a) the perpetuation of cultural characteristics; (b) modification and stability; and (c) religious convictions. The initial phase of the author's argument pertains to the perpetuation of cultural characteristics, specifically with regards to material culture. This encompasses the persistence of housing patterns, types of houses, dress styles, decorative elements, dietary practices, and a complete abandonment of the Buddhist alcoholic beverage known as Chang, made from barley. The Indian tribal economy has been categorized into eight distinct classifications based on their primary and distinctive livelihood practices. According to Vidyarthi and Rai (1976) classification, there are various types of occupations, including forest hunting, hill cultivation, settled

agriculture, simple artisan, cattle herding, labour, agriculture and industrial work, folk artistry, and white-collar and trading professions. Prior to the emergence of contemporary market dynamics, the Balti community residing in Ladakh region primarily focused on engaging in agricultural pursuits. The individuals cultivated apricots, apples and grains for personal consumption. In addition, traditionally they engage in animal husbandry practices, including the rearing of various livestock such as cattle, goats, sheep, and yaks. In the past, individuals would fulfil their daily necessities through the practice of bartering, which occurred both internally and externally within their respective communities. The available historical records indicate that prior to partition, the Baltis residing in Kargil maintained economic relations with adjacent regions. They frequently journeyed to Skardu, which is presently an administrative district in Pakistan occupied Gilgit-Baltistan region, as well as Leh, which is presently an administrative district in the Union Territory of Ladakh in India, to procure essential commodities for their needs. In olden times, individuals would transport apricots and various commodities from Baltistan to trade with the inhabitants of Leh for salt and soda, or conversely. Following the partition and subsequent closure of international borders, the Balti community underwent significant economic transformation, whereas prior to these events, only marginal changes had taken place. Due to the abrupt cessation of trade, the primary means of sustenance, numerous Balti individuals commenced migrating to various regions of the country in pursuit of livelihood opportunities. A significant portion of the population relocated to the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. As a result, it was observed that certain Balti communities were established within the Nanital district of Uttarakhand.[17] Agriculture is still the mainstay of their economy, but many people also own their own enterprises, work in government and private sector white collar positions, or earn a living by performing manual labour for hourly pay. The Baltis are now accustomed to selling their homegrown goods in both the local and national market, relatively the past limited household consumption although the output and quality is not as good as earlier owing to changing climatic patters and other forces but still people manage to make a living out of it. In 2021,

for the first time in Ladakhi history, fresh Ladakhi apricots made their way to the worldwide market, landing in Dubai. Since the Balti people make up a sizable portion of the population in Ladakh, they stand to benefit monetarily from the nationalization and internationalization of Ladakhi apricots and apples.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

According to the 2011 and 2001 National Population Censuses, the total population of Ladakh was recorded as 274, 289 and 236, 539 respectively. As per the same reports, Leh's populace was recorded as 117, 232 in 2001 and 133, 487 in 2011, whereas Kargil's population was noted as 119, 307 and 140, 802 in the corresponding years. The demographic analysis and comprehension of the targeted group under study reveals the present demographic situation. According to the data obtained from the 2001 and 2011 censuses, there were 38, 818 and 51, 918 individuals, respectively, who identified as Baltis and were found to be residing in the regions of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.[18] The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes provided comprehensive figures on the percentage of tribal residents in Ladakh during a discussion on whether or not to include the region under the sixth schedule of the constitution. The entire tribal population of Ladakh is 97 percent, with scheduled tribes making up 66.8% of Leh, 73.35 percent of Nubra, 97.05 percent of Khaltsi, 83.49 percent of Kargil, 89.96 percent of Sankoo, and 99.16 percent of the Zanskar valley.[19]Based on a demographic and sociological analysis of the Balti community in the current Union Territory of Ladakh, it can be determined that the Balti community ranks third in both population size and prevalence of the most frequently spoken language in the area. However, according to Musavir Ahmed (2021), certain Balti activists have contended that they constituted the third largest community in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, as per the 1944 census. He additionally demonstrated that, as per the linguistic census report of India, the Balti community underwent a detrimental decadal growth rate of 31.31 percent between 2001 and 2011. The author observed that based on the aforementioned source, the population of the former Jammu and Kashmir region and

Kargil exhibited growth rates of 23% and 20%, respectively, over the period spanning from 2001 to 2011. According to certain Balti activists, the recognition and construction of a community in Kargil, historically referred to as the Purigpa community among Kargil's inhabitants, was purportedly intended to sever their cultural and ethnic ties with Baltistan and prevent them from identifying with the Balti ethnic group. This contention on part of Balti activists, might be possible because the pre-1989 tribal census in the former J&K state led to the belief that the majority of Kargil's population were Baltis. However, the census report revealed that Baltis only constituted a minority, with the majority of the population belonging to the Purigpa tribe. Therefore, there are individuals who initially identified as Baltis but subsequently realized that they were, in fact, Purigpa.[20] The Purigpa community is a distinct ethnic group residing in the Kargil district of Ladakh, which was granted official recognition in the year 1989. Based on historical sources, it can be inferred that the region currently referred to as Kargil district was formerly recognized as Purig, and its inhabitants were identified as Purigpa. The community employs the Purgi language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family and shares a significant degree of structural similarity and mutual intelligibility with Balti. According to Khasman (2019), the forebears of this particular tribe are recognized as the indigenous populace of the contemporary Kargil region, which was formerly referred to as Purig.[21] The delineation of the geographical boundaries of Purig during that period remains a topic of scholarly discussion.

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Maintaining the Balti tribe's shared ethnic identity is their biggest struggle in this time of complicated and multi-layered identity. A significant turning point in the history of Baltis in Ladakh and Baltistan was the split of the Balti community along border lines with the subcontinent's partition. The Balti language's main issue is that it has been cut off from its radical centre, Tibet, for 500 years and from its near neighbour Ladakh for 50 years due to political disputes and severe religious divide. Therefore, other languages and literatures with strong vocabulary and quantity have

dominated it.[22]Balti identity was separated along geographical lines during India's 1947 partition, which caused this group to lose its identity in Ladakh. In the multi-ethnic society of Ladakh, the Balti tribe only constitutes a minority population, according to a demographic analysis of the post-partition period. Despite assertions to the contrary, the population census data shows that the Balti community was not historically the largest in this area. Even some Balti activists think they have fallen prey to political scheming since independence as a result of their ethnic ties to Baltistan. They contend that the acceptance of the Purigpa community by the Kargil populace is an intentional effort to sever Kargil's ethnic link with Baltistan.[23]Ladakhi and Balti are typically cited as the languages that are most similar to Tibetan, whereas *Phalskat*, the spoken Ladakhi language, is sometimes cited as being nothing more than a divergence from Tibetan. Bettina Zeisler (2005), using a linguistic analysis of the phonology and syntax of language, proposed that the *Phalskat* spoken in Balti and Ladakhi does not originate from *Chosskat* but rather from an earlier stage of the Tibetan language from which Amdo Tibetan and Old Tibetan emerged. Therefore, instead of being the parent of Balti and Ladakhi, *Chosskat* is revealed to be a younger cousin.[24] The Baltis in Ladakh are fighting for their number identity, claiming it is a ruse against them since numerical existence has significance from both political and cultural elements in a society. The Balti and Purigpa populations in Ladakh experience identity uncertainty and conflict as a result of the acknowledgment of Purigpa and the declining Balti population. Different aspects of the collective identity in Ladakh can currently be seen to be in conflict. Language is seen as a crucial component in the formation of social identities. The ethnic communities of Balti and Purgi in Kargil began to argue over this aspect of identity creation. Purgi is not acknowledged by the Balti activists as a language since they believe that the Balti language is the only true and original language of Kargil and Baltistan. Even though Purgi is the dominant language in the Kargil district, almost all local ethnic groups can communicate in it. A section of people think that Balti is the true language of the area, whereas Purgi enthusiasts and others think that Purgi is the true language of the area. In her article *The Importance of Being Ladakhi: Affect and Artifice in Kargil* (2013), Radhika Gupta

demonstrates how strongly a Purgi activist from Silmoo village in Kargil named Master Mohd Hussain reacting to the portrayal of Purgi as a 'Bastard Language, a Language of Bazaar (Street)' saying that the real language of the region is Purgi, not Balti. She further stated that Hussain argues that the almost 500 Purgi folk songs that he is personally familiar with, are evidence of the dialect's long history.

The script of the Balti language has currently been transcribed in Urdu, which is a clear manifestation of the influence of religious identity on linguistic identity. The original script was rejected by most of the Balti population in the region, while the Buddhist community internalized this common identity as their unique source of identity. Both these factors contributed to the estrangement of the Balti community from the script. The Tibetan script, or *Bod-yig*, has allegedly been appropriated by Buddhist conservatives in Leh as a symbol of Buddhist identity. As Radhika Gupta (2013), observed that Purgi and Balti are now written in Urdu script. Some cultural activists in Kargil argue for the revival and re-adoption of Bhoti and lament that Buddhist and Muslim religious conservatism has prevented this from occurring.[25]Aiming to revive the old Tibetan script into the Balti language, conscious cultural activists both inside and outside the community find it challenging given the present beliefs of both Muslims and Buddhists. Similar to this, Baltis no longer practice festivals, folk dance, or folk songs outside of occasional performances at particular events as these are prohibited in Islam.

The Balti community's customs and culture have suffered as a result of modernization in its westernized form. With minor exceptions, almost everyone has adopted the western way of life. The younger generation is a significant target of modernization forces because they serve as a means of conveying centuries-old cultural identity. In terms of their distinct individual identities as well as their group identities, the Balti youngsters are at an important junction. The dichotomy of modernity and culture has captivated the attention of younger generations. They must, either voluntarily or involuntarily, integrate with modern forces in order to maintain their advancement in the milieu, but they must also guard their distinct cultural identification traits in order to prevent identity loss and distortion. Another significant component of a person's collective or social

identity is their religion. As ancient as mankind itself, religious assertion and social identity formation both exist. Since the beginning of time, faith has been used to categorize people as similar or different in some way. Similar to this, it is believed that the Baltis of Ladakh had significant ideological changes over time, going from Bonism to Buddhism and subsequently from Buddhism to Islam. The emergence of such occurrences in the Balti community's society produces a division in the characteristics of the group's collective identity. Only a small number of intellectuals and experts refer to their language as Bhoti, despite the fact that everyone agrees that *Yige* script is their original script.[26]The cultural and linguistic components of Balti identity have been greatly affected by the current collective religious identity of the Balti people.

The people of Ladakh, as a whole, mostly tend to form their religious identities in one of two ways as Muslims or Buddhists. The Baltis claim a shared religious identity as Muslims, and as such, they deal with shared difficulties. Ladakh is thought to be a peaceful area, but during the past four to five decades, some community incidents have dramatically altered the environment there, instilling distrust and communal conflict among the general populace. Due to Kargil's Muslim background and lack of interest in separating Ladakh from the former Jammu and Kashmir State, the Buddhists of Leh have traditionally viewed Kargil's position with suspicion. In the edited volume *Politics of Identity in Jammu and Kashmir: A Contested Terrain*, Baljit S. Mann (2008) made the case that the binary identity politics predominated the discourse of Ladakh politics in the former State. He said that the former Kashmir-centred government's favouritism of Ladakhi Muslims had made the Buddhist population feel more uneasy. He emphasized the concern among Buddhists over the fast-growing Muslim population in Kargil, who are worried about being marginalized as a minority in Ladakh. Additionally, it is evident from history that there has been inter-communal violence. In 1989, the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) in Leh called for a three-year social and economic boycott of Muslims.[27] The ensuing Masjid (mosque) and Gonpa (monastery) sacrilege problem in Wakha hamlet sparked an increase in violence between the two populations. According to certain individuals, these incidents marked a turning point in the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and

Buddhists in Ladakh.

Interfaith marriage, the Member of Parliament for Ladakh's resolution designating Urdu as an alien and imposed language and making it optional for certain jobs that were previously required, and the location of the Gonpa (monastery) in Kargil further intensified the politics of binary identity in Ladakh, widening the chasm of mistrust and suspicion between the two communities. The creation of an anti-conversion law, the inclusion of Bhoti in the eighth schedule of the constitution, and the construction of a Gonpa (a monastery) in Kargil on their claimed site are among the demands made in a memorandum presented on April 11th, 2022 by the All Ladakh Buddhist Association and Ladakh Gonpa Association. All these changes point to increased self-definition and identity construction among Ladakh's Buddhist population. Despite the active engagement of the Baltis and other communities in constructing their identities, they perceive a sense of apathy towards their cultural distinctiveness among the general public, given the prevailing dominant discourse on Ladakh. In addition, for the Balti people in Ladakh, geographic location is also a significant challenge. The community's lives and property are under danger due to its proximity to the border. Since the 1999 Kargil conflict, there have been no known ceasefire violations in the area from either side. However, given their severe suffering during the wars between India and Pakistan from 1947 to 1999, the insecurity of the Balti population in these areas is unquestionable. Although they live in constant fear, they are also worried and want to reunite with their split families on the other side of the border. Balti activists call for the reunification of their estranged family across the international border, or more specifically, for the humanitarian reunification of their split community.

## CONCLUSION

Polarization and mobilization based on caste, community, region, religion, and ethnicity have been observed to result in suspicion and factionalism within societies. Regrettably, this is the predominant condition in the majority of contemporary societies. The elites who lack knowledge and prioritize their own interests tend to exacerbate a feeling of disregard and

inadequacy by placing excessive emphasis on a specific demographic to serve their personal agendas. The separation of Ladakh from the former State of Jammu and Kashmir can be attributed to the neglect of Ladakhis in both policy and public imagination. This was particularly evident in the case of Ladakh. Likewise, the current Union Territory of Ladakh is susceptible to experiencing division and factionalism , if all of its communities are not granted equitable and sufficient portions in both policy-making and public representation. The disproportionate attention given to a particular community due to its magnitude, influence, and prominence has the potential to create societal fragmentation and diminish the standing of other communities in the broader conversation, thereby distorting and obfuscating reality.

According to Balti experts and intellectuals, increasing awareness of the traditional cultural heritage of the Balti people among younger generations may serve as a means of mitigating the potential degeneration of Balti identity. It is a widely acknowledged fact that communities that safeguard their distinct attributes such as culture, language, art, history, rituals, and the like, and effectively transmit them to their succeeding generations, are the ones that are capable of preserving their unique identity. There is a necessity to propagate knowledge and consciousness concerning the Balti culture, especially to the younger generation and the Balti community as a whole, across academic and social spheres, with the aim of advancing and safeguarding this culturally affluent Balti heritage of Ladakh. Given the existential threat faced by the Balti community as evidenced by official statistics, it is imperative that they furnish precise information and advocate for the implementation of an appropriate methodology by the authorities to verify their data. It is imperative for Balti activists to ensure that all Balti individuals who have migrated to other regions of the country during the pre and post-Independence periods actively participate in the forthcoming national population census by providing their personal information to the relevant authorities.

The Balti community residing in Kargil is actively engaged in constructing and asserting their identity in response to the perceived threat to their existence. This is being achieved through various means such as the publication of literature in the Balti language, organizing *Mushairas*

(poetry symposium) in Balti, conducting seminars on the history of Balti, and celebrating Balti festivals. The University of Ladakh's proposal to establish a tribal research centre can be considered a significant milestone in the history of Ladakh. This initiative aims to safeguard the region's abundant and varied cultural heritage. According to Mrs. Kaneez Fatima, the rector of the Kargil campus of the University of Ladakh, the Tribal Research Centre will function as an independent entity upon its completion. Its primary objective will be to undertake research on the cultures and history of Ladakh.In light of these changes, it is envisaged that all communities in Ladakh including the Balti, would have a formalised forum to restore, maintain, and promote their unique cultural identity, therefore enriching Ladakh's multicultural society. Hence, it is imperative that all segments of society, including academia, civil society, and government, collaborate to effectively conserve and advance their distinct communal identity and culture amidst the present era of multiculturalism and globalization.

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# Tribal Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh

*Kanika Sharan*

ABSTRACT

*The Gaddis are an agro- pastoralist tribal community in Himachal Pradesh. Gaddis are known in Himachal Pradesh as residents of Chamba, but now they have spread to the lower hills and have settled down in the Kangra and Mandi districts. The main reasons for their migration are excessive snowfall during winter, obstacles in communication facilities, and lack of healthcare facilities and higher educational facilities. The term Gaddi derived from their native land, 'the Gadheran,' which lies on both sides of the Dhauladhar ranges of the Himalayas, is believed to be used for all the indigenous populations of the Bharmour area of the Chamba district. The Gaddi community is an intersectionality of low-caste groups embedded within the tribal formation. Among the Gaddi caste, heterogeneity within Scheduled Tribes has been recognized. These low-caste groups are partially assimilated, unevenly accepted, and have little legal protection. The Scheduled Tribe status is reserved for Gaddi Rajputs and Brahmans and under scheduled caste come Dalits groups like Hali, Sippi, Badi, Rihare, and Dhogri. Even after this heterogeneity within the tribe, the Gaddis have unique physical characteristics, language, culture, customs, dress, food, social organization, and economic activities.*

## ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

The Gaddis are one of the most dominant and popular tribes of Himachal Pradesh. In the Indian imagination, Gaddi conjured up an image of a shepherd in a woollen light color cloak closed by meters of black woollen rope, a colourful cap at the top of his head, striding across the Dhauladhar Mountain ranges of the Himalayas with its domesticated sheep, goats, and dogs. In 1970, N.K. Issar directed a documentary on the Gaddi tribe through the Films Division of the Government of India, which starts with

a spring time pastoral of shepherds smoking *hookah* and watching over a herd of sheep spread out over a bushy mountain side. The narrator intones that 'the Gaddi, his sheep, and his dog are very much a part of the lush landscape.' The association between Gaddis and pastoralism is as steadfast as that of Inuit and Husky-pulled sleds. The film emphasizes Bharmour, the homeland of Gaddis, affectionately called Gadderan by elders, as the epicenter of Gaddi's life.

Etymologically the term Gaddi refers to shepherds, but only some Gaddis are shepherds today. The term also refers to a territorial group of a particular group of people wearing a striking costume and forming a community with a heterogeneous union of tribes and castes such as Rajputs, Brahmans, Thakur, Rana, Hali, Sippi, etc. Various theories and explanations about the root of the word Gaddi have been put forth. Some say the term is borrowed from the word 'Gadar,' a Hindi term for shepherd or ewe. The land the Gaddis inhabit is called Gaddern, which means the royal seat of their supreme deity, Lord Shiva, who, like the Gaddis, is a nomad and a sheep herder. Many oral narratives say that the Gaddi is either an immigrant population or was created by Shiva and inhabited by him. The generally accepted theory is that this term has come from the Sanskrit word 'gadar,' meaning sheep. 'Gadharean' or 'Gadern' represents the sheep country and is the *Shivbhumi* or land of Gaddis[1].Historical accounts portray the Gaddis either as a distinct group who migrated before the eleventh century to the ancient kingdom of Brahmpura, the present-day Bharmour tehsil in the district of Chamba, or they are portrayed as a heterogeneous group of people who migrated to the western hills at different times and for various reasons. Alongside this history exists a vast repertoire of oral narratives that says, during the rule of the Mughal King Aurangzeb, many people (Brahmans) ran towards the Himalayas to escape, and they started living there and are known as Gaddi.

In simple words, the term Gaddi refers to the throne or throne of the king. The Gaddis are 'Shaivas' as they are the followers of Shaivism. And since they are Shaivas, their standard of living, food habits, marriage rituals, culture, and clothing are all according to Lord Shiva's lifestyle. According to local beliefs, Bharmour is a place where the royal seat of Lord Shiva was present during the mythological period. In Bharmour, according to

the oral narratives, the Gaddi community was established by King Maru in 500 A.D.According to historians, with Brahampura (Bharmour) as its capital, Raja Maru is said to be the founder of the ruling family of Chamba. The kings of Chamba belong to the Suryavanshi line of Rajputs. Maru migrated early to the upper Ganges valley with his family and settled in Kalapa. His original home is believed to have been Ayodhya. He founded Brahampura (present Bharmour) village and made it the capital of his state around the middle of the 6th century A.D. His son Jaistambh succeeded him. Along with King Maru, five- six descendants of the Kshatriya (Surya, Chandra, Som) clan also established Bharmour. The descendants, after the establishments, adopted the name Gaddi. In earlier times, the term Gaddi was a synonym of the word King. Still, according to many local narratives, the community has lost prestige due to political, geographical, and social vicissitudes. It has lost its dignity and is now merely known or seen as sheep herders. In Bharmour, the Gaddi community talks in 'Gaddiyali' and according to which Gaddi word stands for 'Asana' or throne. In Bhrahmpur (Bharmour), the descendants of the Rajput (Kshatriyas) clans had a direct claim to the throne because they established Bharmour along with king Maru; they were called Gaddi. And rest of the communities were called Gaddi Bharhman, Gaddi Sippi, Gaddi Badhi etc. But because they all live together in Bharmour, they come under the generic term Gaddi. Every king in Bhrahampur had to wear Gaddi clothes, i.e., *Chola, Dora, topi,* etc., to remind them that they were Gaddi. According to beliefs, a king gets approval from his people only after wearing gaddi clothes.

Dharmapuri Gadd is the language spoken within the community, and the script Tankri is used by older adults. Other people speak Hindi, whereas Devanagari is used as a script. According to some research, their language is a part of the western Pahari dialect. It retains influences from Gujarati and Rajasthani languages, and there is a profusion of archaic Sanskrit terms and inflection[2]. During earlier times, the Gaddi man often wore the typical dress, which consisted of a Chola and Dora, whereas the women wore *luanchiri.* The men and women wear gold earrings. Men wear a white turban, a characteristic of the Gaddi dress. The Gaddi community follows a non-vegetarian diet, but they mostly take the meat

of sheep, chicken, and ghural. Some of the Gaddi were involved in agriculture, and their food consisted of Makki-ki-roti and occasionally wheat chapatti with mah and rongi[3]. They have rich knowledge of edible herbs from the forest. They use these herbs and their knowledge in their everyday eating habits. They also smoke tobacco in *hukka* and consume alcohol.

## HABITAT


*Source: Google Image*

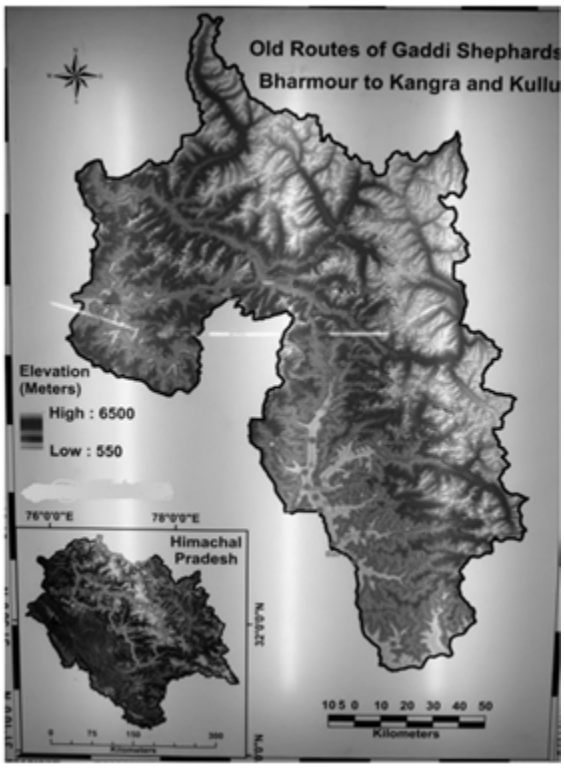
**STs of Himachal Pradesh according to the Census 2011**

Himachal Pradesh has a significant proportion of the tribal population within the State. Gujjars, Pangwalas, Spitians, Kinnaure, and Lahuels are some tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh. Gaddi is one of the tribes residing within the Kangra, Mandi, and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh. The Gaddi tribe is one of the oldest, most dominant, and most famous tribes of the State of Himachal Pradesh. Himachal is a mountain state in the north Indian zone. It covers the 30° 22' and 30° 12' north latitude and 75° 47' and 79° 4' east longitude. Himachal Pradesh is divided into three regions: outer or lower Himalayas, inner or middle Himalayas, and greater or upper Himalayas. The Himalayas' lower range is known as the Shivalik hills, Shivalik meaning 'tresses of the Shiva.' The climate of the State is subtropical to mild temperate. The year in Shivalik hills is divided into three seasons: the winter season from October to February, summer from March to June, and rainy from July to September[4]. Himachal Pradesh is known for its valleys, rivers, forests, and cultural heritage. It has a rich heritage of handicrafts. Woollen, pashmina shawls,

carpets, woodwork, Gompa style paintings, horsehair bangles, metal utensils, embroidered slippers, etc. 90% of the population is involved in agriculture. Almost 20, 300 MW of hydel power can be produced in the State by constructing various major, minor, medium, and mini/micro hydel projects on the five-river basins[5].

**Kangra District**

The name Kangra derives from Kangra town, earlier known as Nagarkot. Kangra was originally a part of the ancient Trigarta or Trigartha (now Jalandhar), which comprised the area between Satluj (Shatadroo) and Ravi. A few tracts of land in the eastern part of Satluj, which probably lies in Sirhind in Punjab, also formed a part of Trigarta. Trigarta was comprised of two provinces, one in the plains with its headquarters at Jalandhar and the other in the hills with its headquarters at Nagarkot (now Kangra).




Source: Google image

**OLD ROUTES OF GADDI SHEPHERDS**

During the reign of King Harsha Vardhan, the famous Chinese Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsiang came to visit Jalandhar in 635 A.D. In his writings, he referred to the principality of Jalandhar situated towards the north-eastern of China-poti (China Bhakti) and towards the south-eastern of Kiu-lo-to (Kullu). In the history of Kashmir, the *Rajatarangini*, Raja Shankar Verma (883 to 903) of Kashmir held control over Prithi Chand of Trigarta. In ancient times, different parts of the hills were ruled by various chiefs, with their allegiance to powerful kings at the center. However, Kangra was ruled by Katoch princes from early times. During the invasion of Punjab by Alexandar in 326 B.C., the Katoch prince was leading Trigartha. At the beginning of the 11th century, Mahmud of Ghazni took over the Turki Shahi family and the Hindu Shahi dynasty of Kabul in Afghanistan after defeating a prominent Hindu army at Ohind and later at Peshawar, entering the plains of Punjab. After taking over the Hindu king at Lahore, he invaded Nagarkot. He defeated the Rajput Raja of Kangra and vandalized the Kangra fort and temple plundering the enormous wealth of gold and silver. After Mahmud Ghazni left, the Katoch kings continued their rule over the Trigartha area. In 1337, Mohammad Tuglak, an Afghan king of Delhi, captured the fort of Kangra in the reign of Raja Prithi Chand. In 1351, Raja Purab Chand recovered the fort from them. Sher Shah Suri also captured Kangra in 1540.

The present district of Kangra came into existence on 1st September 1972 after the reorganization of districts by the Government of Himachal Pradesh. It was the largest district of Punjab in terms of area. It was transferred to Himachal Pradesh from Punjab on 1st November, 1966. It has six tehsils: Nurpur, Kangra, Palampur, Dera Gopipur, and Hamirpur. Kullu was also a tehsil of Kangra district till 1962, and Lahul and Spiti, which were also a part of Kangra, were created as separate districts in 1960. On 1st November 1966, the Una town and 290 villages of Una tehsil of Hoshiarpur district, along with Kangra, Kullu, Lahul and Spiti, and Shimla districts, were transferred from Punjab state to Himachal Pradesh. At the time of 1971 census, Kangra was the biggest district in the state, having eight tehsils/sub-tehsils. These tehsils/sub-tehsils contained 6,524 villages and nine towns. During 1971-1981, the Himachal Pradesh

government sub-divided Kangra district into three districts: Una, Hamirpur, and Kangra, on 1st September 1972.

**Dharamshala**

Dharamshala is in Kangra valley at the foothills of the Dhauladhar ranges. The city is a pilgrim centre for Buddhists in the district of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. The district of Kangra is situated in the western Himalayas, between 31° 2' to 32° 5′ N and 75° to 77° 45 E. The Dharamshala township area and its surroundings have mountainous scenery. Dharamshala is a prominent name among Buddhists as it is the home of Dalai Lama and the Tibetans in exile. It is famous for studying Buddhism, its sutras, tantras, and related texts. Lower Dharamshala is a busy commercial center, while upper Dharamshala, with the suburbs of Mcleodganj and Forsyth Ganj, retains a British flavor and colonial lifestyle. There is the church of Lord Elgin, British viceroy of India, during the 19th century. Many ancient temples like Jwalamukhi, Brijeshwari, and Chamunda lie on the plains below Dharamshala. Dharamshala has been selected to be developed as a smart city under Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship smart cities Mission. Till the British Raj, Dharamshala and its surrounding area were ruled by the Kotoch Dynasty of Kangra, a royal family that led the region for two millennia. Under the British raj, some regions were part of the undivided province of Punjab, led by the governors of Punjab from Lahore. Dharamshala was established in 1849 and has been a municipality since 1867. In 2015, Dharamshala was upgraded from a municipal council to a corporation.

Dharamshala has a heterogeneous population of different ethnicities (Gaddi, Gurkha, Tibetans), religious communities (Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims), and caste groups. The indigenous people in the Dharamshala area are Gaddis, a predominantly Hindu tribal community. They traditionally lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic transhumant lifestyle. Some Gaddis lost their farmland and seasonal pastures when the Gurkhas and the British arrived to settle due to a lack of permanent settlements in the area. Dharamshala developed as a rendezvous for the people of Kangra, who reside in Dharamkot during the summers. According to Gaddi's narrative, Dharamshala gets its name due to pilgrimage to the

Bhagsunag temple. Pilgrims from far-distant places would visit the temple to offer their prayers and reside around the temple premises. The word Dharamshala began to emerge after the second Anglo- Sikh war (1848-49) when the British East India Company annexed Punjab. Dharamshala has two significant areas where civilians settled: Mcleodganj and Forsyth Ganj. Till 1960, Dharamshala served as a summer tourist destination and cantonment, initially for the British Army and later the Indian Army. It came to limelight in May 1960 when the 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso) and migrants from Tibet came to settle in Dharamshala.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Gaddis are one of the most dominant and popular tribes of Himachal Pradesh. Gaddis are known in Himachal Pradesh as residents of Chamba, but nowadays, many have moved to the lower hills and settled down in the Kangra and Mandi districts. However, most Gaddi families have ancestral properties in Chamba, which they visit during summer to worship their local god or collect revenue from their leased land. Bharmour tehsil, the homeland of Gaddis, lies in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh. It is the principal settlement area of the Gaddis. It is situated along the Buddhal, a tributary of the river Ravi and comprises five valleys: Kugti, Tundah, Samara, Holi, and Bharmour. Historically, Gaddis are known to have taken one of the most hostile geographic regions in the world - highlands in the shadows of the mighty Dhauladhar range and the Middle Himalayas.The traditional houses of Gaddis are up to three storeys high. The ground floor is used to keep the cattle and store fodder. The first floor is used for the guests and to store the unprocessed agricultural harvest. The second floor is for the family and kitchen. The third floor is used to store grain, pickles, or sometimes for extended families. Each household consists of a nuclear family. Traditional joint families are unusual. The Gaddi family is considered complete with a pair of mules used to transport luggage during its migratory journey and sniffer dogs that dutifully guard their herds and unmanned belonging at night and during the day when they are away grazing their herds. The Gaddi dog is strong enough and intelligent to avoid wild animal attacks. If a goat or

sheep drifts into another flock, the dog guides the animal back into its enclosure.

Gaddi people are known for their unique culture concerning their distinctive clothes, food habits, rituals, and festivals. Gaddis are caste-endogamous and clan exogamous. They also avoid marriage with relatives. They do not follow any restrictions regarding marriage till 'gotra' exogamy is maintained. Gaddis are monogamous and critical of polygamy unless the spouse is deceased. Elopement, Jhindphuk or Brar Phuk marriage, Hanjrara, Ghar Jawantri, Batta- Satta, and Dan–Pun are some forms of the Gaddi marriage.The marriage practice goes for three days. They call the Bride *Laadli* and the groom *Laadla* in their dialect. The first day of the marriage is *Mehandi ki Raat* (Night). Almost all the relatives visit the bride and groom on this day and design *Mehandi* on their hands and feet. This ritual is mainly done by the bride's and groom's sisters. The second day is known as *Jani* which means *Barat*. On this day Groom's relatives and friends go to the bride's house for marriage rituals. The community priest chants marriage related *mantras* and *slokas* for hours, after which they become couples. The third day is known as *Pacheki.* On this day, after performing a few rituals and eating food, both bride and groom return to the groom's house. The Dowry system is absent in the community, but gift exchange can be seen at weddings. Gaddi values both boys and girls, but the male child is preferred. The Gaddi community practices serious monogamy, but a few cases of polygamy are also present.

In earlier days, pregnant Gaddi women (*Gaddan)* used to deliver a child in *Gaushala* (cattle shed) and stayed there for ten days due to pollution. She is seen to be impure during this period and can enter the house only after purification. But this tradition is not in practice anymore. Interestingly, a *Gaddan* is provided only milk and a *manda* (same as Dosa) for ten days. On the twelfth day, the mother with her baby comes out from *Gaushala* (cattle shed) and takes the blessing of lord *Surya Dev* (Sun). This occasion is trendy among Gaddis and, in their dialect, is known as *Barowhla.* Almost every relative attend this special day.

In earlier days, Gaddi men used to wear long, loose-grown (Choga) which went to the knees and were tied at the waist with rope made of

sheep wool (Dora) and a trouser (pajama) called Unali Suthan in the Gaddi dialect. They cover their head with colorful khadi caps. Shoes they used to wear were generally homemade but are now replaced by new shoes. Gaddi women wear long-gown, either green or pink in color on top and red on the bottom. Heavy embroidery work with colorful treads gives the upper part of the gown unique look.The gown is called Choga. They tie the Choga with a long black Dora. They accessorize the attire with ornaments made of silver though gold ornaments are also used by them now. Now many kinds of changes related to dress have entered the community. Now community people have shifted to attire that seems more comfortable to them while working, traveling, doing household chores, etc. Influence of other communities dressing sense can also be observed in the community. Gaddi women mostly wear salwar kameez with dupattas and men's shirts, jeans, and trousers. Sometimes they wear formal clothes while going to school, college, offices, etc. The lightweight artificial jewellery has replaced traditional silver ornaments. The impact of tourism, modernization, and media (Bollywood, Hollywood) can also be observed in their dressing style. But during special occasions such as weddings, festivals, and rituals, the community still wears its traditional attire and silver ornaments with pride. The community welcomes new changes without forgetting its rich culture, which is its most unique characteristic.

The Gaddi community eats a proper diet. Both men and women are known for their hard-working ability and physical strength. They prepare their food from locally available raw materials highly dependent upon the agro-climatic conditions, socio-cultural ethos, cultural and ethnic preferences, and religious beliefs. However, the community food habits, or traditional food and beverages are primarily limited to consumption at the household level. The traditional food habits and processing knowledge is transferred from generation to generation. Food habits and the formation of food products among the agro- pastoral Gaddis can be broadly classified into four categories which are (i) milk and its food product, (ii) agricultural and its food products, (iii) forest and its food products, (iv) animal flesh.

As pastoral by nature, milk is essential to Gaddi's diet. The milk products are prepared from milk by rearing goats, sheep, cows, yak, and

Churu (a hybrid of cow and yak). Ghee, butter, buttermilk, curd, etc., are the daily essentials of the Gaddi diet. Mahani (prepared from buttermilk) and Gurani (a mixture of jaggery and milk) are peculiar to Gaddi's food habits. Gaddis own sizeable lands in the Himalayan ranges , used for agricultural purposes. They are involved in farming maize, wheat, rice, potatoes, barely, various pulses, and edible leaves such as sarson, arbipatta, palak, chaulai saag, etc. All the leaves are good for metabolism and rich in vitamins and other minerals. Piddha and bhaat are some of the traditional foods prepared from rice. The Gaddi community also uses food products found in the Dhauladhar range's dense forest. Walnuts, pears, apples, wild strawberries, chestnuts, apricots, etc., are some of the forest food products used by the community. Gaddi people are mainly meat consumers in nature. It keeps their body warm and gives them energy. Cock, sheep, goat, fish, etc., are the meat they mainly prefer. Cow meat is forbidden because it is seen as a sacred entity. Meat consumption is avoided during festivals, Tuesdays, and Thursdays of every week which are devoted to specific gods and goddesses.

## TRIBAL STATUS, POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

The term Scheduled Tribe first appeared in the constitution of India. Article 366(25) defined Scheduled tribals as "such tribes or tribal community or parts of or a group within such tribals or Tribal community as are deemed under 342 to be scheduled tribe for the constitution". The tribal population in India is dispersed all over the country. There are 705 Scheduled Tribes in 30 states/UTs. As per the 2011 census[6], the tribal population of the country is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% live in rural areas, and 10.03% in urban areas. Gaddis is an agro-pastoral Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic community living mainly in the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. The total population of the Gaddi tribe is about 1.78 lakhs and about 45.4% of the ST population of the state. According to the Census of India 2011, Himachal Pradesh has the second-highest SC population (25.2%) in India, competing for 15% quota reservations, whereas the ST population (5.7%) competes for 7.5% quota reservations. Bharmour area of Chamba district of Himachal

Pradesh is known as the community's place of origin and homeland. According to the census of 2011, there are 178, 130 Gaddi Scheduled Tribes in Himachal Pradesh. In Jammu and Kashmir, Gaddis are found in Doda, Udhumpur, Ramban, and Kathua districts of the Jammu division. According to the 2011 census of India, in Jammu and Kashmir, the Scheduled Tribe Gaddi population is 464, 892.

| *Status* | *Caste* | *Subcaste* | *Traditional occupation* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Higher | Brahmans | Bhatt | Priest |
| | Rajputs | Thakur, Rana, Khatri, etc. | Agriculturists, soldiers, or working on warrior duties |
| Lower | Dhogri, Daggi, Sippy, Badi, Rihare, Hali | | Farmer, blacksmith, musicians, silversmiths, cleaners, laborers, basket makers, brass workers, shoe- repairers, etc. |

| *Scheduled Caste* | *Total Population* |
|---|---|
| Dhogri | 1, 606 |
| Daggi | 4, 683 |
| Sippy | 26, 907 |
| Badi | 22, 352 |
| Rihare | 3, 018 |
| Halli | 43, 218 |

*Census of India, 2011*

The Gaddi of Himachal Pradesh is a heterogeneous tribal/Dalit community. In 2002, the Scheduled Tribe status was only awarded to high caste Kangra Gaddis, instigating a reaction from Dalit groups who identify as Gaddi and are partially assimilated into tribal life. These low-status Dalits demand tribal recognition as a form of social justice in the face of the long standing social discrimination they have faced for years. Self-identifying Gaddi Dalits are largely sedentary laborers and former

landless tenants. Gaddi Dalits are those castes that marshal histories of indigeneity and untouchability as evidence of tribal inclusion. This includes Dhogri, Daggi, Sippy, Badi, Rihare, and Halli castes. These caste categories come under Gaddi Dalit's claims that Dalits ought to be listed as Scheduled Tribes and socially accepted as Gaddi. They are struggling for identity and external recognition. Gaddi Dalit is a term that states the problem of caste-based tribal exclusion. Across the Dhauladhar mountain range, Gaddi Rajputs are the majority in demographic terms and identify themselves as 'real' Gaddi and are availing reservation benefits of ST Gaddi in areas of Bharmour, Chamba, and Kangra.

On the other side, many Gaddi Brahmans (called Bhatt Brahmans) are traditionally priests by occupation, perform rituals and preside over lifecycle events. These Bhatt Brahmans, mainly from the area around Palampur and Baijnath, abandoned their ST status in the 1990s and accepted Other Backward class (OBC) status. Besides Gaddi Brahmans and Rajputs, there are six Scheduled Castes - Sippy, Halli, Dhogri, Daggi, Rhadey, and Baddi struggling for identity, social recognition, and respect.The notion of purity and pollution related to traditional lineage occupation led to their exclusion and social oppression. The Kangra Gaddis face an administrative paradox. Their counterparts in Chamba and Bharmour were granted ST status in the post-independence period. Those who migrated to the southern slopes of the Dhauladhar mountains in Kangra in early 19$^{th}$ century were considered general caste and later other backward castes (OBCs). This is because Kangra was part of Punjab, and the British administrators considered Punjab free of tribals. The Gaddi Dalits and their status are structurally analogous to other minorities within minorities and struggle for legitimacy and inclusion within the community. These Gaddi Dalits are doubly marginalized, ignored, and invisible, facing many socio-political challenges.

## OCCUPATION AND ECONOMY

In early days, Gaddis were known for their *Khanabadosh* (transhumance) lifestyle. Traveling to different Himalayan ranges with their domesticated animals, such as sheep, goats, cows, dogs, etc., was part of their lifestyle.

Pastoralism was their primary occupation. Along with pastoralism, many people from the community were landowners and started farming in their lands. Gaddi people without lands began working in the agricultural lands of Gaddi landowners (Brahman and Rajput Gaddi). This way, agriculture becomes part of their lifestyle along with pastoralism, providing them with stability and a regular source of income. As an impact of globalization and tourism, many community members shifted their occupation from being full-time agro-pastoral to semi-agro-pastoral. They started taking up full-time jobs in the market and got involved in various kinds of work, such as businessmen, entrepreneurs, etc. They utilize their resources, like land and domesticated cattle, to set up a business of hotels, restaurants, resorts, etc. They use their farming products to sell in the market for a better price, their cattle for wool, meat, milk, etc. Many people including women are involved in entrepreneurship and local businesses. After the settlement of Tibetan immigrants in Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj, people got more job opportunities. Many people got involved in government sectors by availing the benefits of reservation, while some migrated to different cities to find better job opportunities. Most community members are stable due to these changes, and only some people are sticking to the traditional agro-pastoral lifestyle. It may be concluded that the Gaddi community is no more *Khanbadosh*as. They live a very stable life all over the State of Himachal Pradesh. Development, tourism, and modernization have opened up new opportunities for the Gaddi community.

## POLITICAL SCENARIO

According to the migratory patterns of the Gaddis, there are two spatial orientations; one is highland Bharmour, and another is lowland Kangra. They represent not only the up and down extremities of their pastoral routes but also two distinct Gaddi populations marked by different trajectories of cultural assimilation, development, and political classification by the Indian government. After independence, Gaddis in Bharmour were granted Scheduled Tribe status, while those who migrated to Kangra were considered general castes and later Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Gaddis of Kangra fell into an administrative paradox. While their affines in

Bharmour were recognized as ST by the constitution, but they were denied the same. And the reason was that Kangra was part of Punjab, an area British administrators and anthropologists considered tribal-free. In 1966, Kangra was included in Himachal Pradesh, and Gaddis in Kangra appealed for ST status again to be united socially and politically with their relatives in Bharmour. Their demand intensified with the Mandal reforms and political alliances shifted in favor of the Gaddis. Their appeal was granted in 2002, based on an ethnological survey in Dharamshala and nearby areas, and strategically, only high-caste Gaddis were given the ST status. However, political reclassification did not involve SC Gaddi, who were conspicuously absent from the survey. This raises a question about the social organization of Gaddis. In many pieces of literature, the Gaddi 'tribe' is synonymous with the Rajput caste (Gaddi), subdivided by exogamous clan affiliations. A small group of Gaddi Brahmins, called Bhatt, are lineage priests clustered around Palampur, and Baijnath who abandoned their quest for ST status in the 1990s and accepted OBC status. Rajput Gaddis are a demographic majority, and hence are conventionally called 'Gaddi'. This inter-tribal caste hierarchy and the government naturalization of an exclusionary Gaddi order that has intensified claims of tribal belonging among allied SCs is called *Gaddikaran* (Gaddisation) among ethnic entrepreneurs.

In the constitution of India, Article 341(1) states that 'parts of groups within castes, races, or tribes' can be classified as SCs. This 'asymmetrical constitutional arrangement between SC and ST'[7]is that SCs can include tribes, but STs cannot include castes. According to them, this every day experience, the administrative gap between Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste, is felt as state-imposed exclusion from belonging. Casteism has shifted from blunt spatial and interpersonal discriminatory practices involving pollution avoidance to subtler reassertions as political idioms, a pattern seen throughout India[8]. In the general election of 2019 and 2022, politicians were predictably wrangling for the Gaddi vote bank in Kangra district. The BJP candidate and former winner were Kishan Kapoor, a Gaddi Rajput with political experience as the state government's food, civil supplies, and consumer affairs minister. He boasts of being instrumental in awarding ST status to high-caste Kangra Gaddi in 2002.

He has a reputation for being discriminatory and rejective towards SC Gaddis. Therefore, when Sudhir Sharma, a Congress Leader (winner by a wide margin), promised to extend ST status to leave out the other six SC Gaddis lead, the party won by a wide margin in the 2022 national election. According to my respondents, such promises are trotted out every election cycle.

## CONCLUSION

In the era of globalization and modernization, where many communities are giving up their traditional occupations or culture to adapt or survive, only a few have preserved and survived in niches. One of them is Gaddi, most of whom are well educated, well settled, have a proper settlement, and have adopted more permanent and high-income occupations such as government jobs, private organizations, etc. All these changes occurred after a large part of the population became part of the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste status. But culturally and politically, this community is still marginalized. Due to this cultural and political level marginalization, the community is giving up on traditional pastoral occupation, and SC Gaddis are demanding ST status. This is done to avoid the social stigma related to caste-based occupation and social discrimination by others and the ST community people on SC Gaddis. The state and central government have implemented several interventions directly impacting people's lives. There are many policies and schemes specifically for STs to upgrade their lives, depriving SC Gaddis of their rights simultaneously. This internally Scheduled Tribe-Dalit conflict within the community is the biggest obstacle faced by the Gaddis, making them doubly marginalized in society. The experience of Gaddi Dalits, doubly marginal and largely invisible, poses socio-cultural and psychological challenges for many. The Gaddis is an ethnographic example of how tribalism in Western Himalayas is shifting towards inclusion and plurality.

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# Gaddis and Bharmour: An Inseparable Landscape

*Priyanka Ohri*

ABSTRACT

*Bharmour, a small tribal tehsil in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh is also home to the Gaddis, a tribal community, which is identified by its unique dress, migratory and agro-pastoral lifestyle. Located in the higher reaches of Ravi valley, Bharmour is situated in the west of Chamba district and is characterized by rugged and mountainous topography. It is because of the presence of the Gaddi community that Bharmour is also referred to as Gadheran. This paper explains Bharmour's landscape and lifestyle of the Gaddis.*

## INTRODUCTION

This author got an opportunity to visit Bharmour as part of the field work that she was conducting in the region for her doctoral thesis which aimed to understand the Knowledge, Attitude, Behaviour and Practice (KABP) pertaining to reproductive health in the region. The research also encompassed understanding the landscape of the region and lifestyle of the people to supplement the understanding about health behaviors etc.Drawing on the understanding of the region, this paper has sought to position Bharmour within Himachal and at the same time has also made an effort to present the *Gaddi* community to the readers.

This paper has been divided into the following sections: **Himachal:A Northern Hill State**, which positions Himachal within India; **Bharmour: A Tribal Tehsil in Chamba**, which describes the geographical location of the area; **Bharmour: An Ecosystem for Ravi,** which describes how Ravi meanders through the region. This section draws on the observations of

the author; **Bharmour: A Home to Gaddis,** which describes the meaning of the various words associated with the landscape and *Gaddis*, explores the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status given to the tribe and puts forth an understanding of the reason Bharmour is known as a home for the *Gaddis*; **Gaddis & Their Occupations,** explores the occupations undertaken by the community; **Moving Away from Traditional Occupations,** explains how various factors are gradually influencing the community to move away from its traditional occupations; **A Gaddi Way of Life Represented through Tangible Symbols,** explains the lifestyle and cultural symbols of the community; **Geographical Barriers Compound the Challenges of a Tough Gaddi Life,** puts forth an understanding about the geographical barriers faced in the region. This section mainly draws from the observations and experiences of the author; and **Conclusion**, which tries to sum up the insights given in the paper.

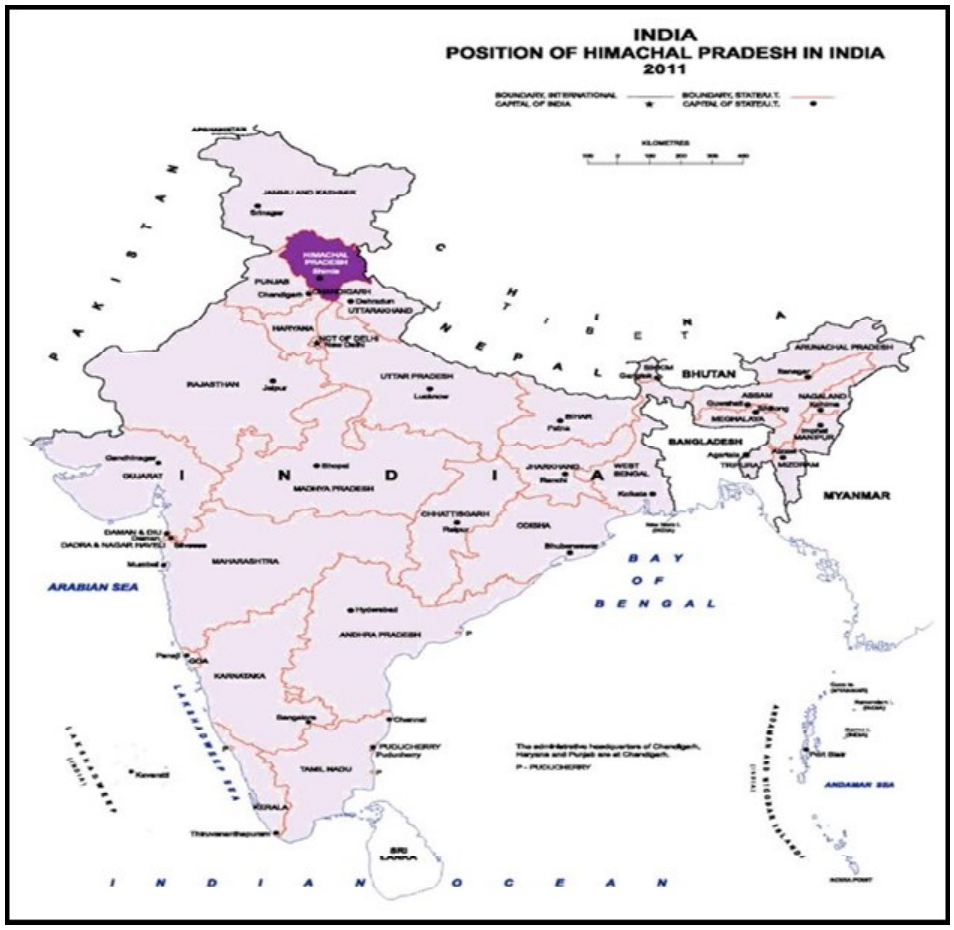
## HIMACHAL PRADESH: A NORTHERN HILL STATE

Himachal means land of snowy mountains; the word Himachal is a combination of two words *Him* and *Achala* wherein *Him* stands for snow which symbolizes purity and *Achala* stands for steady. Himachal Pradesh encompasses not only rugged mountains, but also valleys and cold desserts; and the state can be accessed either through plains of Punjab or hills of Shimla.[1]

Himachal Pradesh is a northern hill state of India. It covers the area of 55, 673 sq. km. with 20, 690 villages and 59 towns. As per Himachal Pradesh Profile (Census), 2011, the population size of Himachal Pradesh is approximately 68, 64, 602. Located between *'latitude: 30°22" N to 33°12" N* and *longitude: 75°47" E to 79°04" E'*, Himachal Pradesh has been divided into 12 districts for administrative purposes. Out of the twelve districts, three districts have tribal population. Whereas Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti are tribal areas in entirety, Chamba district has two tribal tehsils namely, Pangi and Bharmour.[2]Himachal Pradesh is home to tribes such as *Pangwals, Gaddis, Kinnauras, Gujjar, Jad, Lamba, Khampa, Bhot, Lahaulas* and *Swangla* etc.[3]Lying entirely in Western Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh is mountainous with varying altitude of 350 to 4500 meters above sea

level. It shares its boundaries with Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and international boundaries with China.[4]

**FIGURE 1**
**MAP OF INDIA HIGHLIGHTING THE POSITION OF HIMACHAL PRADESH**




*Source*: Administrative atlas-Himachal Pradesh, Census of India 2011, p. 2[5]

## BHARMOUR: A TRIBAL TEHSIL IN CHAMBA

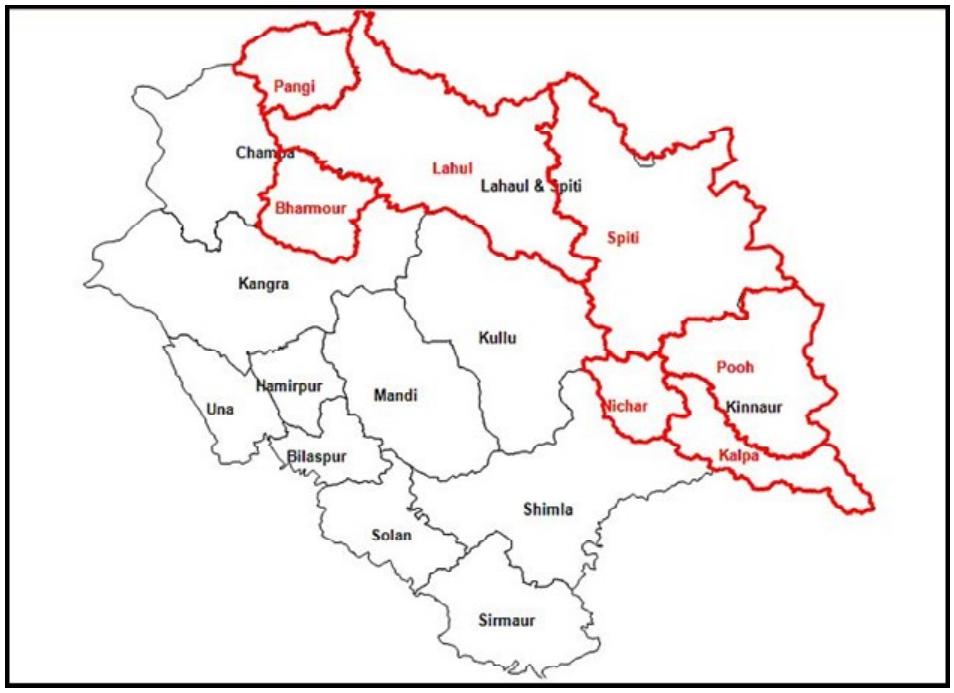
Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh is located between 32$^0$10' N to 33$^0$13' N latitude and 75$^0$45' E to 77$^0$33' E longitude[7]. Chamba has two tribal areas namely Pangi and Bharmour tehsil. Bharmour derives its name from Brahmpura, the ancient capital of princely state of Chamba. This sub-division of Chamba is located between 32$^0$11' and 32$^0$41' North latitude and 76$^0$22 and 76$^0$53' East longitude. Its boundaries run alongside that of

**FIGURE 2**
**ADMINISTRATIVE MAP OF HIMACHAL PRADESH**


*Source*: Administrative atlas-Himachal Pradesh, Census of India 2011, p. 4[6]

Kangra and Lahaul & Spiti district in the East, Chamba in the West, Pangi and Churah in the North and South is again flanked by Kangra district.[8]

**FIGURE 3**
**MAP OF HIMACHAL PRADESH DEPICTING THE TRIBAL AREAS (RED OUTLINE)**



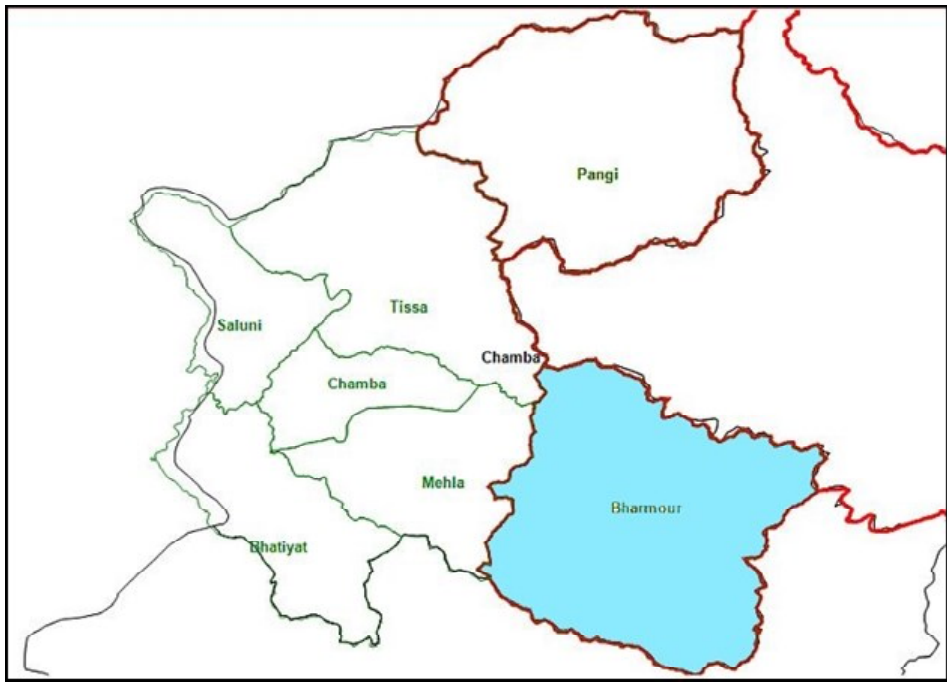

*Source*: Geographical Information System, Department of Tribal Development, Himachal Pradesh[9]

## BHARMOUR: AN ECOSYSTEM FOR RAVI

Bharmour and its Holi region is also an ecosystem for Ravi, one of the five major tributaries of the Indus river on the left bank of Punjab[11]. Originating from Bara Bangal in Kangra, Ravi comes gushing towards Bharmour region via Holi sub-tehsil, and on the way several nallahs merge with her. At Kharamukh, a point of divergence towards either Holi-sub tehsil (Ravi Valley) or Bharmour (Budhil Valley- named after Budhil River for which Manimahesh lake is a minor source[12]) is approximately at the distance of 48 Km from Chamba. At Kharamukh, one can also see the confluence of Budhil and Ravi river. Ravi is fed by numerous local and wild streams on the way forward, gifting Chamba valley with fertility and prosperity.

Bharmour is gifted with ample natural water resources, and many of these resources emerge from higher reaches of the mountains in the form of nallahs. Flow of nallahs is dictated by the season. These nallahs

**FIGURE 4**
**MAP OF CHAMBA DEPICTING TRIBAL AREAS OF PANGI AND BHARMOUR (RESEARCH AREA OF BHARMOUR HIGHLIGHTED IN BLUE)**




*Source*: Geographical Information System, Department of Tribal Development, Himachal Pradesh[10]

pass through several villages and alpine meadow pastures before merging with Ravi. The availability of these resources makes water one of the most significant elements of Bharmour's landscape. In addition to being natural means of drinking water, providing an appropriate habitat for the local flora and fauna, and reducing the likelihood of sudden flash floods, the local and wild streams also support the livelihood generation for the locals. Many streams in the region power a locally operated and mechanised flour mills, which are also referred to as *Gharaats* (water powered flour mills)[13]. Nonetheless, this ample availability of water has also led to the establishment of many hydropower projects on Ravi, including its smaller tributaries like Budhil river and local nallahs. These power projects have had many advantages for the region, like providing jobs to the locals, building road and bridge connectivity, and clustering of civic facilities around the projects etc.

## BHARMOUR: A HOME TO GADDIS

Main inhabitants of Bharmour are tribals who are identified by their dress, migratory and agro-pastoral lifestyle. Traditions and folklore connect the origin of the inhabitants of Bharmour to Hindus, who were pushed into Dhauladhar ranges due to the threat of persecution by invaders[14]. Bharmour is characterized by rugged and mountainous topography, as it has Dhauladhar mountain range in the South and Pir Panjal in the North. Bharmour is also identified as the traditional homeland of *Gaddis*. Hence, this area is also called *Gadderan*[15]. *Gadderan* or *Gathern* means alpine pastures which are grazed in spring (on the slopes of mountains). On these slopes of Pir Panjal and Dhauladhar ranges, *Gaddis* reside[16] and they affectionately refer to this inhabited area as *Gadheran*. The word *Gaddis* also seems to have its origin in *Gadar*, a hindi word for shephered. According to some oral narratives the word *Gaddi* also means the seat of Lord Shiva, so people who worhsip this *gaddi* are known as *Gaddis*.[17]

Furthermore, there are many theories regarding the settlement of *Gaddis* in Bharmour. According to one such theory it is believed that *Gaddis* migrated to Bharmour before 11th century or at times *Gaddis* are believed to have migrated to Bharmour at different times for numerous reasons. Colloquially, it is also believed that at some point in history, people migrated to Chamba and other areas of Chamba from Lahore. There is a famous saying in the region, *Ujda Lahore, Aur Basa Bharmour*, translating to 'Desolate Lahore led to the settlement of Bharmour'.[18]

This historical perspective gives a sense of perspective for Bharmour being a *'notional heartland'*[19]of the *Gaddi* community. In addition to this, *Gaddis* of Bharmour have also received Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. According to Christopher[20], *Gaddis* have traditionally practiced transhumance, and their migratory routes encompass the grazing routes between Bharmour/Chamba in summers and Kangra in winters. In fact, a substantial portion of *Gaddis* have settled in Kangra over the years. Before the reorganization of Punjab, Kangra was part of Punjab. Historically, Punjab had been administered by the British on an assumption that Kangra did not have any tribal population. Consequently, *Gaddis* residing in Bharmour received the ST status during the first constitutional tribal

scheduling in 1950. However, *Gaddis* residing in Kangra did not. It was only in the year 2002 that after a long struggle that *Gaddis* living in Kangra (Gaddi Rajputs and Brahmins) also received the ST status. On one hand there was a celebration, but on another five *Gaddi* castes namely *Sippi, Rihare, Badi, Dhogri and Hali* in Kangra were excluded from the *Gaddi* reclassification despite not only speaking Gaddi language but also exhibiting various aspects of *Gaddi* culture and self-identifying as *Gaddi*. Although these castes do enjoy the Scheduled Caste (SC) status but have not been given the ST status. Consequently, every election season witnesses promises from the leaders that these castes will also be given the ST status[21].

Against the backdrop of the information given above and despite the lack of ST status to a few *Gaddi* sub-castes in Kangra it is pertinent to understand that the word *Gaddi* renders a homogeneous identity to the inhabitants of Bharmour region (all *Gaddis* in Bharmour have an ST status except for the residents of Hadsar Panchayat[22]). *Gaddi* term is used to refer to a culturally homogenous group that resides in Bharmour. Within this group lays a further distinction of castes namely: *Brahmins, Rajputs* [*Rana, Thakur, Gaddi-Khatri*], and lower castes [*Sippi, Lohar, Hali, Thithyar or Riharas*][23]. According to Ranpatiya[24], despite the presence of different castes, and no matter to which caste a person belongs, inhabitants of Bharmour are called *Gaddis*, so consequently, a person from *Sippi* caste will not only be a *Sippi* but will also be a *Gaddi Sippi*. This applies to all the castes, suggesting a level of heterogeneity within the homogeneous group.

It is also interesting to note that traditionally only three upper castes of Brahmins, Rajputs and Khatris came in the ambit of the word *Gaddi* and indigenous communities like *Koli, Rihara, Lohar* etc. were regarded as non-Gaddis. However, in contemporary times, *Gaddis* is an umbrella term used to describe all the inhabitants of the region, making it a common identity.[25]According to Sarkar (1998)[26], *Gaddi* society has three broad caste categories: Brahmins, Rajputs or Sipis (lower castes). However, caste oriented duties are only secondary and there is hardly any difference in terms of culture and occupations between the castes. Some castes do have some specific duties, but they are equally respected because their work supports the basic livelihood system of the place. Furtermore, Sarkar states

that Lohars are important for the functioning of the *Gaddi* society because they carry out repairs of the agricultural tools. People from *Riharas* caste are musicians without whom festive occasions cannot be consummated. Each member of the community is important for its smooth functioning.

## GADDIS AND THEIR OCCUPATIONS

One of the main occupations of *Gaddis* is herding of animals. The climate of Bharmour is ideal for sheep and goat to thrive and the alpine meadow pastures on the higher reaches are ideal grazing grounds. *Gaddis* are known for their nomadic lifestyle influenced by their seasonal movement. In summers, after crossing high mountain passes on foot, *Gaddis* take their animals for grazing to Lahaul Valley and its adjoining areas. *Gaddi* families divide their work. While some members of the family move from one place to another in summers, other members stay at home to look after their agricultural land and practices. During the monsoons some of the families shift to the lower reaches of the Chamba and it is only after winters that they return to Bharmour.

During several field visits to Bharmour and *Gaddi's* migratory places like Kangra, their dependence on animals was clearly visible. *Gaddis* would migrate from one place to another on foot with their animals and bring up makeshift tents in the most unlikely places with their animals. *Gaddis* during their winter migration come down to the plains of Himachal (Kangra)/lower altitudes[27] and stay there until the onset of spring (March-April) until they begin their migration back to the *Gadehran*.

The following images were taken during one of the field visits in Kangra during a cold winter morning. The only way to spot the shepherds was to walk in the jungles and its peripheries and/or take the help of the locals. One of the most striking characteristics of the spots selected by them for pitching their temporary tents was the availability of water streams nearby, which would facilitate the cleaning of their sheep so that these could be sheared for wool.

Since *Gaddis* are primarily sheep herders, they also indulge in wool business. Traditionally, they also make and sell wool products like *Pattu*, *Shawls*, and woollen blankets etc. Women make woollen thread from the fibres that has been collected from their sheep and men hand weave colourful blankets from the yarn. However, in the most recent times, as per the discussions with a few shepherds, they have been facing problems in selling their wool at a good price. Consequently, there were sacks full of sheared wool in many households of *Gaddis* visited in Kangra, as they had been unable to sell it.

Additionally, *Gaddis's* herd also comprises of goats which are sold by them for meat. Goats are sold and fetch a price which is in accordance with the weight. Furthermore, *Gaddis* also depend on agriculture and wild produce to make a living. Since, people live on the slopes, they undertake terrace farming on a dry and stony land. They usually depend on rainfall for irrigation and prefer sowing crops which are not water intensive, e.g., *Rajmah* (Red Kidney Beans), *Maah ki daal* (Black Gram Lentils), *Kluth ki daal* (Horse Gram), other pulses. Along with walnut trees, people have also started capitalizing on the apple growing potential of the area. Areas on the higher reaches can be seen replete with *Nyoza* (pine nuts) tress, which is considered one of the most important cash crops for the locals, as it sells at approximately 2000 -3000 INR/Kg. The locals also depend on the produce from jungles for their livelihood. They harvest cash crops like *Gucchi* or Morel Mushrooms, but owing to a short harvest season, these are sold at a high price.

## MOVING AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

Although the traditional occupations are a primary source of livelihood for the *Gaddi* families, these now enjoy a chequered existence with other new employment opportunities. Due to the establishment of roads, connecting Bharmour with the outside world, and giving access to education, people of Bharmour have been introduced to other livelihood prospects. They have begun getting employment with the government and private organizations within and outside Bharmour. Families are educating their children including girls, breaking taboos. In the present scenario illiteracy continues to limit itself to the older generation[28]and youth continues to mingle with the outside world, generating livelihood in administrative services or teaching. While this happens, the purview of *Gaddi's* traditional occupation continues to become narrow, increasingly limiting itself to lesser number of families.

Additionally, as per the conversations with many *Gaddis* and their families, toughness of life encourages them to seek out new occupations/ vocations. Furthermore, decreasing number of livestock holding and movement permits evidence of disinterest towards the profession, which can be attributed to theft of the livestock during their migrations, declining fodder availability and need for education for their children[29].

## GADDI WAY OF LIFE REPRESENTED THROUGH TANGIBLE SYMBOLS

For *Gaddis*, their animals are their wealth, which are also referred to as *Dhan* (wealth)[30]. *Gaddis* walking through the mountain passes with their flock do not fear anything. They have everything that they need. Every item that they carry with them does not increase their burden, in fact every item fulfils a crucial functional objective and at the same time is also a tangible cultural symbol of their lifestyle and a symbol of an intimate and culturally continuous connection with their traditional occupational identity.

Their *topi* (headgear) is their constant companion. They wear a *chuhali topi* (pointed cap) during festivals and on other normal days they don an ordinary *topi*.[31]. The beige overcoat is a constant companion of a shepherd

traversing the high mountain passes with its herd. This overcoat is a culmination of hand weaving process combined with traditional knowledge and skills, is worn by them despite the weather in their migration cycles, as it regulates the temperature of their body; they also carry a *Hukka*[32](smoking pipe) with them on their journeys with their herd of sheep/goat. Utensils are an indication of their nomadic life and facilitate living in the wilderness. They carry the food supplies in a bag made up of goat skin called *Khalru/Khalri*[33]which also protects the food material from the extreme weather elements to which they are constantly exposed. *Gaddis* also hand weave *Pattis* or blankets, which are called *Gardus*, a fine quality woollen product, which serves as a cover cloth and are also sold by the *Gaddis* during their stay in the lower altitudes in winter months[34].

On some occasions they can also be seen with a *Dora*, which means the girdle, which the *Gaddi* ties around his waist. This girdle is made up of thick wool and is also known as *Gatri*[35], which is the most useful thing in the dress of the *Gaddi*. The girdle when tied on the waist creates a womb like space, which is used to keep the new-born lambs safe. The girdle is used to hang things like, a box holding tobacco, *Runka* (a iron tool to create fire by striking on the stone), *Bhujlu* (a thread to facilitate creating fire), sickle and a flute[36]. In addition to the above, other components of their traditional attire include *Chola* (a dress loosely hand stitched, held together by the Dora), *Chuhali Topi*, (a pointed cap), *Pulan*, (shoes made of grass), which has lost its utility today, yet people wear them at home.

These tangible functional objects are a cultural representation of a community, which continues to hold on to its identity and these tangible cultural representations continue to facilitate a way of life, which is a cultural entity in itself. These material objects crystallise their identity as *Gaddis*, help them navigate a crucial aspect of their lives, and evoke a nostalgia for their ancestral practices, keeping them tied to their traditional knowledge and giving them a sense of belonging to a community with shared practices.

Other material objects, which expand an already intimate connection with their identity are hand spindle and handloom, linking them with their weaving occupation; *Gharaats*[37] (water operated flour mills) which

operate due to the abundance of wild nallahs in and around Bharmour. These are used by the community to grind the grains to convert into flour. As this tangibility enables a unique way of life, the *Gaddi* community has also devised a set of traditions, which are part of this distinct lifestyle and cannot be understood separately.

*Gaddis* lead a tough life. However, people and their families take it in their stride. While male members of the family navigate their migration cycles, other family members stay at home lending a hand in their fields. When one walks the thin cemented or the dirt path that goes through various villages, women can be seen sitting in their *aangan* (veranda) laid with stones, sifting grains, one corner of the veranda can be seen laid with bright red kidney beans and another corner can be seen filled with black lentils. The roofs of the house are reserved for the yellow corn to be laid out, so that it can be dried to make flour. In some houses women can also be seen working with hand tools to soften the wool so that it can later be spun into a yarn. Every visible corner of each home is livened up by women's constant activity. The following picture was taken during one of the field visits to Bharmour (Panjsei Village).

In Gaddi households, women not only look after the house while men are away, but they also work shoulder to shoulder with men in all other economic activities. While men plough the fields, women sow the

crops. On one hand men sheer the sheep and weave the blankets, but first, women spin the yarn. Both men and women enthusiastically take care of their flock. Women also influence the day-to-day decision making in the household whether it pertains to the mundane or the buying and selling of cattle etc.

In *Gaddi* households and society everyone has practical role to fulfil, yet every household and *Gaddi* society at large is influenced by their traditional and cultural practices. Some of these practices include women being advised and expected to keep pardah from the male members of the family. Further, according to Ranpatiya,[38] owing to the scaredness of the *Dhaars*[39](alpine meadow pastures/grasslands), women can not accompany men. Another most important tradition of the *Gaddi* society is being able to maintain a sense of community. The tangible cultural objects, shared practices, traditions, and a collective culture helps the *Gaddis* in maintaining a sense of community. However, we-feeling that was palpable during each field visit in Bharmour does not limit itself to festivities and ritualistic traditions. A collective *Gaddi* tradition also calls for helping each other within the village. Every village is a small community, which is symbolised by the presence of homes in proximity with each other. Everyone knows each other and everything about each other; every festivity and activity like house construction, cutting of grass, digging of infertile land, and even the event of someone's death, calls for a willing contribution of other village members.

According to Ranpatiya[40], more backward a society[41] is, tighter knit it is, which helps them in establishing a feeling of brotherhood, devising culture specific norms, and motivates them to take care of each other. Further, he states that because the *Gaddi* community is tight knit, it becomes easy for the people to maintain cultural continuity by seamlessly transmitting the traditions between generations and among each other.

This sense of brotherhood and feeling of community is further amplified due to the immense geographical barriers that influences a *Gaddi's* life. Living between the mighty mountain ranges must not be easy and since the connection with the outside world is not always possible due to these geographical barriers, it must also create a need to establish deeper bonds with people around. These barriers make the *Gadheran* inaccessible

to some extent, which on one hand create an aura of ambiguity around the *Gaddi* life, but at the same time also create a fertile ground to maintain a continuity in practice of cultural, and professional traditions, which do have a significant influence on their day-to-day lives.

## GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS COMPOUND THE CHALLENGES OF A TOUGH GADDI LIFE

The thing about Bharmour and other tribal areas in Himachal is that these are deep valleys carved out by gushing rivers, surrounded by mountains, which have been then cut to develop road connectivity to the areas. Due to harsh monsoons and heavy snowfall in the winter, all-weather availability and pliability of roads is usually affected. In addition to the unpredictable weather events, these areas are also marred by the constant struggle of the authorities to keep the roads clear during constant snowfall spells in winters. Since there are no air or railway links to the tribal areas, roads are crucial for development, daily activities, and for access to education and healthcare services.

During visits to the region, especially in monsoons, one of the most surprising observations was that on one hand narrow roads and constantly life-threatening road blockages were frightening to say the least, but on other hand, for people in Bharmour, life seemed normal, students were going to schools; and there was a regular movement of sheep and goat traffic with their sheep dogs and shepherds. Every time a flock of sheep and goat came closer, vehicles would politely give them a pass, which is also a common courtesy and etiquette in Bharmour, Lahaul, and Pangi.

If these road conditions are any indication, not every village in the region is easily accessible by road. For example during a visit for data collection in monsoons, roads to villages like Suai and Ullansa were blocked due to heavy rains. Consequently, Suai had to be reached on foot. Such was the mountain trail to Suai that one's legs could not get used to walking even for a minute. So, after being dropped in a jeep taxi up till a vantage point from where one can walk uphill through some villages, mountain trail to Suai started to amplify the inhospitable geographical environment. Standing at the edge of the trail, and at the edge of the deepest gorge one

could ever set eyes on, villages like Greema and Khani were visible on the top of another mountain.

Despite having gorgeous scenery, despite being in an environment which is conducive for clearly hearing your own thoughts, the first thing that comes to mind is not the lack of internet and virtual access to the world, but the influence these conditions must have on people. Lack of frequent public transport, huge distances between villages and the nearest bus stops or school or healthcare facility, and mountainous terrain makes it extremely pertinent that everyone walks. In fact, perhaps, walking is deeply enmeshed with the life in Bharmour.

## CONCLUSION

This paper facilitates an understanding that despite the lessening practice of traditional occupation(s), the significance of the term *Gaddi* comes from *Gaddi's* tangible cultural symbols and customary vocation of shepherding, as much as it comes from the word *Gadehran*. If there was no *Gadheran*, there would be no shepherding and vice versa. The *Gaddi* identity give *Bharmouri* people an ownership of quintessential way of life, which persists over generations (cultural continuity) and manifests in their lifestyle through tangible and intangible cultural symbols.

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# Gujjar-Bakarwal Tribe Resource Management with Reference to their Local Practices and Traditional Institutions

*Arshad Ahmed, Kheraj, Amjed Ali, Kiran Rani* and *Meenaxy*

ABSTRACT

*Seasonal migration of humans and livestock between different agro-ecological zones is the oldest pastoralist practice in many mountain regions worldwide, significantly impacting their sustenance and resource management. Gujjar-Bakarwal tribe, which predominantly lives in the Pir-Panjal range of the Himalayan mountains in India, also practices seasonal migration for the optimization of its resources within the framework of local practices and traditional institutions.This study explores the role of their local practices and traditional institutions, such as* Jirga *(Panchayat institution), in managing natural resources accounting for the interdependence of seasons and social life. In addition, it aims at understanding the deterministic role of seasons on the socio-economic life of the Gujjar Bakarwal tribe. It analyses how the practice of transhumance has been sustained in the context of the socio-economic and cultural landscape, seasonality, and climate change. The informal interactions and conversations with local people were crucial sources for this study. Focus group discussions, individual interviews, and participant observation were used to identify the current local institutions that fit this ethnographic study. The findings indicate that the local practices and traditional institutions* (Jirga) *in the target area play a significant role in determining and sustaining each socio-economic practice with its distinctive objective and level of importance. It also suggests the measures policy-makers can take to strengthen or supplement these institutions and practices in the present scenario. Present research gives insights into the importance of local practices and traditional institutions amongst the Gujjar-Bakarwal tribe for sustainable, social, and economic development by effectively managing their natural resources.*

**Keywords:** *Ethnography, Seasonal migration, Gujjar-Bakarwal, Traditional institutions, Resource management, Pastures.*

## INTRODUCTION

Institutions, particularly at the local level, are essential to sustainable development for mobilizing resources and managing their use to preserve a long-term basis of productive activity[1]. In the context of the management of natural resources, the capacity of local practices and traditional institutions to include the user of a resource in its rational management is a necessary prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable usage. To make a livelihood out of the available resources, pastoral communities function within well-organized institutions that regulate the activities they partake in and their relationships with the surrounding environment. Villages, hamlets, kin groupings, and households are all included in this category[2].These kinds of organizations provide the foundation that make it possible for various community goals to be accomplished. They are dynamic and grow alongside society with the requirements of its people. Local practices and traditional institutions may exist for an extended period, achieve their goals, fade away, or evolve to benefit from new possibilities[3]. These vary in terms of their functions and objectives[4] and encompass a wide variety of indigenous organizations and functions. Some examples include governance at the village level, asset management, conflict resolution, security arrangements, acceptable methods for mobilizing community resources, and lineage organization.

Local practices and institutions become all the more important where communities live in a complex terrain away from the main cities, and where access to legal machinery is complex. Therefore, for maintaining law and order or ensuring the equitable distribution of natural resources, which often leads to disputes, communities primarily depend on the traditional institution and cite local practices[5]. For this reason, local practices such as transhumance have developed locally in different parts of the world[6]. Traditional institutions for dispute resolution are found across the globe with different nomenclature.

### Transhumance across the Globe

For thousands of years, humans have been living as part of the natural ecosystem, causing various disturbances and maintaining a sustainable

relationship with their environment[7]. Grazing land is mainly used for livestock rearing in widespread use. This has been part of the lives of 100 to 200 million people worldwide for a long time and has also been a part of their social, economic, and cultural lives in recent years[8]. The animal husbandry production system covers approximately 25% of the earth's land surface. Many shepherds originated in Africa. Grazing is similarly prevalent in dry and sub-moist areas of Europe and South America, South and East Asia, and the Middle East[9]. However, its reputation has been a mystery throughout its long history, and sedentary farmers and urban residents have marginalized its practitioners. Pastoral communities have risen and fallen, splintered into isolated families or established world-spanning empires. Their extinction is often reported in the face of evidence contradictory to claims that they have continued to exist[10]. Although forage systems have great diversity, they generally have the characteristics of low population density, high mobility and vitality, complex information systems, and spatial knowledge. Pastoral societies are frequently marginalized on social, political, and economic levels[11].

Nevertheless, they contribute significantly to national economies, achieving development goals and maintaining the ecosystem of pastures[12]. Shepherds know how to balance conservation and sustainable use because they use fields for many different things, like food, forage, and water[13]. The pastoral system is adapted using three primary resources: fauna, water, and grassland[14]. Transhumance is the seasonal movement of herds and their herders in search of better pastures and water. Although animals are often accessible, transhumance does necessitate seasonal migration of the pack and its herder.Seasonal migrations usually occur between two locations, predetermined and marked as pasture and water availability. Therefore, transhumance is a particular form of need for adaptive measures on the part of the nomadic population, and it differs to some extent from nomadic hunters and gatherers, who are always on the move and will not periodically return to earlier locations.

## Major forms of Pastoralism

There are two types of pastoralism: transhumance and nomadic. Transhumance herders follow a cyclical migration pattern, distinguishing

between settlement areas with fixed or temporary huts. Compared with nomads, transhumance is generally dependent to some extent on the food of its animals. They often grow vegetables on a small scale in their settlement areas[15]. Pastoral nomads follow a seasonal migration pattern that may differ yearly. The time and place of migration are determined mainly by discovering water and food[16]. Local pasture management and use often result in conflicts between pastoralists and other local communities and between local communities and governments involved in various institutional arrangements in natural resource management and pastoral and non-pastoral societies.There are conflicts since many traditional pastures are included in community forests, so grazing is now restricted.

## TRANSHUMANCE IN PIR PANJAL RANGE OF INDIAN HIMALAYAS

Several transhumant communities, including the Bhotiyas, Gaddis, and Gujjar-Bakarwals, practice transhumance in the Himalayas. These communities have been instrumental in the Himalayan pastures' management and maintenance as economically productive systems for hundreds of years, and their contributions have been much valued[17]. They continue to follow well-defined trails to reach the pastures even though they are reliant on livestock even to this day[18]. The Gujjar Bakarwal is one of the transhumant communities that live in the Pir Panjal range of the Himalayan mountains. They start movements from the lower, middle, and higher mountain ranges in the Pir-Panjal range to reach Jammu and to Kashmir. When the seasons change, they return with their flock of buffaloes, goats, and sheep[19]. The Gujjar Bakarwals have extensive knowledge of ecosystems, the geographical distribution of resources, access to help, and the use of resources[20]. During their migration, they provide care to both themselves and their animals using the knowledge that has been passed on from generation to them on the use of various resources[21]. In addition, they are knowledgeable about fodder and fuel wood species[22].

The impact of climate change is evident on the grazing lands of Pir Panjal. It is reported that as the precipitation pattern changes and glaciers melt more, the average temperature increase in high-altitude regions is

higher than in lower-altitude areas. Some other notable effects of climate change on mountainous regions include droughts, massive floods of glacial lakes, changes in snowfall and precipitation in the area, landslides leading to crop failure, livelihood and food insecurity, shortages of water, and increased income insecurity[23]. The mountainous areas have been labelled "climate change hotspots" which could significantly impact the mountain ecosystem, people living there, human settlements, and lowland economies[24]. Grazing sheep is a way to deal with climate change because it uses grazing resources at different altitudes[25].

Studies indicate that population, traditional institutions, and markets cause changes in the economic situation in the mountainous areas of Pir-Panjal. There is an impact on the climate, the mountain ecosystem, and the Gujjar Bakarwals. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the Gujjar Bakarwal tribe is preserved in the Pir Panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir and follows a pastoral herding practice. This study addresses the following objectives.

- To identify the role of local practices and traditional institutions in managing natural resources.
- To analyze the deterministic role of seasons in the social and cultural life of Gujjar Bakarwals.
- To analyze the practice of transhumance sustained in the context of climate change, seasonality, cultural landscape, and socio-economic dynamics.

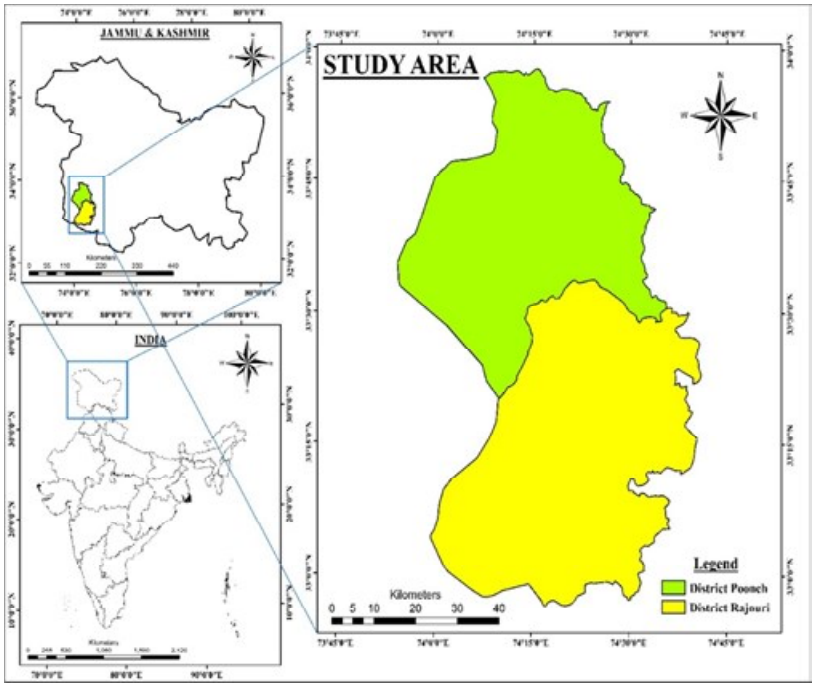
**Study area**

Poonch and Rajouri districts are two of the 20 districts in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Poonch district is located in the southwestern part of Jammu and Kashmir and is bounded by the Line of Control (LOC) with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on its western and southern sides. The district has an area of 1, 674 square kilometers and is divided into five tehsils. As per the 2011 Census of India, the total population of the Poonch district was 476, 835.Rajouri district is located in the north western part of Jammu and Kashmir and is also bounded by the LOC with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on its western side. The district has an area of 2, 630 square kilometers and is divided into six tehsils. As

per the 2011 Census of India, the total population of the Rajouri district was 642, 415.The Gujjar Bakarwal community is one of the largest ethnic groups in Jammu and Kashmir and is primarily involved in pastoralism and dairy farming. In Poonch and Rajouri districts, the Gujjar Bakarwal community is one of the largest ethnic groups and constitutes a significant proportion of the total population.

As per the 2011 Census of India, the total population of Gujjar Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir was 1, 234, 422, out of which 144, 372 were in the Poonch district and 178, 453 were in the Rajouri district. This means that the Gujjar Bakarwal community constitutes around 12% of the total population of the Poonch district and around 28% of the total population of the Rajouri district.Compared to other ethnic groups in Jammu and Kashmir, the Gujjar Bakarwal community is one of the largest, with only the Kashmiri and Dogra communities having a larger population. However, the Gujjar Bakarwal community is unique in that they are primarily pastoralists and have a distinct cultural identity and way of life that sets them apart from other ethnic groups in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Location of the research area**



## ETHNOGRAPHY

Transhumance and contemplation on the organization of human life are not mutually exclusive. Rosaldo(1986) used the approach to characterize his idea of ethnographic sensibility in his contribution to James Clifford and George Marcus' *Writing Culture* thirty years ago. Rosaldo suggested that the transhumant movement provided a valuable model for understanding the complexities of such sensibility, drawing on Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie's historical ethnography and E. E. Evans-Pritchard's observations on the ethnographic approach. He said that if the ethnographic gaze is trapped between seeing variation and seeking significance, then: "Ethnographers' career itineraries can be half-seriously and half-playfully likened to the patterned movements of transhumant pastoralists rather than nomads (tourists) or peasants (missionaries and colonial officials)".

**Methods of investigation**

To understand the intricacies of the tribal lifestyle, it is crucial to have a participant observation which is a comprehensive tool for collection of information about seasonality and sociality. Informal interaction and conversation with locals through participation, interviews with group members, and an analysis of group documents and artifacts[26] has been employed. Therefore, critical sources of information about seasonality and sociality were informal interaction and conversation with locals through participant observation. In-depth interviews were conducted in the study area in November 2020.Three kinds of tools have been used for information collection.

**Participant Observation:**Participant observation is a method of gathering qualitative data that provides detailed information on human activities and experiences in a particular environment.Using this method, a researcher can participate in a social group to monitor both the individuals in the group and the surroundings. This provides the researcher with a comprehensive view of how people make meaning of their experiences and the events they take on around them[27].

**In-depth interview:** for the individual Gujjar Bakarwal to collect

salient information about local institutions and their roles.

**Seasonal Calendar:**The research aims to get knowledge on the shifts in means of subsistence over a year. The seasonal calendar has been utilized in order to gain knowledge regarding the shifts that take place in economic activity throughout the year.

**Oral History:** Oral histories of transhumance have been used to understand the changes in the community through time. The target groups for local records have been the *Mukkaddam* (Headman of a group), *Lambardar* (Formal headman of a group of families), elderly persons, and herders to understand their origin, traditional way of living, rituals, beliefs, and practice of transhumance community.

## Results And Discussion

In this study, various local institutions were found to exist, which were broadly common to all the sub-units of the study area. Accordingly, as a characteristic of their functional role, five major types of local institutions were identified in the study area.

## Typology of practices and local institutions

1. Livestock practices
2. Labour practices
3. Health practices
4. Traditional Leaders
5. Panchayats Organisation Institutions *(Jirga)*

### 1. Livestock-Based practices

Shepherd is a person who grazes the animals of others on a payment basis. The owner of a flock who employs the services of shepherds is known as the owner. The types of shepherds identified in this community are three kinds. Firstly, those who are owners of small flocks and take the animals of others on shepherds' contracts are part-time shepherds. Secondly, those who themselves are flock owners, but their family labour pool is big. So other families may hire them as shepherds, supplementing the family income. The third is a full-time shepherd of the big flock owners, and their families live and migrate with the flock.

**2. Labour practices**

Labour is allocated among family members based on sex and age, albeit the responsibilities explicitly allotted to each sex or age group are not always rigorously followed. Cooking, washing, carrying water, nurturing children, gathering wood, and creating woolen clothes are among household duties performed by women. Male adults are in charge of repairing equipment, maintaining tents, twining ropes, and caring for herding animals.Labour work is the primary source of income for many families. The individual members also enter into several contractual arrangements to fill the labour requirements gap. The number of family workers typically depends upon the size of the family. Adult workers, i.e., males above fourteen in a family who can work as shepherds, constitute the male workforce.

**3. Health practices**

Health institutions readily rely on traditional medicine along with modern medicine.Apart from that, people contact occultists such as *Maulavis, Faqirs* and *Sadhu-Sant*, etc., for exorcise- incantation for healing and economic problems. Their widespread acceptance is underlined and highlighted by the local people who discuss such matters with immense faith and confidence among other community members. Notwithstanding the scientific evidence in support of the healing effect of such practices, these continue to have great faith and psychological importance for the local people.

**4. Traditional Leaders**

Institutional leadership can be found in the study area, *Mukkaddam* (head of the community). In the old belief system,*Mukkaddam* was a person with a position of prominence. He was always the prominent leader through which the community has channelized political, economic, and legal systems to solve the conflict. As a result, individuals, as well as organizations, resorted to them to have their problems resolved. Mostly, people agree to their decisions, preventing them from going to court. In rare cases, when people disagree with their choices, they may go the legal

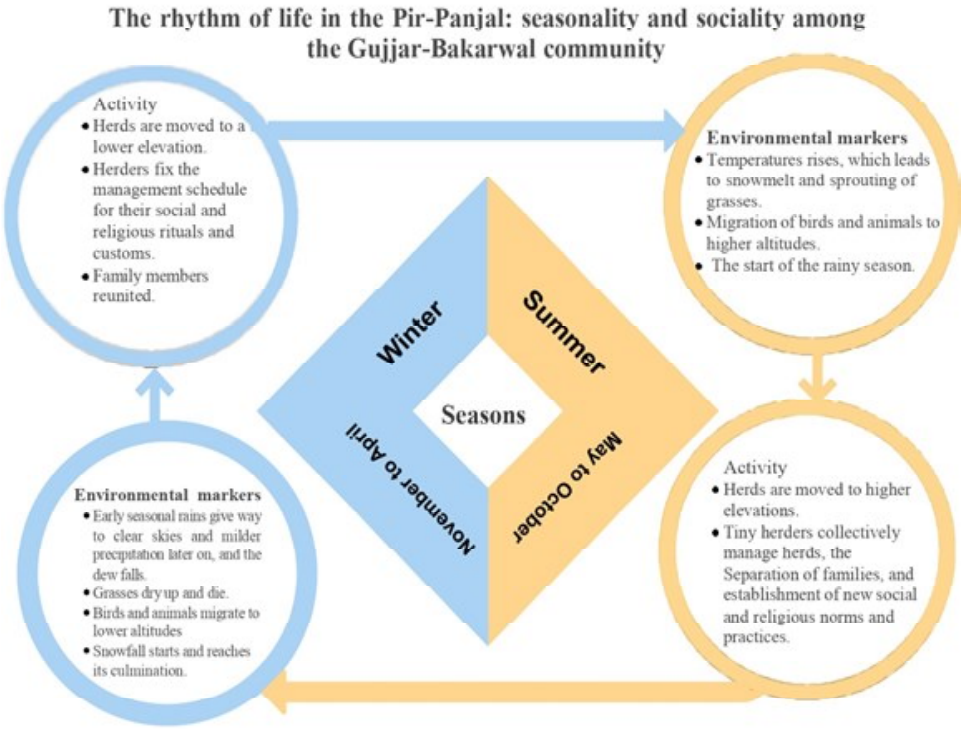
way. However, in the access to court, the barriers of geographical distance to the mainland and limitations of time and money, besides the lack of awareness of legal institutions, are enormous. For this reason, traditional leaders play an essential role in managing dispute settlement at the local level speedily and judiciously.

**5. Panchayats (*Jirga*)**

The Gujjar Bakarwal society has an established *Jirga* system, i.e., Panchayats, an ancient institution in their culture. *Jirga* is the name of the place which is common place for the community and its leaders to sit together and resolve disputes. However, there is no general *Jirga* for the whole Gujjar Bakarwal tribe in the state; each *Kafila* (a big herding group comprising two or three sub-herding groups) has its separate *Jirga*. *Jirga* can resolve disputes among family members, neighbours, and other community members. *Jirga* has a significant influence on today's government setup to settle the conflicts of their communities. Still, their functioning is usually limited to their own *Kafila*, which the *Mukaddam* leads. However, in some cases, when the *Mukaddam* has a massive influence in nearby communities, they may be invited to sit together and resolve the disputes of other *Qabilas* (larger group as compared to *Kafila*) or inter-*Qabila* disputes. The formal hierarchy of groups and sub-groups by which the *Kafila* are ordered into a tribe and through which their leaders exercise their administrative power and use of resources.

**Winter Pasture**

This topographic zone ranges between 610 and 1, 220 meters above sea level and is a zone of Gujjar Bakarwal winter pastures. The area of human and animal migration has a central character. Families live in permanent locations, while shepherds graze their flocks within a 10 to 18-kilometer radius of their winter bases. The daily movements pertain to the operations of herding. The timing and directions of these movements are determined by every day. In the morning, they walk to the river to water the animals, and in the afternoon, they spread their livestock in the grasslands to graze. Typically, these small movements do not entail a change of location and are restricted in distance (fig. 2).



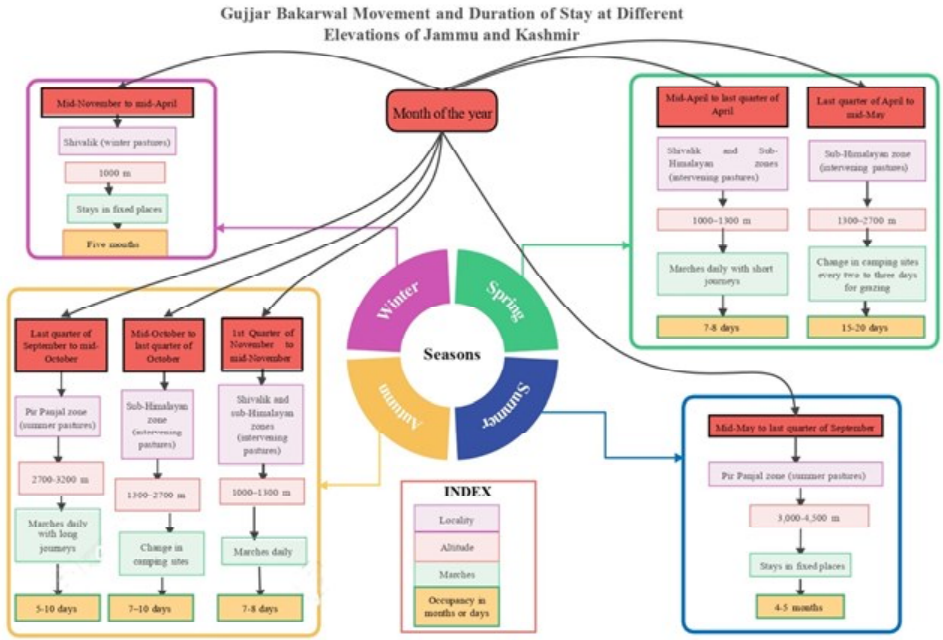

## Spring Pasture

The Gujjar Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir begin their annual spring migration from their winter resorts to their summer bases again in the last quarter of April. When the transhumance starts from the winter bases, during preparations for this migration equipments are repaired and account settled with local traders and farmers. One or two days before the departure, they pay a regular visit to the holy shrine of their ancestors. On the day of departure, they start early in groups of seven to ten families with all their household belongings. The remaining families follow these marching members after an interval of two to three days in groups.

These groups march daily, covering modest distances until they arrive at intervening pastures. After roughly seven to eight days of residing in different fields, the groups form a larger group. Then these large groups move together through the Pir Panjal mountain passes, stopping only for rest and grazing. After crossing through the Pir Panjal mountain zone, these marching groups stay two to three days on the fringes of the Kashmir valley. They prepare for the next journey, which will take them across

Kashmir's valley. They march across Kashmir valley on long marches with minimal stops. After crossing the Kashmir valley, they enter the side valleys (Parle Kashmir) and stay for five to ten days. The group members are divided into smaller groups and march slowly in short marches until they arrive at summer destinations (fig. 2).

**FIGURE 2**




## Summer Pasture

During July, August, and September, they settle at their self-appointed pastures and graze their flock on the lush green grasses of the Great Himalayan ridges, which lie at an altitude of 3, 000 to 4, 500 meters and almost touch the snowline. During this time of year, the Gujjar Bakarwals engage in crucial economic and social activities (fig. 2).They spend their time producing *Shailly* (ropes and cords woven for their use to pack the tents and baggage) and other handicrafts in *Dharas* (shelter). They also spin wool material and weave homespun woollen fabrics. They forage for medicinal plants, hunt for food, and musk deer. Some go hunting and lumbering in the forests, while others work as tourist coolies close to the resorts. Weddings and other religious and social celebrations are only two

examples of the many enjoyable events that occur throughout the summer.

PLATE 1.***DHARA*** **(HUT) ON SUMMER PASTURE**

The late summer season is signalled by short migration towards the pastures on the slopes along the valley. This short-term migration in summer is different from the earlier migration. The families remain in their *Dhara* (plate-1) at their self-appointed summer pastures. Only a group of young shepherds pack up and organize this migration for a few days. They migrate some days around the northern edge of the valley slopes and return to their self-appointed resorts. This short trip's motive is to use some good pastures within their reach.

**Autumn Pasture**

The autumn migration of the Gujjar Bakarwals starts in the last quarter of September to mid-November every year from their summer resorts to the winter bases. Before the journey begins from summer bases, they pack all materials two to three days before the departure. On the day of departure, they move in groups of five to ten households early in the morning and cross over the passes to the southern slopes of the Great Himalayan ranges facing the Valley of Kashmir. The shepherds graze the

animals for fifteen to twenty days on these slopes, just above the side valleys, where they have agricultural fields. Some male members of the families come down to the side valleys to harvest their fields and collect grains. Later, the animals are brought from these slopes to the side valleys. They prepare for two to three days for the next journey through the valley of Kashmir. The small groups unite to form a bigger group to cross the Valley of Kashmir. They make long marches and very few halts till they reach the other side of Kashmir valley as quickly as possible. After a rest of one or two days, they ascend the Pir-Panjal range, cross through the passes in long marches, and descend to the intervening pastures. On the intervening pastures, they graze their animals for ten to fifteen days; then, they gradually move to their winter bases (fig. 2).

## CLIMATE CHANGES AND THEIR EFFECT ON SEASONALITY AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

The respondents variously described the effects of climate on livestock and cultural landscape. The time and intensity of snowfall in high pasture areas are two important factors influencing the production of common nutrients in the grass. The pattern of snowfall in recent years has been unpredictable, the amount of snowfall that occurs each year has decreased, and the rate at which snow melts in the lower mountainous area is lower than it was in the past. One respondent described it: *I have been grazing cattle in this area for the last 35 years. I use the same route every year. I observed that the rainfall pattern has changed, due to which the grassland/pastures have been affected, which ultimately affects the grass's growth, quality, and quantity. We have been grazing our animals in the same grassland for many years, and now we go to different pastures to find suitable herbs.*

Respondents said there were water shortages in traditional water resources such as wells and rivers along seasonal migration routes. As one herder stated:

*On the way to the highland pastures, there were nine different water sources for our livestock. When these water sources were first discovered, they contained a significant amount of water. Recently, two of the nine springs have stopped producing water, and the other five water springs are in the process of*

*drying up gradually. Because there is not enough water, we must alter our travel plans and find a new place to camp for the night.*

TABLE 1
PRESENT WEATHER AND IDEAL WEATHER IN THE PIR-PANJAL REGION

| *Seasons* | *English Month* | *Present weather (in 2019)* | *Ideal weather* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Summer | May to October | Large raindrops, continual rainfall at the start of the season and a clear sky, dewfall, fewer snowstorms | Infrequent but significant rain, cloudless skies, dew, and even snow at the end of the season (in some years). Extreme snowfall |
| Winter | November to April | Decreased snowfall levels, drought, rising temperatures, and gusty winds near the season's end. | Less intense snowfall, a little rainfall in the earlier part of the day, rising temperatures, and stormy winds as the season ends. |

Furthermore, increased presence of invasive weeds overtakes valuable grasses in lower-elevation areas and forests. Farmland is a climate-induced effect associated with higher temperatures and uneven rainfall that significantly impacts livestock grazing. One interviewee said: "Now, all farmland is covered with invasive grass, and we do not have any other herbs." Other grass is also everywhere in the forests. Invasive grasses are replacing our traditional grasses.

Research participants reported that the incidence of livestock diseases has increased due to climate change. According to a herder respondent, livestock diseases continue to rise as the result of extreme heat and cold. In winter, many sheep and goats die of pneumonia. They are mainly located far from veterinary centers, and there is no assistance from the government or other institutions to take care of their livestock. To keep this profession going, they need veterinary help and animal insurance.In recent years, there has been an increase in medicine used for treating livestock diseases. There are new livestock diseases: lumpy skin disease, mouth, and foot diseases have become widespread, and these diseases have never been experienced. They must provide medicine for their goats and sheep every six months. As one agriculture services provider describes the increase in

livestock diseases in mountainous areas: "In the past, livestock diseases were common in lower altitude areas, and there were not numerous diseases in the mountainous regions. Nowadays, many animal deaths are happening in mountainous areas."

## DYNAMICS OF ECONOMIC PRACTICES AND LOCAL TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Animal husbandry, agriculture, and trade were and continue to be the primary means by which people in the Pir Panjal area support their livelihood.Every house raises animals, such as buffaloes, horses, oxen, cows, sheep, and goats. Families shift their animals to various altitude meadows according to the seasons.In winter, they bring their cattle down to the settlements and the places around them and then shift them to low-altitude pasture lands in a lower zone nearby (plate 2). They move all their animals up to the higher-elevation pastures during the warm summer.

**PLATE 2. LIVESTOCK MOVEMENT TO A LOWER ELEVATION**

Access to communication, development initiatives such as transportation, road construction, and the influence of markets on livelihood diversification are some of the economic changes that have taken

place in the area under consideration.In upland villages, a significant change in subsistence and traditional farming has been reported. Due to falling income, interest in growing crops on the hillsides where maize, wheat, and barley are grown, has declined.There is no benefit of agriculture in non-irrigated areas. Following the decline in livestock numbers, there is shortage of labour and compost, and the precipitation pattern is uncertain. Therefore, they abandoned the cultivation of land in the highlands and are now cultivating in the valley floor with irrigation facilities. More than 40% of agricultural land has been abandoned.

People will have to buy food as they move away from subsistence agriculture. As a result, people will have to diversify their earnings by working outside of subsistence farming. Even though selling their products is the only alternative that can lead to sustainable agriculture in the highlands, they still require further support. They seek support for the diversification and value addition of products based on livestock rearing. They require support with pasture management and marketing aid for their wool and meat products. Furthermore, some young men have gone overseas to work in Saudi Arabia, the United States, Kuwait, Korea, Japan, Europe, and the Middle East.

## CONTRIBUTION OF GUJJAR BAKARWALS TO THE LOCAL AND UT ECONOMY

Gujjar Bakarwals have a significant presence in the livestock sector of the region in Jammu and Kashmir. They contribute to the local economy by selling their livestock such as milk, meat, and wool, which are important commodities in the local and regional markets. In quantitative terms, it is estimated that the Gujjar Bakarwals own around 60% of the total livestock population in Jammu and Kashmir. According to the 2019 Livestock Census, Jammu and Kashmir had a total livestock population of around 8318.70 (thousands), out of which 2532.62(thousands)were cattle, 690.83 (thousands)were buffalo, 3247.50(thousands) were sheep, 1730.22 (thousands)were goats, and the rest were horses and mules.

In addition, the Gujjar Bakarwals also contribute to the economy through their role in the transportation of goods and people across the

rugged terrain of the region. They are skilled in managing livestock and can travel long distances with their animals, making them an essential part of the local economy.

Gujjar Bakarwals are known for their high-quality dairy products, including milk, cheese, and butter, which are in high demand in the local and UT markets. They supply around 70% of the milk produced in the State. In addition to milk, the Gujjar Bakarwals also produce other dairy products such as ghee, butter, cheese, and yogurt. These products are sold both locally and in nearby markets, providing additional income to the communities.Moreover, the dairy farming practices of the Gujjar Bakarwals also have a multiplier effect on the local economy. The sale of milk and dairy products generates demand for other goods and services, such as transportation, packaging materials, and veterinary care, creating employment opportunities for local residents.

In the lower, medium, and upper mountain regions, the Gujjar Bakarwals rely heavily on animal husbandry as their primary source of income. For commercial purposes, animals including sheep, cows, and goats are kept. The raising of animals is a major component of the economy of Jammu and Kashmir. Animal husbandry in Jammu and Kashmir, one of the state's key economic sectors, has significantly improved the state's financial situation. Gujjar Bakarwals play an important role in the conservation of natural resources in the region. Their traditional grazing practices have helped in maintaining the ecological balance and biodiversity of the region.

The community also supplies meat to local markets, an essential protein source for many people in the region. Apart from meat production, the Gujjar Bakarwals also contribute to the production of wool. The manure produced by livestock is a valuable source of fertilizer for agriculture, which contributes to the growth of crops and the local food supply. The traditional lifestyle of Gujjar Bakarwals attracts tourists, and many people visit the region to experience their unique culture and way of life.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES WITNESSED BY GUJJAR BAKARWALS AFTER THE GRANT OF ST STATUS

The Gujjar Bakarwal communities were granted Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by the Government of India in 1991. Since then, there have been some socio-economic changes witnessed by the community in terms of their employment opportunities, entry into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and All India services, and other professional services.

**Employment opportunities:** With the ST status, the Gujjar Bakarwal communities have become eligible for reservation in government jobs and educational institutions. They are now eligible to appear for various competitive exams for J&K and All India services. This has opened up new employment opportunities for the community in various sectors such as education, healthcare, and administration. Many Gujjar Bakarwal youths have also started taking advantage of government schemes and have been trained in various vocational courses to enhance their employability.

The ST status has also enabled the Gujjar Bakarwal community to enter J&K and All India services. Many members of the community have been successful in clearing competitive exams like the civil services and have been able to secure high-ranking positions in the government.

**Improved access to education:** The ST status has also led to an increase in educational opportunities for the Gujjar Bakarwal communities. With the availability of reservation in educational institutions, more community members are now able to access higher education, which in turn has led to better employment opportunities and socio-economic development.

The ST status has helped to improve the social and economic status of the Gujjar Bakarwal communities. The reservation policies have enabled the community to access better job opportunities and educational opportunities, which has led to an increase in income levels and living standards. With access to government schemes and reservations, the Gujjar Bakarwal community has also been able to pursue other professional services like healthcare, law, engineering, and other technical fields.

**Increased political representation:** The ST status has enabled the

Gujjar Bakarwal community to access political reservation in the State Assemblies of Jammu and Kashmir. The community has been able to contest and win reserved seats in the State Assemblies. As of March 2023, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly has two reserved seats for the Gujjar Bakarwal community. With the ST status, the Gujjar Bakarwal community has been able to participate more actively in the democratic process. With access to political reservation, the community has been able to assert its political identity and has become more politically aware. The community has been able to secure political reservations in the District Development Council (DDC) and Block Development Council (BDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir, which has led to an increase in their political representation.The ST status has enabled the Gujjar Bakarwal community to have representation in decision-making bodies. The community has been able to participate in the formulation of policies and programmes that affect their socio-economic and political status.

**Empowerment of women:** The Gujjar Bakarwal community has also witnessed an increase in the participation of women in local governance with the ST status. Women from the community have been able to contest and win seats in the DDC and BDC elections, which has led to their empowerment and increased representation in decision-making processes.

**Allocation of resources:** With political representation, the Gujjar Bakarwal community has been able to ensure that their voices are heard in the allocation of resources for development projects. The community has been able to advocate for the development of their areas and the allocation of resources for the welfare of their community.

**Cultural preservation:** With increased political representation, the Gujjar Bakarwal community has been able to assert their cultural identity and preserve their traditional way of life. They have been able to advocate for the preservation of their culture and heritage and ensure that their voice is heard in matters that affect their community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research found that transhumance, labour and livestock practices contribute heavily to Gujjar Bakarwal communities' livelihoods and

symbolize their cultural identity. The traditional institution, local practices, such as *Jirga* (Panchayat organization) was found to be a "connector" that binds Gujjar Bakarwal by creating opportunities of mutual interest, trust, and reciprocity to facilitate labourand livestock practices. As per the traditional belief system, *Mukkaddam* had a prominent role in the political, economic, and legal systems where people and organizations approached him to solve local problems. People usually agreed to decisions made here, thereby avoiding the court. People who disagree with the decisions made here may take the legal course. Geographic distance to the mainland, time and money limitations, and lack of legal understanding are considerable hurdles to court access; therefore, approaching *Mukaddam* was the favoured mode of dispute resolution economically, quickly, and fairly.In addition, they have a strategy for managing local commons based on traditional user rights. However, it was found that presently Panchayat system has replaced the traditional institutional systems, because of which the social fibre of the community has undergone significant transformation. Though Panchayats are quite effective in dispute resolution, other roles of traditional institutions have been wiped away, such as a 'mediator' or 'connector' in selling or buying livestock and solutions of inter and intra-community disputes by way of simple, informal discussions. Now people tend to approach courts increasingly, and social and cultural connectivity has weakened over time. There is also a lack of supportive government policies to manage pasturelands effectively or to encourage pastoral nomads to carry on with their traditions. For these reasons, people in the study area need to reinstate the traditions, institutions, and practices for better and hassle-free functioning of the Gujjar Bakarwal communities.

Another issue reported by the study participants is the massive and unplanned road construction which results in the degradation of pastures and increased landslides. Though it provides the facility to move quickly with the livestock using motor vehicles, yet it has a flipside to it. When people and livestock marches to the pasturelands, they reach there in a month without overburdening a small area, thereby avoiding conflicts between herders and residents of pasturelands. Marching practice is

consistent with the sustainability ethos, whereas transportation using vehicles is not sustainable in more ways than one. Here also, the study participants expressed a need to reinstate the traditional practices.

Another challenge to the sustenance of the Gujjar-Bakarwal community is posed by the socio-economic and demographic shifts in the Pir-Panjal range, which have resulted in the growing importance of the market economy. This has encouraged the diversification of means of subsistence into fields other than the agricultural and livestock industries. While this is, in and of itself, a welcome improvement in people's livelihoods, it has also created a labor-shortage situation. The changes also encourage the local community's internal and external movement, increasing the flow of remittances in the rural economy. However, for these reasons, the upcoming generation shows very little interest in the activities associated with pastoral life and prefers alternate occupations, which leads to a labour shortage for agriculture and livestock management.Therefore, to continue their work, it is required that the government frames supportive policies and institutional provisions should be developed for human and animal insurance, veterinary care, and grazing rights. There is a lack of private players in this field in the study area; therefore, government initiatives will be beneficial.

The participants in the research region have reported that climate change has had an impact on their mountain ecosystems and livelihoods.This is the case even though there is insufficient climate data available to confirm the effects of climate change on meadows and cattle.Climate change impacts include rare snowfall and rainfall, rangeland degradation, increasing water stress due to gradually drying up water sources, increased animal diseases, and the spread of invasive species onto grazing pastures. Because the climate change impact is anticipated to be more significant in the mountains compared to other locations, the projected scenarios point to a future that will become increasingly difficult for the Gujjar Bakarwal communities. Thus, there is need to undertake a systematic study of the impact of climate change in the Pir-Panjal range and take corrective measures urgently. Meanwhile, support should be provided to the local communities to face the adverse effect of climate change. Grazing areas may be developed. More freedom

may be provided to the herders for grazing in protected areas such as reserved forests.

## CONCLUSION

In the study area, there are various local institutions, most of which serve multiple purposes, but all appear to be related to natural resource management, either directly or indirectly. Local practices and traditional institutions are essential to how people in many pastoral communities live.Some are intimately engaged in and effectively manage local practices and traditional institutions.Other local practices and traditional institutions have maintained their significance over the period, while others are either gender or age-specific, which restricts membership to entire subsets of the local community. Some of these local practices and traditional institutions have withered away completely, while others have deteriorated over time. Many conventional institutions' local leadership remains strong and can influence and offer suggestions that could assist or impose formal institutions. As a result, there is a pressing need to have deeper understanding of how informal legal systems have functioned in the past and how concepts for incorporating elements of local practices and traditional institutional systems into the formal approach may be conceived and developed.The differences in scope and purpose of the local practices and traditional institutions mentioned in this study have characteristics in common that might be leveraged for natural resource management. First, their actions are often tied to natural resource management, either directly or indirectly. Secondly, they are typically designed to address socio-economic and environmental purposes. Thirdly, traditional leaders have a tremendous impact that can be exploited to expand the local practices and traditional institutions' sphere of influence in the area. Fourthly, they have some decision-making ability and local control over natural resources. Finally, they are intensely aware of people's relationships with their environment and may freely draw on the area's rich local ecological knowledge. The study's findings indicate that a single cultural group has multiple frameworks for marking and counting time throughout the year that is influenced by social activities and the physical state of items in the

surrounding environment. For example, the folk taxonomy of seasons such as winter and summer is mainly based on livestock's upward and downward movement in response to changes in weather patterns. In contrast, winter, spring, summer, and autumn are linked to the appearance of physical items in the environment.

The Gujjar Bakarwal pastoral system is a source of revenue and a cultural emblem. The tradition is diminishing owing to economic and climate change in the Himalayas. Gujjar Bakarwals allow livestock to be raised by seasonally moving animals through varying grazing and weather chances in different biological zones. This practice contributes to culture and livelihoods but requires government and private sector support, acknowledgment, and respect for transhumance pastoralism's cultural and indigenous values. Government should preserve grazing rights, build market ties, diversify goods, and provide veterinary services and insurance. Herders require government and business sector help to sustain their occupation; thus, policies must be implemented to address their daily struggles. While implementing progressive policies and institutional frameworks to manage pasturelands, boost herd sizes, and enhance livelihoods, the government must also enrich the traditional institution and local practices which play a central role in the sustenance of the Gujjar-Bakarwal community.

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# Ladakhi and Balti Tribes' Attitudes Toward Child and Maternal Health and Educational Services In Ladakh

*Jaya Bharti, Hitaishi Singh and Anmol Shekhar Srivastava*

ABSTRACT

*Despite the government of India's admirable efforts to assist tribal people and help them develop, many tribal problems persist in India. This paper seeks to explore attitudes and barriers toward child health, maternal health, and educational services among the Ladakhi and the Balti tribal people.*

*In March 2016, qualitative research was conducted through a self-developed questionnaire. This interview schedule was used to assess the concept and usage of child and maternal healthcare services and educational services with samples aged 25 to 50 years from the Ladakhi (50) and the Balti (50) tribes of Ladakh.*

*The study found that the primary barriers to utilizing healthcare facilities are direct and indirect financial barriers; travel distances to medical facilities; subpar public transportation; hospital staff members perceived to act negatively toward patients; and inadequate infrastructure. The location of schools, weak economic conditions, lack of awareness, medium of language, geographical conditions, and discrimination were found to be the barriers to utilizing educational services. The study draws attention to the obstacles that patients face in using healthcare facilities; these obstacles are not always caused by the patient's socio-economic situation but also due to other contextual factors and the standard of medical care being provided. The difficulties in using educational services are also highlighted.*

**Keywords:** *Tribes, Ladakhi, Balti, Attitude, Barriers*

## INTRODUCTION

Recent events have focused interest on the history, politics and strategic situation of the Himalayas, but the peoples who live in this spectacular

region have been largely overlooked. The Himalayas form an area more than 1, 500 miles long, 150 to 250 miles wide and averaging 19, 000 feet high at the crest, rising out of the Indo-Gangetic plain of northern India and Pakistan and bordering on Tibet. They extend from the Indus river in Kashmir in the northwest through the north Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and through the mountain countries of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, turning northeast with the Brahmaputra river in the state of Assam where they comprise the northern sections of what is known as the North-East Frontier Agency of India. In the northwest they merge into the Karakoram, the Pamir and Hindu Kush ranges and the lower mountains which turn southward in West Pakistan. In the east they connect with the lower mountains perpendicular to them which form the border between India and Burma. Davis aptly notes that "the whole mighty barrier, with great subsidiary ranges curving southward at either end, looks on the relief map like a folded curtain pushed back and draped around northern India and Pakistan." Throughout the Himalayas there are great variations in climate; from the arctic conditions of the high regions to the sub-tropical climate of the terai, which is the swampy forested belt at the foot of the mountains bordering the Indo-Gangetic plain. One common feature is the rugged mountain terrain broken only occasionally by broad valleys such as that of Kathmandu in Nepal.

Uptil now, it was believed that people living in tribal areas were suffering not only from communicable diseases like malaria and malnutrition, but a recent report has revealed that maternal deaths along with non-communicable diseases like hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes are now spreading in tribal areas. At present, many commendable works are being done by the Government of India for the development of tribals, but many problems persist even today.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- A community-based cross-sectional study was carried out by Gopinath T. T. et al. (2018) in a tribal region of the Jawadhu Hills, Puthurnadu PHC subcenter. The study involved a total of 316

children. As a whole, 26.9% of people were undernourished. Stunting was more prevalent overall (55.4%), exceeding the World Health Organization's threshold for determining the severity of malnutrition.

From 1961 to 2011, it is evident that both India's literacy rate and the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes greatly rose. However, the fact that there was still a 14.03 percent discrepancy between these two groups in 2011 is cause for worry.

TABLE:1
THE LITERACY RATE OF SCHEDULED TRIBES COMPARED TO THE TOTAL POPULATION (IN PERCENT)

| *Census* | *1961* | *1971* | *1981* | *1991* | *2001* | *2011* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All social groups | 28.3 | 34.45 | 43.57 | 52.21 | 64.84 | 72.99 |
| STs | 8.53 | 11.30 | 16.35 | 29.60 | 47.10 | 58.96 |
| Gap | 19.77 | 18.15 | 19.88 | 21.61 | 18.28 | 14.03 |

Source: *Statistics of school education: 2010-2011*

The enrolment of students from various social groups was facilitated and promoted after independence by several government initiatives in the shape of various programs and an increase in the funding for education.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

To explore the Ladakhi and Balti tribes' attitudes and barriers toward child health, maternal health, and educational services. Data was collected using an interview schedule. There were 50 Ladakhi and 50 Balti participants. Their age range varied from 25 to 50 years. Ex-post facto research with an exploratory orientation was used. Incidental sampling was used to collect the data.

The interviews were recorded after taking the participants' prior consent. The schedule was in the local language. There were 10 questions under two parts (Child and Maternal Health and Educational Services) to understand the perceptions of the Ladakhi and the Balti Tribes. The

responses were recorded verbatim.With reference to the results, each question is discussed in detail with reference to the various responses given by the interviewee.

## I. ATTITUDE TOWARD CHILD AND MATERNAL HEALTH

### *1. Reason for Child Deaths*

**(What is the reason for child deaths in your community?)**

| Categories | LADAKHI (50) | BALTI(50) |
|---|---|---|
| Separation from the land | 40(80%) | 6(12%) |
| Illiteracy | 10(20%) | 40(80%) |
| No technological facilities | - | 4 (8%) |

80% of the Ladakhi tribe reported that the main reason for the child deaths was "**separation from the land"**. Many tribes continue to live in forests and mountains far from civilization. The facilities are not available on time due to the distance. In comparison, 80% of the Balti tribe reported **"illiteracy"** as the primary cause of child deaths. When a person experiences any illness or accident, the tribe members believe more in witchcraft and exorcisms. They don't value physicians and other medical aids. Instead of using the services offered, they prefer the traditional methods of healing. Because of this, despite the government of India's numerous efforts, this society still lacks literacy.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "On the one hand, there are many facilities available in society and the people living in those facilities. On the other hand, we have a wild society that stays away from this civilized society... Either the facility has not been provided by the government or it has not reached us. Now, whose fault is it? Either ours, that we could not live in the society or the society has not adopted us till date. For this reason, we have a high child mortality rate even today because facilities are not available on time."

**Narrative of Balti**: "The main cause of the high child death rate in the Balti tribe is illiteracy since this tribe still practices exorcisms and

witchcraft. The spirit is seen as the primary cause of any problems, illnesses, or accidents that take place. Goats and chickens are offered as sacrifices to the demon. In our tribe, those who value faith and tradition are more prevalent, and as a result, they do not value professionals like doctors and nurses."

## 2. PROCESS OF MATERNAL HEALTH

**(What is the process followed in your community for maternal health or how do you care?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Prenatal Care and care of baby and mother both | 30(60%) | 40(80%) |
| Proper Facilities | 10(20%) | 6(12%) |
| Good Food | 5(10%) | 2 (4%) |
| Don't know | 5(10%) | 2 (4%) |

The Ladakhi tribe(60%) and the Balti tribe(80%) both reported **"prenatal care and care of baby and mother both"** as the primary issues of maternal health. According to the Ladakhi tribe narratives, they give a controlled amount of food during pregnancy to ensure a normal delivery without the baby getting overweight. They recover after giving birth using traditional methods, which are thought to be healthy by them, but scientifically, this could lead to infection. They make the mothers work in the prenatal period to make them healthy, while the doctors suggest resting. On the other hand, the Balti tribe considers the first thick yellow milk dirty for the child, which is said to be the healthiest by the doctors. Good food and proper facilities are considered secondary factors in the process of maternal health.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "Maternal health means prenatal care. Under this, the mother should be given food in a controlled quantity because giving more food increases the weight of the child and there are problems with normal delivery. It is important to apply oil and turmeric to it for quick recovery. Other methods are included in antenatal care so that both

the mother and the baby remain healthy."

**Narrative of Balti**: "According to the Balti tribe, during the process of maternal health, the newborn should not be fed the mother's first thick yellow milk because it is dirty milk and it is advisable to throw it out. It should save both the child and the mother. The first milk should be given to the newborn by the aunt (*Bua*). Apart from mother's milk, other means like honey, ghutti, etc. should be taken for the first one or two days."

## 3. REASON OF MATERNAL DEATHS

**(What is the main reason for "Maternal Deaths" in your community?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Bleeding, infection, BP | 35(70%) | - |
| Inappropriate facilities | 15(30%) | 5(10%) |
| Alcohol | - | 45(90%) |
| Don't know | - | 5 (10%) |

The Ladakhi tribe(70%) respondents claim the leading causes of maternal deaths are **excessive bleeding** (postpartum in most cases), **infection** (usually postpartum), **high blood pressure during pregnancy** (preeclampsia and eclampsia), complications related to childbirth, and unsafe abortion. The **practice of alcohol, bidi, tobacco**, etc. is found in abundance among the Balti tribe(90%). The tribe's members have a custom of offering and receiving country liquor as prasad from the Gods. Not only men, but women also consume **alcohol** addictively among the tribals. There is also a risk of death because of inappropriate facilities and the lack of appropriate treatment at the time.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "In our tribe, the biggest cause of maternal death is excessive bleeding during and after delivery, and due to the non-availability of any suitable treatment at that time, there is a danger of death. At that time, many types of coatings are used, but they do not get any relief, and we do not have the capacity to go to the city for treatment there. We don't even have the means of daily living. Neither the women nor the children get any fresh food to eat."

**Narrative of Balti:** "Many women in our tribe's society drink alcohol when they are in pain, out of habit, and this habit is harmful to them when they are pregnant. At first, we didn't even know that it was harmful, but later, when we saw with our own eyes, some people who said that alcohol is harmful to both the newborn and the mother, we understood the main reason why. Our tribe's women, however, are still unable to leave it."

## 4. AGE OF MARRIAGE

**(At what age do people in your tribe generally get married?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| 15-17 | 45(80%) | 44(88%) |
| 20-25 | 5(10%) | 2(12%) |
| 25-30 | - | 2 (4%) |
| 12-15 | - | 2 (4%) |

80% of the Ladakhi tribe and 88% of the Balti tribe reported that most of them marry young, between the ages of 15 and 17. These tribes, however, use the fact that there aren't many suitable marriage proposals for girls in their communities, to defend the marriage-at-a-young age policy. Since the bodies of teenage girls are still developing, they are at a higher risk of complications during pregnancy, which leads to an increase in the rate of maternal deaths. In addition, child brides are less likely than adult brides to receive adequate prenatal care or give birth in a medical facility.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "In the Ladakhi tribal society, marriages are done only in 15-17 years, but it does not mean that we bid them adieu early. Sometimes girls stay in their maternal house for a year, and sometimes, according to the circumstances, the girls are sent off immediately. It is not right to delay for a long time when we get a good marriage proposal. Because generally, we don't get any good proposals in our tribe, and if we do get any, we don't want to lose them at any cost."

**Narrative of Balti**: "In our society, marriages are fixed in childhood

so that when you grow up , you don't have to find a groom for marriage. As you grow up, marriage proposals are not easily found. Marriages must then be performed only within our tribe because no one will come from the city with a proposal, so you must wander in search of one. We marry at 15, 16, or 17 to avoid worrying about the future, and by doing so, the children mature quickly and gain an understanding of life."

## 5. SEMANTIC OF ANTENATAL CARE

**(What do you understand by the term "Antenatal Care"?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Care before birth | 40(80%) | 45(90%) |
| Don't Know | 10(20%) | 5(10%) |

Most of the respondents—Ladakhi tribe (80%) and Balti tribe (90%)—said that "**Care Before Birth**" is a semantic term for antenatal care. The mothers are expected to work in terms of prenatal care so that they can stay healthy and active. To ensure the healthy progression of their pregnancy and the prompt identification of high risks, all expectant mothers should register for antenatal care at the closest medical facility as soon as they become aware of their pregnancy.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "In prenatal care, both the mother and the unborn child should be given good rest. She should not have any physical pain, but knowing all this, we also know that it is very important for the mother to remain active during this time so that the child remains fit, so women are very active here anyway, because a woman has to cook for eight people. The women in our house take care of all the work behind us while we are outside."

**Narrative of Balti:** "We try to provide as many facilities to pregnant women as possible, but our living conditions are such that the women here have to work hard, unwillingly. There are no special facilities here; people have moulded themselves around what they have. One has to walk miles away, then the needs of the day are fulfilled. Then we also believe that the more work you do with the child in the stomach, the

stronger the child becomes. There is no harm in this, then gradually it becomes a habit, then neither the pain is remembered, nor the swelling of the feet."

## 6. EASE IN RECEIVING MONTHLY RATION

**(How do you receive your monthly ration?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| 12-13 km distance | 40(80%) | 35(70%) |
| No Ration Card | 10(20%) | 15(30%) |

The Ladakhi tribe respondents(80%) and the Balti tribe respondents(70%) face the problem of receiving a monthly ration due to the 12-13 km distance from the place of availability, whereas some don't even have a ration card. They claim that despite the fact that the majority of people have health issues, their ration does not reach them properly.

According to a 2018 report by the Ministry of Health, the daily intake of nutrients by tribal groups is below the recommended daily level and reflects increasing food insecurity among the tribal population.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "One has to walk more than 12-13 km to get a ration, and many times, even after standing in line, the ration is not available. When you leave the house, the children look at you with a lot of hope; when you come home empty-handed, the children become indifferent and weep. That's why sometimes we feel angry at the government about why we do not get a good quantity of rations regularly.

**Narrative of Balti:** "In our society, due to economic backwardness, there is a great need for rations. In the absence of rations, our children and the people of this society feel insecure, and most of us are victims of malnutrition. 80% of people are facing health problems, but despite all this, the ration is not being provided to us properly. We do not have enough strength to walk 12-13 km and come home empty-handed from there."

## 7. SEMANTIC OF EDUCATION

**(What comes to your mind after listening to the word "Education"?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Waste of Money | 40(80%) | 40(80%) |
| Provided by Government | 10(20%) | 6(12%) |
| Books, Paper, Pen etc | - | 2 (4%) |
| Don't know | - | 2 (4%) |

The first question tried to explore the semantics of the word "education." For many Ladakhi and Balti tribes, the word "education" refers to a waste of money with a hopeless attitude. These individuals believe that studying is unnecessary if one must work for an income by ultimately becoming a servant. Some of them also want the government to offer better educational facilities.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "Education will be a lot for the educated people. For us, it is a waste of money. It is of no use to sacrifice our basic needs to teach children to write. What do you get then? Zero! Nothing else. A person of our acquaintance taught his child very hard, but the child did not get a job in the city, so it became a waste of money.

**Narrative of Balti:** Éducation is all about wasting time and money. Nothing happens by studying. No matter how educated you are, no one will give that respect and love to our society and children. People think of us as animals. They wonder what will happen to the children of our tribe if they start studying. Who will pick up the garbage? Who will clean their houses? When they have to become a servant by reading and writing, then it is better to remain illiterate and remain a servant. Why waste money?"

## 8. STUDIES DROP OUT REASON

**(What do you believe is the main cause of school abandonment in your community?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Location of School | 40(80%) | 5(10%) |
| Weak economic conditions | 10(20%) | 40(80%) |
| No need of studies | - | 2 (4%) |

Ladakhi respondents(80%) reported the **'location of school'** as the distance between home and school and the associated cost, especially for secondary education, discourages parents from sending their children to school. Thus, the dropout rate of children is high. On the other hand, the Balti tribe(80%) faces financial problems and considers **'Weak economic condition'** as the reason for dropping out of school, as most of the tribal communities lack financial resources to access quality education and related educational resources.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "Whenever we think of sending our children to school, it also comes to our mind how to send them to school. Good schools are far away from our homes, or it can be said that our homes are far away from the school itself. Even if we wanted to, we are not able to send our children to school. And children cannot cross the path on foot alone for so many kilometers every day.

**Narrative of Balti:** "Who doesn't want to teach kids? Even if you ignore many things and needs, who will fulfill the lack of money? The school takes money. We sent our children as long as we could to primary school. When they went to the higher class, there was no money to pay the school fees, so they dropped out. There are also some other government schools that are far away. We need money to pick up and drop off children, to buy tiffins; books; etc., which we do not have. What would you eat if you spent everything studying?"

## 9. PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE

**(As a parent, what do you think about the education of children in your tribe?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI (50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of Awareness | 45(90%) | 5(10%) |
| Medium of language | 5(10%) | 40(80%) |
| Lack of understanding of tribal culture among teachers | - | 2 (4%) |

Ladakhi respondents(90%) believe that there is a **lack of awareness** regarding the long-term value of formal education. Tribal parents prefer to place their children in lucrative employment that regularly raises the family's income because education does not yield an immediate economic return. On the other hand, Balti respondents (80%) stated that the slow development of bilingual entrance textbooks containing text in regional and tribal languages hinders learning outcomes (reading and writing) in schools located in tribal areas. There is a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the ecological, cultural, and psychological characteristics of tribal culture among local teachers. This makes education inconsistent with the needs of the tribes.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "What will the children of our tribe do after studying and writing? Ultimately, they will be working. They should also know how to do household work. All the children in our tribe are taught to work from childhood so that they do not face any inconvenience in growing up to live their lives and can help reduce the problems of the household by earning some money. Anyway, when children go to study, there is no good behavior in school. Better than that, they are at home.

**Narrative of Balti:** "We want to teach our children, but the medium of study is very different. Our children only know their own language. Nowadays, schools are taught in the English language like in cities, due to which children are afraid to go to school. He doesn't want to be ridiculous in school. They say that the rest of the children make fun of themselves for speaking their language in school. Because of this, there has been a

hesitation in the children going to school. When the children were admitted to the school 2 years ago, they failed. Madam used to say that the child is weak. Send them to school to study and listen to things too."

## 10. LACK OF ADEQUATE MONITORING

**(What do you feel are the reasons behind the lack of adequate monitoring?)**

| *Categories* | *LADAKHI(50)* | *BALTI(50)* |
|---|---|---|
| Geographical conditions | 40(80%) | 5(10%) |
| Discrimination | 10(20%) | 40(80%) |
| Lack of interest in the department | - | 5 (10%) |

Ladakhi respondents (80%) said that due to the remote geographical conditions of different tribal areas and lack of proper coordination between different departments, proper monitoring is hampered. The government has taken several initiatives to uplift the status of tribal education. These first ensure compliance with Articles 14, 15(4), 16, and 21 of the Constitution. On the other hand, Balti respondents (80%) think that discrimination is the main reason why there isn't enough oversight.

**Narrative of Ladakhi**: "No officer comes here to investigate us. No one cares whether the facilities provided by the government are reaching us or not. If someone asks once a year, then it is another matter. No one wants to come to where we are staying, probably because the route is very difficult. No one wants to bear this pain, yet we live here. No one can even think of what kind of problems we go through. There is no way or medium of conveyance to get here.

**Narrative of Balti:** "People of this civilized society consider us to be different from themselves. Many people think of us as wild. They don't want to talk to us. If any facility or scheme comes from the government, then they have trouble giving it to us people because perhaps they do not consider us their equal. Many big officers scold and banish us, behaving like animals to us. No one cares. The government makes many schemes for our tribes, but nothing reaches us."

## FINDINGS

The study found that the primary barriers to utilizing healthcare facilities are direct and indirect financial barriers; travel distances to medical facilities; subpar public transportation; hospital staff members perceived to act negatively toward patients; and inadequate infrastructure. The location of schools, weak economic conditions, lack of awareness, medium of language, geographical conditions, and discrimination is found to be the barriers to utilizing educational services.

## CONCLUSION

Tribes are facing many challenges to their existence in the society. The Indian government has taken numerous actions to uplift the Indian tribes. Despite the fact that their reliance on conventional healers is declining, some of them continue to engage in witchcraft and exorcisms. Malnutrition, infectious diseases, and problems related to maternal and child health are also very high in tribal areas. The tribal population is bearing an increasing burden of health issues, but these regions continue to lack adequate health services. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the government health system in tribal areas.

MoHFW works closely with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), NITI Aayog, and state governments. It supports the capabilities of health managers and supervisors at the district and block levels for the planning, implementation, monitoring, and supervision of effective maternal health care services, including pregnant women at high risk and in remote, vulnerable, and socially disadvantaged areas. The following interventions by the Indian government are implemented with assistance from UNICEF:

- Reaching every mother: UNICEF backs the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's stance that every delivery should be carried out by a qualified healthcare professional in a healthcare facility.
- Continuity of Care: Using a continuous care strategy, improving pregnant women's health and nutrition while also offering high-quality services for maternal and child health. Family planning,

antenatal care throughout the pregnancy, better management of a normal delivery by trained professionals, and prompt postpartum care for both mother and child are included in this.

- Antenatal care: Upon learning of a pregnancy, expectant mothers should immediately register with the nearest health facility for antenatal care, so as to be assured of a healthy pregnancy and to be notified of high risks that can pose a risk to their health and that of their unborn child.
- Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritvat Abhiyan (PMSMA): Under this campaign launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, quality, comprehensive, and assured antenatal care is provided free of charge every 9th of the month. It strengthens antenatal care, detects and follows up on high-risk pregnancies, and contributes to a decline in maternal mortality in India.
- The Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK): program includes free maternal services for women and children, a nationwide emergency referral system, a maternal mortality audit, and better governance and management of health services at all levels.

The global goal of improving maternal health and saving women's lives can only be achieved if we reach out to those most vulnerable - women living in rural areas, urban slums, and poor households; teenage mothers; and women belonging to minorities, tribals, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes.

Many of the problems of tribals in India persist even today. Concerted efforts are needed to solve them. The following suggestions would be important in this direction:

1. Expanding self-employment opportunities is necessary to address the issue of economic backwardness alongside expanding employment opportunities. The tribal groups continue to be well known for their handicrafts and diverse forms of art. The tribal people's economic issues can be greatly alleviated if appropriate arrangements are made to buy and sell the goods they produce locally. Their economic conditions can be improved by establishing cooperative societies in tribal villages, paying fair wages to the

workers, preventing their exploitation by contractors and forest officials, and also providing loans for agriculture at low interest. It can be beneficial to promote innovative, affordable agricultural practices in tribal areas.

2. The solution to cultural problems is possible only if the outside groups are not given opportunities to impose their religion on the tribes. Elwin has suggested that it is necessary to protect tribal culture. Only those officers should be appointed in tribal areas who are familiar with their language and culture. Education should be such as to bring about a gradual change in their superstitions and traditional practices.
3. In order to solve the social problems of the tribes, it is necessary that, with the help of tribal leaders, changes be made in the thoughts and attitudes of the people. This work can be done by establishing Tribal Councils in each village. It is necessary to implement new laws that are fully compatible with the tribal culture and traditions. Some of the more aware people will be able to encourage other people to change their behavior.
4. There is a critical need for practical education in tribal communities to address the tribes' educational issues. Agriculture, handicrafts, and the production of farm equipment and handicrafts should be the focus of this practical instruction. Numerous studies have demonstrated that providing scholarships to indigenous children is ineffective because it maintains their parents' focus on the size of the grant. Giving the kids in the classroom wholesome food and literature in exchange would be more beneficial. Animal husbandry, fishing, poultry, and bee-keeping can also be encouraged through education. Additionally, the tribal areas' primary educational institutions need to be expanded.
5. Making plans for mobile hospitals in the tribal areas is necessary to address the tribes' health-related issues. These hospitals, which are housed within the buses, can reach settlements within 10-15 square kilometers and offer first aid services. The distribution of essential immunizations and vitamin tablets will benefit more from their involvement. It is also necessary to make arrangements for

clean drinking water, to make people familiar with the rules of health, to manage the disposal of dirty water, and to give training in the rules of cleanliness.

6. It is necessary to solve the problems arising out of development programs among the tribes. It has become clear from many studies that a large part of the amount given by the development officers to the villagers in the form of grants or subsidies, is swinded. In this situation, there is no justification for the provision of such grants or subsidies. The entire amount of assistance should be distributed through the Tribal Council in the form of agricultural or handicraft equipment. This will stop the misuse of funds and the real benefits of the schemes will reach the tribals.
7. In order to reduce political unrest among the tribes, a thorough and practical strategy is now required. First and foremost, they must receive the proportion of positions in various services designated for the tribes. In regions with a significant tribal population, tribal officials should be appointed with priority. Political parties should adhere to a code of behavior to prevent them from agitating the tribes to further their own agendas. Laws pertaining to forests should be changed so that tribal members can obtain the items they want from them without endangering the woods.

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# Livelihood Transformations among the Semi-Nomadic Tribes of Ladakh: A case study of Zanskar

*Jigmat Dachen, Stanzin Nouskit, Rajkumar Gaddi and Sonam Gytso*

ABSTRACT

*Zanskar is a region located in the Union Territory of Ladakh in northern India. It is renowned for its stunning landscapes, including high mountain ranges, deep valleys, and the Zanskar river. The people of Zanskar traditionally follow highland pastoralism by taking their cattle to higher reaches of the nearby mountain and settle there during summer and the place is locally known as Doksa. They rare cattle like Yaks, sheep, and goats which are crucial for the local economy, providing wool, milk, and meat. In recent years, however, there have been changes in the traditional livelihood patterns due to various factors. Modernisation, expanded network, and presentation to the exterior world have brought both openings and challenges to the people of Zanskar. There is significant shift in the pattern of livelihood among the communities, the traditional practice of highland pastoralism has significantly reduced and very few families are found practising traditional pastoralism, whereas majority of the members of the communities has already sought alternative sources of livelihood. This study seeks to identify changes in occupation, socio-economic changes, and educational status among the semi-nomadic tribes of Zanskar region of Ladakh. Snowball sampling and purposive sampling technique was used to identify the Doksas and villages in Zanskar valley. Survey and intensive interviews have been conducted to collect the data from the participants. The findings of the study revealed that most of the Doksa practitioners are women, who are experts in every aspect of dairying like milking, milk processing, packaging of butter and cheese and they sell these dairy products and generate their income from it. The herders faced problems like harsh climatic condition, threat from wild animals (especially brown bear), excessive workload and pathetic living conditions. The people of Zanskar even face many problems related to education of their children like lack of basic educational facilities and winter tuitions.*

**Keywords:** *Doksa, Livelihood transformation, Zanskar, tribe.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nomadic societies have had significant influence in the history of human societies. However, following the industrial revolution, changes have occurred quickly due to technological advancement. Nomadic communities' role and prominence have waned over time for a variety of reasons.Furthermore, significant changes have happened in several facets of their lives, posing numerous difficulties and opportunities.[1]Pastoralists' livelihoods in many developing countries are inextricably related to their animals and, by extension, the environment in which they live. As a result, any natural or human-caused crisis or disaster that affects the ability of the environment to provide resources to the people and livestock living in these regions puts the people at serious risk of losing their animals and can impair their ability to cope with future emergencies.[2] Pastoralists have demonstrated remarkable resilience; they retain intact social structures and procedures for reciprocal resource sharing, and their livestock is also an encashable asset. Pastoralism in the Himalayas is built on transhumant behaviours, and it entails cyclical travels from lowlands to highlands to take advantage of seasonally available pastures at varying elevations.

Himalayan pastoralists migrate to the high alpine regions in the summer to feed their animals. Then, after the monsoon, they migrate down to the low altitudes for the winter grazing season. The movement of people and livestock takes place between previously designated locations, which become regular seasonal campsites or bases.[3] The different grazing pattern reflects the varying reliance of village communities on traditional livelihoods in response to limited resources availability and climate conditions to maintain food security and livelihoods.[4] The impact of globalization and the changing aspirations of younger generations are causing the erosion of traditional values. The decline of traditional pastoralism not only affects livelihoods but also cultural and environmental conditions. The trend of rural to urban migration of villagers to Leh differs from that of the nomadic population is due to the fact that out-migration from the nomadic communities involves a shift from a tent-dwelling mobile existence to a sedentary lifestyle.[5]

Zanskar is one of the coldest and driest regions of southern Ladakh.

Zanskar is a tehsil in Kargil district of Union Territory of Ladakh. Historically, the main way of life of Zanskar has been *Doksa*. This form of highland grazing depends on human skills and involves moving livestock from the valleys to the highlands to make good use of the land available at higher altitudes. *Doksa* is the short distance transhumance system of livestock farming practiced in Zanskar during the brief summer season. It is mainly a kind of bovine transhumance where seasonal migrations take place between permanent homesteads in the arid Valley and natural highland pastures in the vicinity of glaciers.The *Doksa* system is a perfect example of human resourcesfulness and creativity that has enabled people to survive in the extreme conditions found in the Himalayan region of Zanskar.[6]Transhumance refers to the regular migration of animals between the dry season and the wet season in the form of pastures during the dry season, uplands and lowlands during the wet season, upland cultivation during the dry season and uplands during the growing season, pastures during the growing season and salt during the growing season.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to understand the livelihood transformation in the semi- nomadic tribes of Zanskar. Other objectives are as follows:

1. To study the socio-economic and educational status of semi-nomadic tribes of Zanskar;
2. To examine reasons of livelihood transformation in semi-nomadic tribes of Zanskar;
3. To suggest policy measures to improve the livelihood of semi-nomadic tribes of Ladakh.

**STUDY AREA is** Zanskar, Zahar (locally) or Zangskar is a tehsil of Kargil district, within the Indian Union Territory of Ladakh. Zanskar Valley, which stands at 13, 154 feet, is a semi-arid region located on the northern edge of the Great Himalayas. What draws travellers to this region are the beautiful snow-capped mountains, the pleasant atmosphere, Zanskar's sparkling water bodies, and the lush scenery. The valley is 105

kilometres from Leh and might be a hotspot for adventure sports including trekking, paragliding, and river rafting, among others. During winter, temperatures drop to as low as -30 degrees Celsius. Travel to Zanskar is possible between the months of June and September; otherwise, all roads to the Valley are heavily snow-covered, preventing access.

**FIGURE 1**
**MAP OF LADAKH SHOWING STUDY AREA IN RED (ZANSKAR)**


According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Zanskar Tehsil in Kargil district was 13, 793, with 7, 008 males and 6, 785 females. In 2011, there were 2, 327 families living in Zanskar Tehsil. The average sex ratio in Zanskar Tehsil is 968. The total literacy rate in Zanskar Tehsil is 59.73 percent. The male literacy rate is 63.43%, and the female literacy rate is 39.12% in Zanskar Tehsil. The valley covers 7000 $km^2$ but only has 5,000 ha (0.7%) of farming. The net sown area is around 2, 900 ha, accounting for 57% of the total cultivable land. The agricultural land is fully irrigated, with an average household holding of 2.20 ha. Zanskar has a total population of 13, 793 people, 52% of them are literate and live in 2, 283 homes. The valley's population is predominantly Buddhist, with

only 5% Muslim. The region is a cold desert at high altitude, located in the rain shadow of the western Himalayas. Temperatures range from 28°C to -30°C, with an annual precipitation of approximately 250 mm, largely from winter snowfall. The Valley is inaccessible for 6 to 7 months per year due to severe snowfall that blocks the passes connecting it to the rest of the country.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study tries to understand the livelihood transformations among the semi-nomadic tribes of Ladakh, particularly in Zanskar. It is qualitative in nature and the data was collected by using snowball sampling technique and purposive sampling technique. The participants were herders from different villages who were the residents of villages like Aksho, Abran, Munay, Zangla, Raru, Rantaksha, Karsha, Tungri. It was found during the study that these herders were stationed at various highland pasture settlements (*Doksas*) like Lato Marpo, Chakdo Karpo, Oma Tangtse, Shamkashi Yogkma, Bao Thang, Zakul, Honya, Rantak Titi, and Shaktanchan *Doksas*. Interview schedule and survey was used to collect the data from participants. Data was collected from 50 households; among them few were identified practicing highland pasture settlements (*Doksas*) system and many have left these traditional practices of highland pastoralism because of many changes in the region and in lifestyle of the inhabitants.Through intensive interview, we attempted to understand the socio-economic status, education and the adaptive strategies employed by these communities in the face of evolving circumstances.Before initiating the survey, effort was made to gain a contextual understanding of the local communities and available resources. This preliminary step facilitated the establishment of a rapport between the researchers and the inhabitants. The field data collection process at the selected *Doksa* locations was carried out collaboratively, involving active participation from the residents at every stage.

**FIGURE 2**
**DURING DATA COLLECTION AT HIGHLAND PASTURE SETTLEMENTS (*DOKSA*).**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Education and Socio-Economic status

The people of Zanskar are becoming advanced day by day in every aspect especially in education, which has improved as compared to two decades. Education is thought to be the utmost necessity in every one's life. So, the people of Zanskar have become advanced in the field of education and they are migrating towards the cities where their children get the best advanced education. A survey of the educational status of children enrolled in government schools reveals the challenges faced during their studies.The inhabitants of Zanskar who had attended schools, have to move to Leh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and others parts of the country for further studies and to look for other opportunities in their career.The survey showed that they faced several problems like shortage of teachers, less enrolment, shortage of infrastructure facilities, lack of internet connections, lack of hostel and transport facilities. The major problem they faced in the education of their child is that there are no winter coaching facilities to the student and a library in every village for the learners.Even the needy students are not able to get the scholarships, which acts as barrier for them to pursue their higher education without any financial burden.

Socio-economic situation has improved a lot as compared to the last two decades and the *Doksa* practitioners were less as compared to the last decade. While taking data, the people of Zanskar mostly told that they left *Doksa* due to the lack of manpower as well as the smaller number of

domesticated animals in their family and they also considered education as an important tool to eradicate many problems. They thought of giving up *Doksa* because it is hard to practice nowadays. Even people are less patient as compared to earlier and also have other available sources of income. They would prefer an easy work to sustain their livelihood. Although by practicing *Doksa* they generate enough income by selling their dairy products like butter which cost rupees 600-800 per kg, and they also sell their dried cow-dung. When the workload is high and other financially beneficial employment opportunity might be available, it is fairly common for households to pool their livestock and send their herds with a trusted person or hired professional to the summer pastures, which are mainly common lands.

Changes in occupation and employability in the region with the advancement and improvement in roads connectivity from Manalito Zanskar region brought changes in socio-economic lifestyle of highland pastoral communities. Significant change is also due to the introduction of new crop cultivation. The shift from traditional crop cultivation to new cash crop cultivation like potato and peas in the region due to the high demand of markets from Himachal Pradesh bring much economic prosperity among the households. Participants informed about some notable changes in the alteration of land use patterns. Pastoral communities traditionally utilize land for grazing their livestock, moving them seasonally to ensure sustainable forage resources. However, with the introduction of new cash crop cultivation, portions of land that were previously reserved for grazing may be converted to arable land. Moreover, the introduction of crop cultivation can lead to changes in the division of labour within the community. Traditionally, pastoral communities have well-defined roles and responsibilities related to herding, milking, and other livestock-related activities. With the shift to new crop cultivation, there may be a need for diversified labour, including planting, tending, and harvesting crops. This can lead to changes in the social dynamics and traditional roles within these communities.The reliance on new crop cultivation may also introduce new economic activities and sources of income. Pastoral communities may diversify their livelihoods by engaging in crop production alongside livestock rearing. This diversification can provide economic resilience and

potentially improve household incomes. Many households in some villages were not having their own agricultural land. They had the lands of monasteries to cultivate, in return they have to give some amount of crop yield to the monasteries. With the building of road connectivity to the region from Manali, Kargil and Leh, there is scope of instant income for many herders to leave their traditional occupations. Another major factor which affects the *Doksa* practitioner to leave this practice is the influence of tourism. There is a probability of total vanishing of *Doksa* practitioners in coming years due to the tourism influence and it is the greatest threat to the people of Zanskar and even for Ladakh. It's hard to accept that if the *Doksa* practitioner is totally vanished then it might be great loss to the people of Zanskar valley as well as for the whole Ladakh. *Doksa* is the traditional culture and ritual which was followed by their ancestors and which is about to be vanished from Ladakhi culture very soon due to western influence.

During discussions with the participants, we have found that various centrally sponsored government schemes like Jal Jivan Mission (JJM), Anganwadi Centres and basic health centres in the locality have become crucial. Pradhan Mantri Gram SadakYojna (PMGSY) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) have become important but there are no such schemes for herders to encourage them to practice and preserve their highland pastoralism (*Doksa)* system.

## REASONS FOR LIVELIHOOD TRANSFORMATION

As most of the men folk migrated to cities specially Leh for better opportunities, as a result majority of the *Doksa* practitioner were women who are experts in every aspect of dairying like milking, milk processing, packaging of butter and cheese and they sell these dairy products and generate their income from it. Even Zanskar is known for its dairy products especially in Leh district and even from Himachal Pradesh, people come and buy cheese and butter. There are significant number of people leaving the highlands every year and joining the unskilled, casual labour force in the main city. The education of children outside their own community leads to a shortage of shepherds.[7] Size of the herd varies from 20 to 30

which includes animals of others besides one's own. Some of the problems faced by the herder are harsh climactic condition, threat from wild animals (especially brown bear), excessive workload and pathetic living conditions. In case minimum amenities are not provided in the *Doksa*, this tradition is bound to perish. If this continues, the farming community and groups need to search for alternatives. During our survey to explore migration patterns from Zanskar villages to Leh city, it was found that only few individuals migrated permanently for business and other purposes in Leh and most of them spent some months during summer for education of their children and to generate income from various sources.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Highland Pastoral Practices (*Doksa*) system must be promoted by introducing various governmental schemes. This can not only benefit them but also can become a good source of livelihood for many generations with some improvement in this system.
- Government should protect the pastoral lands so that their traditions of *Doksa* system is protected.
- Minimum basic and required amenities should be provided to the *Doksas*, otherwise it will perish soon.
- Government should provide educational facilities and quality education to the people of Zanskar, so that the sessional migration for education can be stopped.
- Government should come up with a policy to protect the wild animals (specially bears) and also the people.
- Non-Governmental Organizations should reach out to the backward areas of Zanskar to spread awareness regarding education, health and various issues related to life styles. They should organize various programmes to make them aware of the importance of their education and health and their family.

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# *Da-rtse*: A Traditional Archery Festival in Ladakh

*Sonam Joldan*

ABSTRACT

*Despite residing in the high altitudes of the Western Himalayas, the inhabitants of Ladakh have engaged in various sports, including archery, for centuries. Archery holds a special status as a traditional sport in the region, embodying the essence of activities deeply ingrained in the local culture and tradition. With a history spanning centuries, archery has firmly established itself as a traditional pursuit among the people of Ladakh. Even today, the archery festival known as* Da-rtse *remains a prevalent activity in most Ladakhi villages. This study focuses on the* Da-rtse*, a traditional archery festival in Ladakh.*

*The primary objectives extend beyond a mere exploration of traditional archery. The focus is on understanding the nuances of traditional archery and investigating whether the inherent natural talents, shaped by centuries of tradition, can be harnessed for contemporary competitive sports. The goal is to leverage these traditional skills to attain excellence in modern archery*

**Keywords:** *Traditional archery, tradition, culture, natural talent, modern*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The archery festival, locally known as *Da-rtse* or *da-phangs*, is a deeply rooted cultural tradition across Ladakh. Skander Khan traces its origin to ancient times when Tibetan, Mon, and Brogpa tribes utilized bows and arrows for hunting bears, wild yaks, and ibex. The Mon community, even today, holds the honour of presenting the first arrows in archery contests. The legendary hero Darpon Chhemo, a skilled archer from the *Kesar Saga*, continues to be idolized by the people.

Folklore and songs abound with references to archery, especially in

folksongs. Arrows hold a significant place in various rituals and customs. Although the exact inception of archery is challenging to pinpoint, petroglyphs depicting people hunting with bows and arrows suggest its ancient roots in Ladakh. According to Ravina Aggarwal, the archery festival, or *Da-rtse*, is one of the oldest and most widespread cultural performances in Ladakh.

Today, the archery festival has evolved into one of the region's popular traditional games, featuring archery competitions and traditional music, songs, and dances. Many Ladakhi folk songs incorporate references to arrows. Symbolic gestures involving arrows, such as presenting them to greet a newborn or incorporating them into Ladakhi marriages, highlight their cultural significance.

During our visit in January 2019 to Leh, we interviewed several people who are knowledgeable of traditional songs relating to archery. I must mention here that Dr.Tashi Thinlas of Skurbuchan and Mr. Sonam Tsering of Basgo, have not only sung the songs but typed in the Ladakhi language and translated them into English. The following are some of the songs related to archery and arrow both in Ladakhi and its translations in English:

**ཨ་ཞང་དཀར་མཁན།།**

ངས་ཡོ་ལ་ཁྱོན་འང་ཨ་ཞང་ངེ་དེའ་དང་རོག་མཁན།།བདག་ངེ་ལ་གསན་འང་དེའ་ཨ་ཞང་ངེ་དེའ་དང་རོག་མཁན།

ཆ་ཡིན་ཆ་ཡིན་ཅེར་མཁན་ནི་མངའ་ཚོ་བོ་དེའ་གསུམ་སྟོང་ཡོད།།

མི་ཆ་དེའ་ཟེར་མཁན་ནི་མཁའ་ཚོ་བོ་དེའ་གསུམ་སྟོང་ཡོད།།དཀར་ཡོ་བའི་ལམ་བསྟན་ཡོ་སྟོན་དེ་ལ་ཡང་ཕྱུང་ཡིན་དོ།།ནག་ཡོ་བའི་སྲོ་
ག་བཅག་ཡོ་སྟིང་དེ་ན་ཡང་ཕྱུང་ཡིན་དོ།།བཏང་པ་ནས་ཁར་ལ་དེའ་མི་ཡོག་ཐུམ་ཡང་མི་འདུག་དོ།།ཡོག་པ་ནས་ཁང་ལ་མི་ཤི་ཐུམ་
ཡང་མི་འདུག་དོ།།

**Translation: Ajang Darokhan**

Listen to me uncle Darokhan, listen to me Uncle Darokhan, ready to go, there are three thousand arrows, not ready to go there are, another three thousand arrows. The direction seeking white arrow, I will release first, the killer black arrow, I release next, once released there is no way it will not hit the target, once hit there is no chance of surviving.

དྲྭ་བ། མདའ་མོ་མདའ་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གོད། མདའ་མཹའི་ཚོག་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གོད། མདའ་མཹའི་སྒིན་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གོད། མདའ་མཹའི་འདུ་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་གོད། ལེགས་སམ། ལན། མདའ་མཹའི་མདའ་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་དེ། ཙོ་སྐྱེས་འཛངས་མའི་ཐུག་གང་ཡིན།ཕྲིང་རྒྱལ་ཆེན་མཹའི་ཙོག་མདའ་ཡིན། ཅི་ལ་བརྒྱ་ཡི་ཁང་མདའ་ཡིན། མདའ་མཹའི་མདའ་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ལེགས། མདའ་མཹའི་ཙོག་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་དེ། ཐྲ་རྒྱལ་རྩོད་ཡིའི་ཁྲིང་ཙོག་ཡིན། རྒ་ཐུབ་རྩོད་ཡིའི་མཹའ་ཡིན། མདའ་མཹའི་ཙོག་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ལེགས། མདའ་མཹའི་སྐྱར་ཙོག་ཡིན། ཅི་ལ་བརྒྱ་ཡི་སྐྱར་ཙོག་ཡིན། མདའ་མཹའི་ཙོག་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ལེགས། མདའ་མཹའི་སྒིན་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་དེ། རོག་བྱང་རོག་ཡིའི་རྒྱ་སྒིན་ཡིན།མ་ཅི་བརྒྱ་ཡི་ཀོ་སྒིན་ཡིན། འབྲོང་ཆེན་བརྒྱ་ཡི་དུས་སྒིན་ཡིན། མདའ་མཹའི་སྒིན་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ལེགས། མདའ་མཹའི་འདུ་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་དེ། ཙོ་ལད་དཀར་ཡིའི་ཅོམ་དུ་ཡིན། ཙོ་ལད་ནག་ཡིའི་ཅོམ་དུ་ཡིན། རྒྱ་གར་རྒྱལ་ཡིའི་ཉིང་འདུ་ཡིན། མདའ་མཹའི་འདུ་ཚད་ཆེ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ལེགས། ལེགས་སམ།

**The Story of Arrow**

**Question: -**

Tell me the three major sizes of an arrow, tell me the three major sizes of the fletcher of an arrow, tell me the three major jellies of an arrow, tell me the three major tips of an arrow.

**Answer:** The three major sizes of an arrow are: -

Full cubit size of a stout adult, the Bamboo arrow of Ling Gyalam Gesar, The shooting arrow of a hundred children.Those are three major sizes of an arrow.The three major sizes of the fins of an arrow are: the gliding feathers of the king of birds, the flamboyant feathers of a gorgeous peacock, and the sticking feathers of a hundred children, these are the three major features of arrow fletching.The three major jellies of an arrow are: The tendon jelly of yaks, the hide jelly of a hundred buffaloes, and the bone jelly of a hundred wild yaks are the three features of arrow jelly.The three major features of the arrowhead are:The ostentatious head of white steel, the penetrating tip of black steel, and the gliding arrowhead of the kings of India, these are the three major features of an arrowhead.

ནག་ཟན་མདའ་མོ།

དྲི་བ། ནག་ཟན་མདའ་མོ་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། རྒྱ་ཚལ་དམར་པོ་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། མོང་ལོ་གྱུ་བཞི་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། དཀྱལ་དཀར་མེ་ལོང་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། དར་ཚོན་སྣ་ལྔ་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། གཞེར་གདུབ་ཟླ་དགུ་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། ལ་བཏགས་དཀར་པོ་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། ནམ་ལྡགས་མདེའུ་དེ། ཅི་དང་གང་གི་དོན། ལེགས་ཤམ།

ལན། ནག་ཟན་མདའ་མོ་དེ། མི་ཆེན་གོང་མའི་དོན། རྒྱལ་ཁྲིམས་མདའ་ལྟར་དྲང་། རྒྱ་ཚལ་དམར་པོ་དེ།འགོ་སྡེ་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་དོན། འགོ་སྡེ་མཐའ་ལྟར་ཚོགས། མོང་ལོ་གྱུ་བཞི་དེ་ ཡར་འཕེན་ཐུབ་མའི་དོན། ཆོས་གཞི་མཐའ་དྲུ་རྒྱས། དཀྱལ་དཀར་མེ་ལོང་དེ། གཅའ་སོ་ནམས་ཀྱི་དོན། གཅའ་སོ་སྐར་ལྟར་ཚོགས། དར་ཚོན་སྣ་ལྔ་དེ། གཅེན་དྲང་ནམས་ཀྱི་དོན། གཅེན་དྲང་སྐར་ལྟར་ཚོགས། གསེར་དུབ་ཟླ་དགུ་དེ། ནུཚང་འཛངས་མའི་དོན། མཛོས་པའི་གཟུགས་ནྡན་གསལ། ལ་བཏགས་དཀར་པོ་དེ། གཅེན་འཕེལ་སྣ་ཅིད་དོན། གཅེན་འཕེལ་གསེར་ཟམ་ཚུགས། གནམ་ལྡགས་མདེའུ་དེ། ཕ་མ་གཅེས་ཀྱི་དོན། ཚེ་སྲོག་ལྡགས་ལ་གྱུབ། ལེགས་ཤམ།

**Translation:Forest Bamboo Arrow**

**Question:** -What is the meaning of the forest bamboo arrow?What is the meaning of the red dye from India?What is the meaning of the square carpal bone?What is the meaning of the five colour of ribbons?What is the meaning of the ring with nine studs?What is the meaning of the white scarf?What is the meaning of the thunder steel arrowhead?

**Answer:** The meaning of the forest bamboo arrow is the royal majesty, who rules straight like an arrow?The red dye from India represents the group of head men in general, heads gathered like a rainbow.The square carpal bone represents a liberating reverend monk, His dharma altar is extensively set.The five colours of ribbons represent the relatives. Relatives gather like the stars of the sky.The ring with nine studs represents the shy little girl, her gorgeous contour is manifest.The white scarf represents the creation of new relationships, the golden bridge of relationships is being established.The thunderbolt steel arrowhead represents the parents, their lives are made of steel. Is it ok?

མདའ་མོ་གནམ་སྟོང་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན།

དྲི་བ། མདའ་མོ་གནམ་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་གངས་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་ཐག་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་མཆོ་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་སྒང་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་ཐང་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་ཡུལ་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། མདའ་མོ་མ་ཁང་གྲུ་བཞིར་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཅི་འདྲ་མ་ཞིག་མཐྱེན་ལེགས་སམ། ལེགས་སམ། ལན། མདའ་མོ་གནམ་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཉི་ཟླ་གཉིས་ཀའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། རྒྱ་སྐར་འཛོམས་པོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་གངས་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། དར་སེང་དཀར་མོའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། སེ་རྒེ་གཡུ་རལ་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་ཐག་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། སྐྱིན་ཆེན་བ་ཆན་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། ཤ་ཐན་འཛོམ་མོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་མཆོ་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཤ་སེར་མེག་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། ཤ་ཐན་འཛོམ་མོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་ཐང་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། རྒྱང་བྱིང་ཡར་བའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། རྒྱང་ཐན་འཛོམ་མོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་སྒང་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། འཛོང་རྒྱང་རོག་པོའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། མེ་ཏོག་སྔ་ལྗའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་མཁར་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་འགྱིང་ཙ་ན། མི་ཆེན་གོང་མའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། དྲག་ཞན་འཛོམ་མོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་ཡུལ་སྟོང་མཐོ་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཡུལ་དཔོན་ཆེན་མོའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། སྐག་ཤར་འཛོམ་མོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། མདའ་མོ་མ་ཁང་གྲུ་བཞི་ལ་ཕྱར་ཙ་ན། ཡབ་ཡུམ་ཁ་མའི་གཟི་མདངས་དང་། གཉེན་དྲུང་འཛོམ་མོའི་མདོག་འདྲ་ལ། ལེགས་སམ། ཅཱཀྲཱཏཱཡཱཏཱཏ།

## Arrow flying high in the sky

**Question**: What does it look like when the arrow flies high in the sky? What does it look like when the arrow flies high above the glaciers?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the rocky cliffs?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the lakes?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the green grasses?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the plain fields?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the royal palaces?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the country?What does it look like when the arrow flies high over the square home?

**Answer:** When the arrow flies high in the sky, it appears with the glare of the sun and the moon and the colours of the spectrum of the

heavenly stars. When the arrow flies high over the glaciers, it appears with the glitter of the white snowman, and the colours of the snow lion with the turquoise mane.When the arrow flies high over the rocky cliffs, it appears with the glamour of the great ibex and the colours of the range of small ibexes.When the arrow flies high over the lakes, it appears with the grace of the golden-eyed fish and the colours of an array of small fish.When the arrow flies high over the plain fields, it appears with the charm of the wild zebras and the colours of many small zebras.When the arrow flies high over the green grasses, it appears with the grace of the wild yak and the colours of five varieties of flowers.When the arrow flies high over the palace, it appears with the charisma of the royal king and the colours of the full spectrum of the aristocrats.When the arrow flies high over the country, it appears with the charm of the head man and the colours of the assembly of citizens.When the arrow flies high over the square home, it appears with the elegance of the parents and the colours of the complete range of relatives.

མདའ་མོའི་བྱས་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ།།

དྲི་བ། མདའ་མོའི་བྱས་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ཤོད། ཤོག་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ཤོད། རྒྱབ་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ཤོད། སྦྲིན་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ཤོད།ལྷེང་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ཤོད། ལེགས་སམ།

ལན། མདའ་མོའི་བྱས་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པ་དེ། སེར་ལྗང་ལྷེམ་བ་དེ་དང་གཅིག གཡུ་ལྗང་ལྷེམ་པ་དེ་དང་གཉིས། སོག་མདའ་སོག་མའི་སོག་ཤིང་གསུམ། བྱས་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ལེགས། ཤོག་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ། བྱ་རྒྱལ་རྐོད་པའི་ལྷེང་ཤོག་དང་། ཀྲག་མོ་ཁ་དཀར་ལྷེམ་ཤོག་དང་། རྨ་བྱ་འཇོལ་མོའི་ངོམ་ཤོག་གསུམ། ཤོག་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ལེགས། རྒྱབ་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ། རོག་བྱང་རོག་པའི་སོག་རྒྱབ་དང་། ཕྱི་ལིང་རྟ་ཡི་རྟ་རྒྱབ་དང་། ཀྲག་མོ་ཁ་དཀར་ལྷེམ་རྒྱབ་གསུམ། རྒྱབ་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ལེགས། སྦྲིན་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ། རོག་བྱང་རོག་པའི་ཀོ་སྦྲིན་དང་། རྟ་པོ་རུ་རྒྱབ་རུས་སྦྲིན་དང་། བྱ་རུ་ཁ་མོའི་ཁོང་སྦྲིན་གསུམ། སྦྲིན་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ལེགས། ལྷེང་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ། རྒྱང་ཤྭགས་ཆེ་བའི་རྒྱང་སྐྱ་དང་། སྦྲིན་ཤྭགས་ཆེ་བའི་སྦྲིན་སྐྱ་དང་། སྐྱོག་ཤྭགས་ཆེ་བའི་སྐྱོག་འོད་གསུམ། ལྷེང་ཚད་རྣམ་པ་གསུམ་པོ་ལེགས།ལེགས་སམ།

**Translation:The Three phases of construction of an Arrow**

**Question**: Tell me the three phases of construction of an arrow, tell me the three sizes of feathers of an arrow, tell me the three tendons for

jelly for an arrow, tell me the three jellies of an arrow, tell me the three modes of gliding of an arrow. Is that, ok?

**Answer**:The three phases of the construction of an arrow are: One is the flexible golden willow, the second is the turquoise green willow, and the third is the Bamboo arrow, bamboo wood.These are the features of the construction of an arrow.Three features of the feathers are, the gliding feathers of the king of birds, the flexible feathers of the white spotted eagle, and the flamboyant feathers of the peacock are the three features of the feathers of an arrow.The three features of tendons are: Wild yak's tendons of legs, the horse tendon of a dynamic horse, and the third, white-spotted eagle's tendon of the wings, these are the features of tendons. The three features of the jelly for an arrow are: Wild yak's hide jelly, the jelly of wide-horned wild sheep, the third is the red jewel fish's core jelly, these are the three features of jelly for an arrow.The three levels of gliding of an arrow are: The roar of strong winds, Cloud thunder sounds of thick clouds, And the third, the electric flashes of thunderbolts, these are the three levels of gliding of an arrow.

Thus, the traditional folk songs in Ladakh mention archery and arrows which are sung on many occasions. The songs mentioned not only arrows but also how to make arrows, the materials used and the significance of archery in traditional cultural contexts. The above mentioned songs are some of them that we could document during our visits to Ladakh.

## ARGON *DA-RTSE*

Argon *Da-rtse*, a renowned archery competition in twentieth-century Ladakh, gained acclaim not just for its sporting events but also for the vibrant cultural extravaganza featuring folk songs, dances, and drama that accompanied it[1]. Taking place annually in May in Leh town, its origins trace back to the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the Argon community, where archery competitions were already popular. The distinctive cultural program that elevated Argon *Da-rtse*'s reputation was curated by Argon individuals who had extensive experiences in trade and travel[2].

The central activities of Argon *Da-rtse* encompassed both archery contests and cultural presentations. The event, unfolding over rounds, featured teams with distinguished leaders (*margo*) often selected from the upper castes or classes. Tents and carpets were laid out, target *bos* and the main target, known as *tsaga*, were set up, and players engaged in rounds, each involving a pair of participants from opposing teams, with each player equipped with two bamboo arrows.

Guidelines for attire and etiquette were stringent, restricting participants to don white robes, special leather boots, and a *rum-i-tibi* (a Turkish fez with a pompon on top). Additionally, players were required to bring silver cups with saucers. These regulations were particularly observed during the Argon *Da-rtse*, where participation was mainly reserved for the elite and affluent men of Leh, regardless of their religious background. The entrance fees, covering meals and equipment, rendered the game inaccessible to the young and ordinary individuals.

Sadly, Argon *Da-rtse* has ceased to exist for several decades. The Galdan Kadpa, the venue for this historic event, was sold by the Karpotogs family to the Ali Ju family. In 1967, the site was transformed into Ladakh's first cinema hall. Although the momentum was lost, some enthusiasts appealed to the government for a designated land to revive *Da-rtse*. The effort saw a brief continuation, but in 1986, an unfortunate incident occurred during a *Da-rtse*, where players were pelted with stones by the youth, marking the conclusive end of the Argon *Da-rtse*[3].

## *DA-RTSE* TODAY

Nowadays, the archery festival/game has evolved into one of the region's cherished traditional sports. Annual *Da-rtse* or *Da-phangs* festivities are a common occurrence throughout Ladakh, typically taking place in the spring months before the onset of sowing. Interestingly, in certain villages, *Da-rtse* has even transformed into a winter sport.

During our field visits, we found teams practicing archery in various places, using both traditional and modern equipment. Traditional equipment is made in Ladakh and modern equipment is imported from outside. In Kargil, some of the respondents argue that nowadays, with

the introduction of modern communication in the region, many players have ordered their bow, arrow and other accessories through online mode. We could document the Da-stseat Nimoo.

## NIMOO *DA-RTSE*

Nimoo village is positioned along the National Highway, approximately 40 kilometers before Leh, when travelling from Kargil. The village annually hosts the *Da-rtse* festival, typically in May or June, chosen based on the convenience of the residents. Respondents highlighted the suitability of these months for organizing *Da-rtse* in the village.

Historically, the *Da-rtse* in Nimoo took place during the spring months, following the completion of repairs to the village canal. Originally lasting two days, the first day, known as *Pen-zang*, involved preparing the target bos, locally referred to as *Pen-zang*. The second day was dedicated to the main *Da-rtse* event. In the past, *Da-rtse* occurred at a location called Nangsoy-go.

Today, the *Da-rtse* in Nimoo is organized by the village committee, locally known as *tsogspa*, elected by villagers for one or two years to oversee the village's social initiatives. The *tsogspa* is actively involved in various social and cultural activities, including the organization of festivals like *Da-rtse*.

Although the actual *Da-rtse* event in Nimoo lasts for one day, the committee begins preparations a day or two in advance. This involves setting up tents, arranging traditional seating, coordinating cooking, arranging music, and preparing the *Pen-zang* target. On the *Da-rtse* day, the entire village gathers for activities such as archery competitions, music performances, and the sharing of food and drinks. Music, a vital component of *Da-rtse*, involves participation from the entire village, including women. Janet Rezvi characterizes *Da-rtse* not as a competition but as a collective gathering[4].

The *Da-rtse* festivities commence with the playing of Larna, a musical piece accompanied by drums. Two teams are formed, one led by the village head/nambardar (*Goba*) and the other by the Tsogpa president. Interested players, evenly distributed between the teams, contribute nominal entry

fees. The *tsogspa* covers expenses, including food for all villagers, using funds from the village's collective income.Each player from a team can shoot two arrows during their turn. The *Pen-zang* target is divided into two scoring parts: the outer part called *dam-nag* and the center or bull's eye known as *tasga*. The winning team, or the one hitting *tsaga* (bull's eye), distributes money to the musicians and leads the next dance. We can see below the two members in traditional dress during 2018 *Da-rtse* at Nimoo.

PHOTO 1:**NIMOO *DA-RTSE*, 2018**

Two archers from two teams shot two arrows each. The archers are supposed to stay behind the line marked by a poplar wood. The equipment they used is mixed - both modern and traditional. The bow is modern and some archers use traditional arrows with modern bows. The team who hits maximum on the target known as *Tsaga* wins the match.

The entire day's festivities encompass *Da-rtse*, singing, dances, and music. The musical component consists of three types: Larna marks the beginning of the event, a distinct tune follows when a target is hit, and the main dance music takes center stage. A special tune is played when an archer hits the target, locally known as *Tsaga.* The target bos illustrate the primary *Tsaga* at the center, the white spot with the highest score points, followed by the black round known as *dam-nag*. This unique tune is exclusively played for archers hitting the *Tsaga*, the white spot. Post-competition, archers who hit the *Tsaga* is having a separate dance.

Photo: 2.**Nimoo *Da-rtse*, 2018**

The photo shows *Tsaga*, the white spot in the Centre which has maximum scoring points and is followed by the black round known as *dam-nag*.

In earlier times, local musicians were readily available in the village itself. However, nowadays, villagers hire musicians from Leh since there are no musicians playing music within the village. Our research team had the opportunity to interview Tundup Tashi, a 74-year-old drummer from the village of Nimoo. He served as the main drummer for the village, participating in various functions, particularly the Namlangseylarna. Tundup Tashi acquired his musical skills from his grandfather, Stanzin Wangtak.Tundup Tashi was the last musician of Nimoo village. We could interview him in September 2018.

## ARCHERY AND GENDER

In the past, another dimension of *Da-rtse* or traditional archery festivals was associated with gender, with women typically not directly participating in the game, as it was predominantly dominated by males. Women's roles in *Da-rtse* were primarily confined to the organizing

committee, dancing, and serving as spectators. Dechen Yangzes, a resident of Nimoo, stated that she had never personally taken part in any *Da-rtse*, and she couldn't recall her mother participating in any village *Da-rtse* either. She added that this trend is undergoing a shift, noting that more and more girls are now getting involved in archery, particularly in modern archery competitions.

Contemporary developments have led to the establishment of new norms, breaking down old barriers. Women, once prohibited from even handling arrows, are now actively participating in the game as archery adopts a more modern form. During our field visit in October 2018, the research team documented instances of girls practising archery at Government Degree College, Kargil.

## TRADITIONAL AND MODERN ARCHERY

Throughout Ladakh's history, archery shows have been identified by gender and some cases by class. The Argon *Da-rtse* shows how the game was linked with an elite class. The guidelines were such that mostly the elite and affluent men of Leh were involved in the actual game of archery. Similarly, archery in the past was linked with gender where women did not directly participate in the game.

Contemporary regulations are reshaping archery, forging new connections and dismantling old constraints. A remarkable shift is witnessed as women, once prohibited from handling arrows, now actively engage in the sport, marking a modernization of archery. During our field visits to Kargil and Leh districts in September and October 2018, we encountered numerous young female archers passionately honing their skills. Notably, Sonam Yangchan, a female archer from eastern Ladakh, emerged as the National Champion and represented India in various international tournaments.

Male archers from Ladakh have also ventured into the global and national competitive arena. Originally identified for their traditional archery prowess, these athletes were selected under the Special Area Game Scheme (SAG) by the Sports Authority of India and received training in contemporary archery in Delhi[5]. Within a short span, many of them

displayed commendable performances at junior-level national competitions, eventually securing numerous medals at both national and international levels.

The success of these archers in a brief time frame demonstrates that proficiency in traditional archery can seamlessly translate into competence in modern archery. The fundamental techniques can be acquired using traditional bows and arrows, serving as a stepping stone to mastering modern archery. Notably, learning about traditional bows is advantageous for young individuals due to their lighter draw weight, compared to the heavy poundage of modern bows, making it easier to draw and control.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, traditional archery in the Ladakh region harbours immense potential for the younger generation to make a mark in national and international competitions. A pivotal recommendation is to introduce archery education at the school level. The success stories affirm that with traditional techniques and talents, youngsters can swiftly adapt to modern archery. While district youth and sports in Ladakh have initiated archery tournaments for high school students, it is imperative to provide proper training in correct techniques. Equally important is the early instruction of right techniques to the young children. Therefore, a crucial step involves training teachers or coaches to disseminate the correct techniques across various schools.

Thus, *Da-rtse*, the traditional archery is getting popular in Ladakh and has great potential for modern archery competition if the right modern techniques are taught at the right time. Already, they have natural talents as they play traditional archery, government can explore this potential.

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# Tradition and Transition: Culinary practices and food-preservation techniques of the Mising Community

*Rajib Pegu, Sanjay Deuri, Kaushik Kumar Deka, Ratnajit Gogoi* and *Susitra Shyam*

ABSTRACT

*Assam, one of the seven sisters of North-East India has its own unique culture and tradition. The food habits of Assam, the tribal cuisine in particular show a deep impact of South Asian food culture on the food habits of Assam. Out of many tribes residing in Assam, the Mising community is an indigenous community known for its distinct cultural practices and traditional way of life. However, there is limited research available on their culinary practices. This study tries to explore the traditional food sources, dietary patterns, and culinary practices within the community and their present-day relevance for healthier living. It also delves into the food preservation techniques utilized by the Mising tribe, such as drying, smoking, fermenting, and pickling, to ensure sustenance during times of scarcity. Moreover, the study examines the socio-cultural significance of food in the Mising tribe, including its role in rituals, celebrations, and social gatherings. Descriptive analytical method along with secondary data from various sources has been used. By gaining insights into the food habits and preservation techniques of the Mising tribe, this research contributes to the documentation of their unique cultural heritage and offers valuable knowledge on sustainable food practices and traditional wisdom.*

**Keywords:** *Mishing tribe, food habits, preservation techniques, sustainability.*

***Objectives***

1. To contribute to the understanding of the culinary practices and dietary habits of the Mising community.
2. To explore the traditional knowledge related to dietary habits and food preservation techniques for a healthier life in

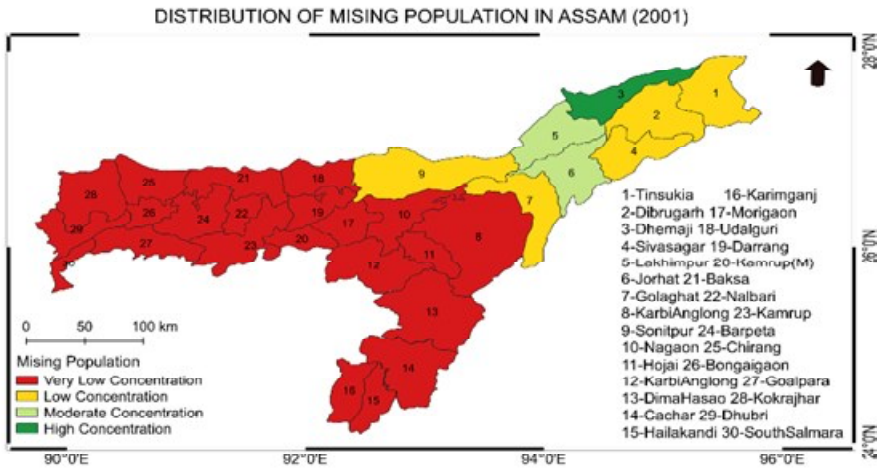
contemporary times.

**Methodology**

This study involves descriptive analysis based on primary data collected from the households of the districts of Assam where the Mising community largely resides in the rural villages and secondary data collected from various journals, research papers, magazines, and articles; by accessing various relevant archives, important documents; by accessing various websites, etc. A random sampling technique has been used for the research study.

**Study Area**

Assam is one of the north-eastern states that have a rich cultural heritage, diversity, etc. It has a total geographical area of 78, 438 sq km. The latitudinal and the longitudinal extension of Assam is 24.50°N - 28°N and 89.42°E - 96°E. The average rainfall of Assam is 2402.9 mm according to 2022 data. The study is limited to the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Majuli, Charaideo, Jorhat, and Golaghat, where there is a considerable population of the Mising Tribe. However, it needs to be mentioned that the traditional food habits and the ethnic ways of food preservation can be found in villages and not in semi-urban areas, towns, or cities. So, this study is confined to those Mising villages where these ancient and ethnic ways of life continue.




*Source*: Based on the data from Mishing Autonomous Council.

## INTRODUCTION

The Mising tribe of Assam, India, is an indigenous community known for

their distinct cultural practices and traditional way of life. This tribe has long inhabited the north-eastern region of Assam, where they have developed a unique set of culinary practices and preservation techniques that have sustained them for generations. However, despite their rich cultural heritage, there is a noticeable lack of research and documentation regarding their food habits and preservation practices.

Food habits are an integral part of any culture, reflecting a community's values, beliefs, and socio-economic conditions. Understanding the food habits of a specific community, such as the Mising tribe, provides valuable insights into their lifestyle, dietary patterns, and the availability of food resources in their environment. Additionally, exploring the traditional food preservation techniques used by the tribe sheds light on their resourcefulness and adaptability to the local climate and ecological conditions. Food preservation techniques play a crucial role in ensuring the availability of food during periods of scarcity and for long-term storage.

The Mising tribe, living in a region prone to natural disasters and seasonal variations, has developed various methods to preserve food, allowing them to sustain themselves during challenging times. These preservation techniques include drying, smoking, fermenting, and pickling, among others. Such techniques not only extend the shelf life of food but also enhance its flavors and nutritional value which protects the body from various diseases and thus helps in leading a healthier life.The preservation of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage is of utmost importance, especially in the face of rapid globalization and cultural assimilation. By studying and documenting the food habits and preservation techniques of the Mising tribe, we can contribute to the preservation of their unique cultural heritage and traditional practices. Furthermore, this knowledge can be utilized to inform sustainable food practices and strategies in the context of environmental changes and global food security challenges. Apart from these, understanding the importance of these traditional culinary practices may also offer insights into their importance for leading a healthier life.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the age of industrialization and modernization, the way of cultivation has undergone drastic changes. To meet the growing demands of the ever-increasing population, using fertilizers, HYV seeds, pesticides, irrigation, etc. has drastically changed the complexion of the soils and the environment. On the other hand, the Mising tribe of Assam still follows the age-old ways of cultivation in the field, to meet the demands of their families. They have tried to meet the demands of ancestral ways of cultivation involving various preservation techniques. To understand the preservation techniques, we have to closely study various cultural practices and the food habits of the Mising community. The food habit of the Mising tribe mainly involves boiled-type foods gathered directly from nature without much use of spices and others. Their cultural ways including their food habits have a close association with nature.

In the rural and interior village areas, Mising families take three meals a day with plain rice as a staple dish along with boiled curry most of the timewith non-veg items depending upon the season. Though it differs in the semi-urban and urban areas, the use of oil (mustard and sesame in particular)can be seen prominently. Mising tribe traditionally is agriculturalists, and food-gatherers and preserves food for future use.

The cultivation of crops is still carried out in the traditional ways. Ploughing is done with the help of cows, *Nangal*, etc and harvesting is done with the help of sickle. They cultivate rice crops like red rice;*joha* rice etc. and presently, they also cultivate various new rice varieties like *Ranjeet* rice. *Yakaanaam* (red rice) is sowed in the months of December-January and harvested between May and June. Another rice variety, i.e., *Joha* rice is sowed in the months of May-July and harvested in December.For self-consumption as well as for sale in the market, the Mising people also cultivate many varieties of pulses like *Pareet* (black lentils) and dal. It is generally sowed in the months of September-October and harvested in January (till the first week of February). Another cash crop *Xorioh* (vegetable mustard) is sowed in the month of October-November and harvested between the second week of January and the second week of February.

Table 1

Crops and vegetables cultivated by the Mising community

| *Sl. No* | *Name of the Food (In Mising term)* | *Name of the Food (In English)* | *Scientific Name* | *Sowing Months* | *Growing Months* | *Harvesting Months* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yakaanaam | Red Rice | Oryza punctata | December-January | February-April | May-June |
| 2 | Joha Aam | Joha Rice | Oryza sativa L. | May-July | August-November | December |
| 3 | Pareet | Black lentils | Vigna mungo | September-October | November-December | January- First week of February |
| 4 | Xorioh | Vegetable Mustard | Brassica junce | October-November | November-December | Second week of January- Second week of February |
| 5 | Onion | Allium cepa | October | November-January | February | |
| 6 | Taelaab | Garlic greens | Allium sativum | October | November-January | February |
| 7 | Alu | Potato | Solanum tuberosum | October | November-January | February |
| 8 | Taapah | Pumpkin | Cucurbita moschata | First week of October | December- January | February-May |
| 9 | Laowa | Bottlegourd | Lagenaria siceraria | August-September | October-November | December-February |
| 10 | Paro taapa | White Gourd | Benincasa hispida | March | April | May-August |
| 11 | Palengga | Spinach | Spinacia oleracea | October | November-December | January |
| 12 | Lai | Vegetable Mustard | Brassica junce | October | November-December | January |
| 13 | Bilai | Tomato | Solanum iyco- | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | persicum | October | November-December | January | |
| 14 | Bean | Green Bean | | October | November-December | January |
| 15 | Muursae | Chily | Capsicum frutes-cens | October | November-December | January |
| 16 | Muulaeh | Radish | Raphanus sativus | October | November-December | January |
| 17 | Oarie | Coriander | Coriandrum sativum | October | November-December | January |
| 18 | Bhul | Sponge gourd | Luffa aegyptiaca | January | February-March | April |

*Source:* Author's own computation based on primary data and secondary sources

From the above table, it can be seen that in different seasons, different crops are cultivated. Some of the crops are freshly eaten and others are stored for future use. These are stored so that they can be used in the future or their seeds can be grown in future. The vegetables and other crops are for home consumption, and a few quantities are for sale in the market. Crops like black lentils, vegetable mustard, etc. are grown both for domestic use and commercial purposes. Black lentils (*Pareet*) are usually sowed in September and October and harvested in January and continued till the first week of February. Vegetable like mustard is sowed in October and November and harvested in the month of the second week of January and continued till the second week of February.

Vegetables like onions, garlic green, potato, spinach etc. are cultivated in October and harvested in February. Some vegetables like spinach, vegetable mustard, tomato, green bean, chili, radish, coriander, etc. are cultivated in October, and harvesting is done in January. *Zaid* season crops like pumpkin, cucumber, etc. are also cultivated by the Mising tribe. Some of the vegetables like *bhul* (sponge gourd) are cultivated in January and harvested in April. Bottle gourd is cultivated in the months in August and September and harvested from December till February. A white gourd is cultivated in March and harvested from May till August.

These crops and vegetables were cultivated by the second largest tribe of Assami, i.e., the Mising tribe without using any fertilizers or pesticides. They use organic manures like cow dung, and rotten vegetables in the cultivation of vegetables.

FIGURE 1 :**BLACK LENTILS (*PAREET*)**

FIGURE-2:**VEGETABLE MUSTARD (*XORIYOH*)**

TABLE 2
FOODS STORED

| Sl No | *Name of the Food* (In Mising) | *Name of the Food* (In English) | *Preserved and stored* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Taapa | Pumpkin | Paraab (Above fireplace) |
| 2 | Paro taapa | White gourd | Paraab (Above fireplace) |
| 3 | Lauwae | Bottle gourd | Paraab (Above fireplace) |
| 4 | Pareet | Black lentils | Kumsuum (Rice Godown) |
| 5 | Piyaas | Onion | Paraab (Above fireplace) |
| 6 | Taelaab | Garlic | Paraab (Above fireplace) |

*Source:*Author's own computation based on primary data

Most of the cultivated vegetables and crops are eaten freshly but some vegetables are stored and preserved for future use, i.e., for self-consumption or cultivation purposes(seeds). These crops include pumpkin, white gourd, bottle gourd, black lentils, onion, garlic, chili, etc.At the center of the kitchen, there is a fireplace called *Maeram* where food is cooked. This *Maeram* is used for both cooking as well as for carrying out certain rituals. There is a strong belief in the Mising community that their ancestors' soul, *Tatoo* meaning grandfather, and *Yaayoo* meaning grandmother resides. Whenever any traditional ritual is performed, *Apong* (rice beer), Aagin (Meat)/ *Aangoo* (Fish) or any curry is first offered in the *Maeram.* Right above the *Maeram*, there lays the *Paraab* where we can find multiple-layered shelves and each layer serves different purposes. This will be discussed later on in the preservation techniques. In the top layer, pumpkin, different types of gourds, onions, garlic, etc. are kept after harvesting. In the corner of the *Chang* (traditional Mising house) lentils are stored.

The Mising tribe believes in Animism, and every activity of life depends upon nature maintaining a cordial relationship with the natural surroundings. So, the Mising tribe uses different preservation techniques to survive and meet the required needs of the family without harming the environment.

FIGURE 3
**GARLIC STORED IN PARAAB**

FIGURE 4
**PUMPKIN, ONION, GOURDS STORED IN PARAAB**

FIGURE 5
***NAAMSINGAOTUNG* (GRILLED DRY FISH)**

FIGURE 6
**A VIEW WHERE *NAAMSINGAOTUNG* IS KEPT**

In table 3, it can be seen how different types of foods and beverages are preserved, processed, and used by the Mising tribe. *Naamsing* is one of the favorite and delicious dishes enjoyed by the Mising community. At first, the fish is properly washed and the inside is cleaned thoroughly. In the *Paraab,* i.e., the second layer above the *Meram* (food cooking place), the properly cleaned fish are kept and smoked for 4 days(average). A plant called *Aengee* is cut and left in the sun for almost two hours so that the gum is phased out. After the fish is properly smoked, *Aengee* is then grinded with fresh green chili and with the smoked fish. Then the mixed texture is put inside the bamboo (properly cut into sizes and cleaned) and it is covered with *Khear* (rice straw). It is kept in the *Pareeb* as shown in the picture.To get the proper taste, it is required to be kept for at least 4 months. Moreover, it can be preserved for 4 to 5 years and even more.It is a Mising-ethnic delicacy known for its aroma and taste.

*Khar* (alkaline) is another liquid food that is preserved by the community and is used in different food dishes. There are three ways to make or process it. The first way is to make it from the *Bhim kol* or *Athiya kol.* At first, the fruit is taken out and the peel is left to be dried either in

Table 3

Foods and ways of preservation

| Sl. No | Name of the food items (Mising Language) | Assamese Food Name | English term for the food | Ingredients used | Time required for processing (in hours/days) | The total number of Days for preserving |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Naamsing | Hukaan mass | Dry fish | Smoke fish, Taro leaves, green chili after the fish is smoked for 4 days | 4 hours 4-5 years | |
| 2 | Khar | Khar | Alkaline | Black lentil leaves, Banana peel | hours | 1 year |
| 3 | Kharoli | Kharoli | Fermented mashed mustard | Mustard, chili | 10 days | 1 month |
| 4 | Eyug | Baa gaas | Bamboo shoot | Bamboo shoot | 7 days | 4-5 years |
| 5 | Sitaar | Hukhaan jolokia guuri | Red chili powder | Fresh Green and Red chili | 4/5 days | 4-5 months |
| 6 | Guyae | Tamul | Betel Nut | Betel nut | | 8-10 months |
| 7 | Asannaam Eegaajin | Hukaangahori-maangkho | Smoked Pork meat | Fresh Pork, Salt, Turmeric | Boiling- hours, Fire smoke- 3 days | 2-3 months |
| 8 | Asannaam Porookaajin | Hukaanmurgi-maang kho | Smoked Chicken meat | Fresh chicken | Fire Smoke- 4 days | 2-3 months |
| 9 | Asannaamangoo | Hukaan Mass | Smoked fish | Fish | Sun- 1 days, smoke- 4/5 days | 1 year |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Nogin Apong | Hass Pani | Rice beer | Bormanimuni (Centella asiatica), *Horumanimuni* (Hydrocotylesibthorpioides), *Banjaluk* (Oldenlandia-corymbosa), *Kuhiar* (Saccharum officinarum), *dhapattita* (Clerodendrum-viscosum), *Bhilongoni* (Cyclosorusexlensa), Bam Kolmou (Ipoemea sp.), *Senikuthi* (Scoparia dulcis), *Lai Jabori* (Drymeriacordata), *Jalokia* (Capsicum annuum), *Anaras* (Ananas comosus) and *KopouDhekia* (Lygodiumflexuosum) | 4-5 hours | 1 months |
| 11 | Poro Apong | Sai maat | Rice beer | Same as above | 5-6 hours | 6-8 months |
| 12 | Ek aachar | Gahoriaachar | Pork pickle Mustard oil, green chili, salt, turmeric | Smoke pork-5 days | 4-5 months | |

*Source*:Author's own computation based on primary data

**FIGURE-7**
**KHAAR MADE FROM BHIMKOL (MUSA BALBISIANA)**

the sunlight or in the *Paraab*. After drying, it is burnt till it converts into ashes. These ashes are dipped in the water for at least 10 minutes to 15 minutes. Then the ashes are filtered and the liquid obtained is stored. The second method is from black lentil leaves.

*Kharoli* is one of the delicious foods which is preserved for a short period. For *Kharoli* (mashed fermented mustard), at first mustard seeds are washed properly. Then it is rinsed thoroughly in the sun. After the seeds are properly dried up, it is pasted in the *Dheki* or *Uura*l (types of traditional grinders). Then through a *Saloni* (a type of round bamboo plate that has small holes in it), the paste product is cleaned once again, the portion left in the *Saloni* is not used and the cleaned portion is mixed with salt and *Khaar-made* from banana and then the *Kharoli* is wrapped in banana leaves in the form of small sachets. These can be kept for at least 10 days.

*Sitaar* (Red-chili powder)- At first, the fresh green chili is properly washed and dried in the sun for half an hour or so. Then it is kept in the third layer of the *Paraab* (above the fireplace) and smoked for 4 to 5 days till it becomes crispy. This smoked-crispy chili is then pasted on a flat stone with the help of bare hands and stored. It can be preserved for at least 4 to 5 months. The longer it is preserved, the more is the hotness of the red chili powder.

*Guyae* (Betel nut), is one of the most common forms of fruit/nuts

eaten by the tribal and the Assamese community. Betel nut of the Areca Palm tree is collected from the tree after it matures from February to May, then it is kept in jute bags. A hole of considerable depth is dug on the ground and those jute bags filled with betel nuts are put inside it and later on, the hole is filled with soil. From October to November, when the price of betel nuts is very high, it is taken out from the ground and sold in the markets as well as used for self-consumption. Another form of preservation of betel nuts is that the jute bags filled with betel nuts are thrown in the corner of the fishery.

FIGURE-8

**FIRST LAYER OF PARAAB WHERE FRESH PORK/ FRESH CHICKEN IS KEPT FOR PRESERVATION.**

*Asannaam Eegaajin* (smoked Pork) is also preserved by the Mising people and its preservation technique is a bit different from the other tribes of Assam. Fresh pork, usually 300 grams or 400 grams of weight is cut and then it is boiled for more than half an hour with salt and turmeric. After boiling it, the water is thrown out and the pork pieces are dried out and kept in the first layer of the *Paraab*. The pork is then smoked properly for at least 3 days. This way pork can be preserved and stored for at least 2 to 3 months.

*Asannaam Porook Aajin* (smoked chicken): In a cauldron (*Kadai*), water is boiled. Chicken is properly cleaned with the help of it and then it is put on fire to clean the left-out feathers. The whole chicken is cut into four to five pieces and kept in the *Paraab* for 4 to 5 days. This smoked chicken can be preserved for 2 to 3 months.

*Asannaam Angoo* (smoked fish): For smoked fish, bigger-sized fish is preferred by the Mising people. The small-sized fishes are used to prepare Namsing. Fish like *Rou, Kanduli, Kusiya, Kuri, Hol*, etc. are preferred. The fish are properly washed and the internal organs are properly cleaned. After cleaning, the fish are kept in the *Paraab* and smoked for 5 to 6 days. These smoked fish can be stored and used for 4 to 5 months.

*Nogin Apong* (white rice beer) and *Poro Apong* (black rice beer): Before starting the fermentation process, the *Kiling* (earthen pot) used for fermentation is first fumigated by placing it on a *Torap* (a bamboo frame constructed over the fireplace) until the pot turns blackish. For making this beverage, initially, *ApopPitaah* (a type of cake) needs to be prepared. The ingredients for the cake are leaves of green plants like *Rukgi* (Ferns), *Bilumoni* (Cyclosorus), *Mudhuri Paat* (Guava leaves), *Kothal Paat* (Jackfruit leaves), *Tabaat* (sugarcane), etc. These leaves are cleaned properly and then dried on a bamboo mat called *Opoh*. The rice is soaked and left to dry for one hour. The rice which was left to dry is then grounded into powder form and all the necessary ingredients mentioned above are ground in a *Kipar* (wooden mortar) into paste separately. Both the paste and the powdered rice are mixed thoroughly and made into a cake and kept in *Salani*(bamboo mat) covered by hay for at least 10 days. Then this is transferred to the *Paraab* (a bamboo frame constructed over the fireplace) and hay is taken out from it after 8 to 10 days. After that, the rice is boiled and left to be cooled in the *Dolah* (bamboo mat of rounded shape). Then the *Apop Pitaah* is mixed and kept inside in the *Killing* (earthen pot) covered with either banana leaves or rice hay and left for fermentation. The process of making this rice beer is known as *Nogin Apong*.

The rice beer prepared by the Misings is known as *Apong* and the starter cake is called *ApopPitha.* Different leaves needed for preparing *ApopPitha* are of the plants Bormanimuni (Centella Asiatica), *Horumanimuni* (Hydrocotylesibthorpioides), *Banjaluk* (Oldenlandiacorymbosa), *Kuhiar* (Saccharum officinarum), *dhapattita* (Clerodendrumviscosum), *Bhilongoni* (Cyclosorusexlensa), Bam Kolmou (Ipoemea sp.), *Senikuthi* (Scoparia dulcis), *Lai Jabori* (Drymeria cordata), *Jalokia*(Capsicum annuum), *Anaras* (Ananas comosus) and *KopouDhekia* (Lygodiumflexuosum) etc.

The Misings also prepare another kind of rice beer and it is known by

**FIGURE 9**
**THE EARTHEN POT WHERE RICE BEER IS MADE**

the name *Sai Mod*. In this method, hay and husk are half burned till they become black. This ash is mixed in equal amounts with boiled rice and to it is added the *ApopPitha*. In this case, the amount of *ApopPitha* is added in double quantity concerning *Apong* preparation. The mixture is compactly packed in a *Killing* and fermented for about 15 days. It is then filtered in the same way as *Apong*.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD PRESERVATION

The Mising tribe's food preservation techniques are not only essential for sustaining themselves during times of scarcity but also hold socio-cultural significance within the community. Food plays a vital role in rituals, celebrations, and social gatherings among the Mising tribe. The traditional knowledge and practices associated with food preservation are passed down through generations, strengthening the cultural identity of the community.

The preservation techniques, such as smoking and drying, not only extend the shelf life of food but also enhance its flavors and nutritional value. The preserved foods are often used as ingredients in traditional dishes and are integral to Mising cuisine. They add unique flavors and textures to various recipes, creating a distinct culinary experience.

Furthermore, the preserved foods are often shared and exchanged

during festivals and social events. They serve as symbols of hospitality and community bonding. The act of preserving and sharing food reinforces social cohesion and strengthens relationships within the Mising tribe.

The food preservation techniques employed by the Mising tribe hold valuable lessons for sustainable food practices. These techniques have been developed over generations and are in harmony with the local environment. They rely on natural resources and do not harm the ecosystem. The Mising tribe's reliance on organic farming practices, such as using organic manures and avoiding chemical fertilizers and pesticides, contributes to sustainable agriculture.

Preference is given to boiled foods which give more nutrition and use less oil in their dishes. The Misings have in-depth ideas on foods, particularly on the pre-natal and post-natal period foods. After delivery, mother is suggested to have chicken soup which is prepared with *Bihlangani l*eaves (a kind of medicinal plant). *Kochu* or *Ange* (taro, the botanical name is *Alocasia acuminata schott*) is a very common food among the Mising society. During the puberty period girls are restrained from taking certain foods such as pineapple, and banana flowers. *Bihlangani*(a kind of fern) leaves are used as medicine for rheumatic pain. Generally, they eat shoots, leaves, and tubers cooked with acidic fruits like *Ow-tenga* (elephant apple), *bilahi* (tomato) and *nemutenga* (lemon). It is useful for blood purification also. In the 5th month of pregnancy, a woman is traditionally given *pajap* (duck meat), as there is a strong belief that without it her baby might be physically handicapped after birth. The meat of pigeons and *phapuk* (banana flower) is essential not only for females but men too as these increase blood. Spadin of Banana is used as medicine for the treatment of eating hair accidentally with food as sometimes one/two hairs may be left inside the stomach. Therefore, Spadin of Bananas is eaten at least one/ two times a year. Even *phapuk* (Spadin of Banana) with pigeon meat is also a nutritious food as it improves blood. Mising foods are source of vitamins, minerals and fiber. They prefer boiled food with local herbs like medicinal creeper used in curries: vedailata (*Paederiafoetida*), dimoru (*FicusglomerataRoxb*), hati- Khutora (*Amaranthus spinosus L.*), nefafu (*Clerodendrumcloebrookianum L.*), tengamora (*Hibiscus Suddarifa L.)*, mosundori (*Houttuynia cordata Thunb)* and species of fern used *dhekia*

(fiddlehead fern) which is nutritious and useful for health. The juice of vedailata works as a stringent and particularly they use it in diarrhea and dysentery.

## CONCLUSION

This study on the Mising tribes of Assam sheds light on the remarkable interplay between cultural practices, sustainable resource management, and community resilience. The Mising tribe's food habits, centered on locally available ingredients, demonstrate a deep connection to their natural surroundings and a profound understanding of their ecosystem. The Mising people's traditional food preservation techniques, such as smoking, drying, fermentation, and the use of natural preservatives, not only ensure food security during periods of scarcity but also contribute to the preservation of their culinary heritage. These practices reflect a harmonious relationship with the environment, as they rely on locally sourced, organic ingredients and minimize waste.

Furthermore, the social and cultural significance of food preservation among the Mising tribes is evident in their rituals, festivals, and communal gatherings. The exchange and sharing of preserved foods strengthen social bonds, foster a sense of belonging, and reinforce cultural identity. The preservation techniques are not merely utilitarian methods; they are an integral part of the Mising people's social fabric and collective memory.The study of the Mising tribe's food habits and preservation techniques also holds broader implications for sustainable food systems. Their reliance on traditional knowledge, organic farming practices, and sustainable resource management offers valuable insights for promoting environmentally friendly approaches to food production and consumption. The Mising people's ability to adapt and thrive in their local ecosystem serves as a valuable lesson in resilience and sustainability. By preserving and storing food for future use; they reduce waste and ensure food security even during challenging times. The traditional knowledge and practices of the Mising tribe provides insights into sustainable food preservation. In conclusion, the food habits and food preservation techniques of the Mising tribes of Assam provide a glimpse into a rich cultural heritage that intertwines

with sustainable practices and community cohesion. Preserving and celebrating these traditions not only safeguard the Mising tribe's cultural identity but also inspire sustainable food systems that respect and work in harmony with the natural environment. By recognizing the wisdom embedded in the Mising people's food preservation techniques, we can learn from their sustainable practices and strive towards a more resilient and ecologically conscious future.

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# *RAKHAANG*:A TRADITIONAL YOUTH DORMITORY OF THE MARING TRIBE OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

*CHARANGA MODARPHA*

ABSTRACT

*This paper is an attempt to re-visit and re-discover the traditional youth dormitory of the Maring tribe known as* Rakhaang *which once served as a traditional educational and social institution during the pre-literate society of the community. A comparative study of youth dormitories practiced by some other tribal communities of north east and* Rakhaang *has been made in this article. The paper discusses the origin, roles and functions it played in the pre-literate Maring society. It also highlights some of the unique features of* Rakhaang. *Unfortunately, an institution which was once a cultural center imparting integral values to its people now disintegrated after the advent of Christianity in the Maring society. The Marings who were once known for their rich cultures and traditions now seem to forget them and tend to assimilate themselves in modern society. The paper aims to revive the lost tradition and raise awareness among modern youths about the integral values taught in the ancient dormitory, which is crucial for nation building.*

**Keywords**: *Maring,* Rakhaang, *Youth Dormitory, Traditional, Social institution, Ethno-medicine, Pre-literate.*

## INTRODUCTION

Youth dormitory is a common institution for most of the tribal societies of north east India.*Rakhaang* is one such institution among the Maring community of Manipur. The word *Rakhaang* is a common term for both boys and girls dormitory in Maring society which is not the case for some other tribes of north-east India. For example, among the Mao Nagas the boys dormitory is known as *Khruchozḷ* (Bachelors' Dormitory) and for the girls *Lochozḷ* (Virgins' Dormitory).[1]Different Naga tribes of north east India

practice such institution under different names. For instance, it is called *Dekha-Chang* among the Sema tribe, Lotha tribe called it *Champ*, *Ariju* among the Ao Naga tribe, *Lungshim* among the Tangkhuls, *Kichuki* among the Angami tribe, *Herangki* among the Zeliangs etc. The prevalence of youth dormitories has been elaborated by Von Fḷr-Heimendorff, C. (1950) in his words, "men's houses are also found among the Bhors, Mikirs, Garos, Lalungs, and Lynngams, as well as among most Kuki and Lushai tribes. In Burma men's house occur among the Khantis and the Karen, and further east the institution is also found among the Moi tribes of French Indo-China. Community houses of similar type flourish in Sumatra, Celebes, the Philippines and New Guinea".[2]However, not every Naga tribe who practices youth dormitory system follows the same pattern of *Morung*. Today, many of this community houses have disintegrated and lost all its practical importance in our daily life. Though different tribes have their own terms for these dormitories in their own dialect, but the common term *Morung* is in use among the Nagas of north east India. In this paper, the word *Rakhaang* and *Morung* are interchangeable for readers' conveniences.

## METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This article uses a qualitative research method, using focus group interviews and open-ended questions to gather data. Informants' confidentiality is assured and their information is used for publication purposes, which they understood and agreed. The reason for choosing focus group data collection is precisely explained by Howard Lune and Bruce L. Bergas :"participants, one hopes, do not merely answer questions when asked, but actively explain themselves to each other. It is the desire among group members to make themselves understood by others in the group that yields the richest data".[3]Most respondents witnessed youth dormitory during their early years, some being members of *Rakhaang*. Primary sources were collected through personal interviews with community while secondary data includes books, articles, journals and internet sources.

## ETYMOLOGY OF THE MARING AND THEIR SETTLEMENTS

The Maring tribe, a Scheduled tribe in Manipur, in olden days were known as *Meirings* which signifies *Mei* (fire) and *Ring* means 'alive' which means people who keep fire un-quenched.[4]They are known for their traditional fire-making method called *Meihongtang*, which is traditionally known as *khongma-heeng* and using bamboo strips through friction.According to R. Brown, the origin of the 'Murring' is near the eastern foot of the Hirok Range, but in the Kubo Valley under the hills at a place named Mungsa.[5] Forefathers considered *'Kulvi-ShongShong'*(Kabow valley of Indo-Myanmar) as place of their origin. Lately, they spread into different parts of Manipur. Presently, they are concentrated mostly in the districts of Chandel, Tengnoupal, Senapati, Kangpokpi, Kakching, Thoubal and Imphal East of Manipur state. The Marings are traditionally and culturally rich tribal community known for their knowledge of handicrafts and ethno-medicine. The Maring dialect falls under Tibeto-Burman languages.According to the reports of Dr. Grierson, "Sopvoma is most nearly connected with the Western Naga languages and the Maring with the Kuki ones, while Tangkhul occupies an intermediate position."[6]But the Marings are culturally and socially different from that of Kuki community in terms of naming of person, village administration, naming of clans, customary laws, etc.

## ORIGIN OF RAKHAANG

The origin of *Rakhaang* in Maring community is unknown until today, but it is believed to have been established for war preparation. During those days there were frequent wars and conflicts between different ethnic groups or with neighbouring villages and in such warlike society, maintaining well organized and trained village defensive force was very much required. Dormitory youths particularly boys, served the purpose during those days. It is believed that when sudden raids and attacks were made by the enemies, members of *Rakhaang* reacted together and prevented defeats or casualties of their villagers.Von Fḷr-Heimendorff described the importance of youth dormitories as: "these institutions play a vital role

in coordinating the activities of all male members of the community and gain particular importance in those warlike societies which depend on the young men for the defence of village".[7]He also states that it is among more advanced agriculturists dwelling in permanent villages, yet retaining a tribal organization which favors communal living. In this regard, K.Mann (1989) elaborates that "to harness the youth power to its fullest benefit, in the larger interest of society, the institution of youth dormitory came into being in some sections of society".[8]The above statements of Von Fḷr-Heimendorff and K. Mann seem to be relevent to the Maring society in regard to the origin of *Raakhang*.Considering that the *Raakhang* only exist for war purposes would be a wrong assumption. In fact its members also actively participated in other social and cultural activities.

## LOCATION OF RAKHAANG

The site selection of *Rakhaang* was made looking at the convenience of the villagers. According to my informants it can be at any place which is strategically suited and agreed by the villagers. So far as present knowledge is concerned, we do not find a separate building or place of dormitory in Maring society other than a symbolic structure of *Raakhang* constructed by the present generation in some public places. Usually it is annexes to private house which is an ordinary dwelling house with the owner's permission. As regards the site of the *Rakhaang*, we find a similarity between the Liangmai Naga and the Marings. Kailadbou Daimai writes that, "unlike some Naga tribes such as the Konyak, Ao, Lotha, and Rengma, the Liangmai Naga do not have separate house built as Khangchiu. It is but attached to one of the houses in the village".[9]Therefore, we have no sources on the process of construction of Maring dormitory system and its architectural design. Usually, the house of the village chief is used for boys' dormitory and house of 'Khangsillak/Nangaka Upa' is used for girls' dormitory. Besides, the villagers also can propose the site and the owner of that house has to accept the proposal. Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban Von Stockhausen and Marion Wettstein observed that "The Morung was school and barracks in one, and was usually located at a strategic

point in the village or the village division that permitted its optimum defence in case of attack."[10]

## ITS DIVISION

*Rakhaang* has three divisions: 1. *Douwa Rakhaang* (Sub-junior) 2. *Yaima Rakhaang* (Junior) 3. *Upa Rakhaang (Senior).* There were separate dormitories for both boys and girls in all three divisions. Most of the trainings took place during their stays in *Douwa* and *Yaima Rakhaang*. After staying in lower division of *Rakhaang* for certain period of time they rise to the next division and so on. The last and final division is the *Upa Rakhaang* where they spent rest of their life if remain unmarried. Every ancient village of Maring has a *Rakhaang*. There was no evidence that the Maring villages had more than one dormitory each for boys and girls irrespective of the size of the village. However, both boys' dormitory and girls' dormitory in each division was similar in almost all aspects.

## MEMBER'S ADMISSION

Every boys and girls who have attained puberty age must gather at *Rakhaang*. They are laughed at if they still stay under their parental roof after growing up. Among the Marings, there was no particular ceremony of initiation of youths into the *Rakhaang*, which is also not the case for some other communities that practices youth dormitory. While writing about the *Morung* of the Konyak tribe, Von Fḷr-Heimendorff (1938) observed that "this initiation ceremony is called 'Shou-ban-bu' and is invariably performed in the month of 'Shou-ban-li', which roughly corresponds to October".[11] There was no age specification to become a *Rakhaang* member. Selection of members was made during village assembly. Every boys and girls who are promoted to become a responsible person of his/her family, a promotion locally known as *Taam Ka*, is only eligible to become a member of the *Rakhaang*. Enrolment into this Institution is called *Rakhaang Ruich*al. There were no sorts of rituals or mandatory ceremonies to be performed during this enrolment process. Every enrolled member was equally treated and no caste distinction existed within the dormitory. Traditionally, enrolment into this youth dormitory signifies the attainment

of marriageable age for boys and girls. However, considering that entry into dormitory is the only criteria for marriageable age may be wrong, as instances of child marriage exist though uncommon in Maring society.

Until marriage it is compulsory to attain the village *Rakhaang*. After marriage, boys or girls will no longer be the members of the *Rakhaang*. During their youth life they are more attached to the dormitory than their parental house. However, this does not mean that a *Rakhaang* member severed his ties with his family members. Family remains the primary economic and social unit. Most of the time members extend their help to their parents in their family works during daytime and gather in the dormitory only at night.

## OFFICIALS AND THEIR ROLES

These youth dormitories are under the control of dormitory officials/leaders that look after the affairs of the *Rakhaang*. The leader is known as *Khangsillak* which is a common term for both boys and girls dormitory. The leader for boys *Rakhaang* is called *Karlhanga Upa* and that of girls is called *Nangaka Upa.* These leaders are not hereditary and are selected from time to time by the members.

Senior-most member of the dormitory usually holds the leadership position that is considered to be having vast knowledge and experience. He is expected to be capable of managing the affairs and maintaining discipline of the dormitory. He has a good deal of authority over the members. Members are given war instructions by their leaders for effective defense and offence during the war time.The leaders have every right to control the members and give information for next day activities. No member can do single activities without prior permission from their leaders. One has to seek permission from their leaders for any activities when he/she is in *Rakhaang*. The leaders assign duties to a member and if he/she fails to perform unreasonably, heavy punishment was given to such person. However, under no circumstances a member of *Rakhaang* can be expelled from the membership. Only fine/penalty was imposed upon the offenders of the norms of *Rakhaang* as a punishment. A person who commits crimes or acts against the dormitory rules was flogged three times, six times or

even twelve times according to the nature of crimes committed by the person. Members had to discharge assigned duties and at the same time enjoy privileges of the dormitory. Unexpected night checks were carried out by the leaders and any member found with misconduct, punishment was given to such person. A member also requires getting permission from their leaders for meeting friends and dating loved ones. He/she would be allowed to go for dating loved ones only after being accompanied by a friend as witness of any untoward incidence. Thus, even though this youth dormitory does not have any written rules to be followed by the members, conventional norms were accepted and practiced. Every dormitory member learns to respect and obey the words and directives of their leaders. Common sense seems to be their guiding principle in their day to day affairs. It may very aptly be called a microcosm of the village, having its own council who are the office bearers in the pattern of the village administration.[12]Although the *Rakhaang* has its own rules and officials to look after its affairs, their overall activities come under the purview of the village council. Dormitory members cannot transact business independently which is of community importance and which will affect village administrations.

## FUNCTIONS OF RAKHAANG

*Rakhaang* is a social educational institution. It is a place for learning every aspect of life and ready for a mature person in future of the society. In fact, it is the first and only form of education system that existed during those days.Unlike the modern schools or institutions, there were no specific curriculums in *Rakhaang*. There was also no specific dress code for the *Rakhaang* members but decency in dress wearing was their priority. A member of male dormitory practiced war dance, folk songs, rhythms of drum, handicrafts, blacksmithing etc. They were taught the values and duties of good citizens and other cultural importance such as how to wear *Lingkham* ( traditional mens-lungi), *Phikham* (women's-lungi), *Murshum* (turban) etc. Girl's dormitory practices folk songs, cultural dances, yarning, weaving, ornament wearing etc. Sometimes legendary stories of their forefathers were told orally by their leaders. A member has to attend

dormitory everyday unless holiday is declared by their leaders. Members attain *Rakhaang* only at night after dinner but not in daytime. And no food was provided in the dormitory.Thus, the *Rakhaang* system of the Maring was a typical institution where all the necessities/pre-requisites to become a responsible and successful human being in the society were taught to the young people (boys and girls).

In fact, it is a place for young boys and girls to start their early education and learn their culture and social norms from their seniors. The *Morung*, according to Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban Von Stockhausen, and Marion Wettstein "is where the bachelors spent their evenings and nights until they married, and where they learned from elders all that was of importance to a Naga in life, such as social skills, craftwork, the arts of war and hunting, and the oral tradition of the tribe: the historical, handed-down stories and songs".[13]There were times when the *Rakhaang* organized entertainments in the form of dancing, singing *(Rakhaangknuy, Rakhaang-laasha, Shrengsengchun, etc.)* or games and sports during village feasts or festivals, religious get-togethers or wedding ceremonies, etc. Such entertainment and merry making organized by the *Rakhaang* members gave room to breathe and relaxation to the people of the village/surrounding villages from the monotony of their daily routine works. There were also times when members organized community fishing and hunting and feast together at the end with whatever they get. This youth dormitory is more or less similar to modern educational institutions of early societies in so far their teaching values is concerned, where members were imparted and trained integral values of life to become a responsible person in the society. Thus, the *Rakhaang* was a training centre/institution for art of living as well as entertainment and fun.

The entry of women in boy's dormitory is allowed only on some occasion, and is strictly prohibited in Maring community. But men's entry to girl's dormitory was less restricted as it is considered a place for courting. In this regard, Peal reported that "there is the universal taboo of these barracks to the married. She is not allowed in or, at times, even near them; whereas the unmarried young women and girls are not thus invariably prohibited, and in not a few cases are expected to sleep in them with the young men".[14]It is also believed that entering of unmarried women in

boys' dormitory would bring bad luck to its members in diverse forms. Only during special occasions, members of boys and girls dormitory were allowed to get-together to learn and practice cultural importance such as folk dance, folk songs, traditional games and sports, legendary stories, etc. from experienced members.

As mentioned earlier, *Rakhaang* also considered being a perfect place for courting and match-making. Boys and girls taking the opportunity of occasional get-together choose their life partners and proposals were made. Proposal, if accepted by the opposite sex, was followed by exchange of gift. Boys used to present comb, ear rings, traditional crown, weaving items, handicrafts, etc. to their partner while girls commonly present traditional clothes and shawls to their boy. Love marriage was common but parents seem to be the ultimate decision makers of their children's relationship. Exogamy was not unknown but widely discouraged by parents and elders who preferred endogamy. Only after parents accepted their chosen partner, traditional ceremony was performed to tie knot of their children under customary laws.Thus, dormitories were also a perfect place for choosing life partners.

In Maring society youth dormitory also functions as place for training ethno-medicine practice. These people were knowledgeable and used various ethno-botanical plants as medicines in curing and healing ailments. Their vast knowledge in ethno-medicinal plants could be due to the lack of modern pharmaceutical medicines during those days and location advantages in the lower Himalayan hill ranges which are known for its biodiversity. Such important knowledge was imparted to the members of youth dormitory by experts who also learned it from their forefathers. They were taught the process of making medicines out of these plants, its usages and dosages. Present advancement in science and technology, availability of modern pharmaceutical medicines, better standards of living, demise of knowledgeable persons and advent of Christianity in the community have led to considerable decline in the use of traditional medicines. However, some Marings are still in use of these ethno-medicines in treating diseases and have been found effective.

Whatever cultural activities, members have learned from the dormitory were performed in different occasions in the form of

competition. Folk songs competitions were sometimes organized during *Kumtin* function between two villages. Such activities give room for youths to showcase their talents and encourage them to practice community cultural importance to reach its perfection.*Rakhaang* also serves as a guest house for unmarried neighboring villagers.There was no restriction of other villagers to attend *Rakhaang* of another village. Provided that such visiting member has to follow the rules of the *Rakhaang* he/she is visiting.

## UNIQUE FEATURES OF RAAKHANG

The most striking feature of the *Rakhaang* was their sleeping and sitting pattern at night. They sleep according to the clan seniority-wise. *Yama Upa* (a clan which is considered elder than the other Maring clans) that is *Dangsha* clan of Maring tribe takes the first place, next to *Dangsha* clan is *Charang* clan which is followed by *Kanshou* clan and lastly *Makung* clan. This pattern is also practiced in other socio-cultural activities and functions. This rule is strictly followed by the Maring community till today. It helps people easily identify the clan a person belongs which follows such sitting position in different occasions.

Boys' dormitory is often decorated with *Phung* (wooden drum), *Daar* (gong) *Pasi&Toutri* (traditional flutes), *Chung* (Shield), birds' feather of different colors, and animal skulls. In fact, it is a mini museum that displays traditional items. There was, however, no evidence of curved beams and pillars in Maring *Rakhaang* which is mostly seen in Morungs of other Naga communities. The *Morung* in general placed number of stones for sitting purposes but among the Marings a long wooden log locally known as *Pungshang* was placed for such purpose. Generally, only elders and dormitory officials take this place during meetings and gathering while members get together around this wooden log and practice traditional dance, folk songs and other cultural events.

Each day every member had to bring firewood called *Meirup Heeng* from home and make bonfire out of it while gathering at night. No funding comes from outside for maintaining *Raakhang* except from the parents of *Rakhaang* members. All the requirements of dormitory comes voluntarily from members itself.

Another peculiar feature is that for those who have been absent without leader's permission, he/she had to bring one *Tonglei* (medium size earthen wine pot used by ancient Marings) of husked wine as punishment and seek apologies from the leader. Such wine would again be drunk together during night entertainments. Members, however, maintain equality and possess equal rights and privileges in ordinary daily life. Astonishingly, unlike modern institutions there were no dietary restrictions in Maring dormitory system. Rather, members shared wines of different taste brought by the members which was made by different hands.

## VOLUNTARY ROLE OF THE MEMBERS

Apart from learning cultural and social norms, members were also trained to become a disciplined person. Discussing the role of *Morung*, V.K. Anand states that, "the *Morung* is the club, the public school, the military training centre, the hostel for boys and a meeting place of the village elders. It is as well as the centre for the social, religious and political activities. In short, it is the fulcrum of the village democracies".[15] *Rakhaang* played a vital role in coordinating the activities of the villagers. Any village activities seem to be incomplete without the help of dormitory members. They form the village workforce and voluntarily provide labor during village functions. They considered village as one family and help in time of sickness, dead, disasters and calamities. They extend help to those villagers or families who cannot be accomplished in their agricultural activities. A villager can also seek help from the members during harvest, making of house plot, construction of house, etc. It is the duty of the member to extend voluntary help in such circumstances. Every unmarried girl helps in fetching water, cooking and arranging food, etc. and boys work includes collection of thatches for house construction, plates, bamboo cups, etc. during village or family functions. It was the duty of the leaders to assign and monitor members if work is done.

Dormitory youths were on the fore-front in every community work of the village. All labour rendered by the members is voluntary in nature and no wages are given to them. Sometimes, family offers a barrel of wine

to volunteers as an act of gratitude for their help. This way they are expected to keep community interest before self-interest. In doing so, members learn mutual helpfulness, work ethics and volunteerism from this social institution.

## DOWNFALL OF RAKHAANG SYSTEM

The dormitory system of the Maring existed till 1970s and was absorbed in modern system of education. Advent of Christianity in Maring society has significantly contributed to the decline of tribal traditional social institution including the *Rakhaang* system in Maring community. K. Mann, commenting on the declining trend of dormitories, states that "in some cases they are completely destroyed and in many other their shape has been unrecognizable for such a trend, are included in formal education, modernity and conversion to Christianity".[16]This dormitory system has been immensely helpful in proper functioning of every Maring villages and in their administration during olden days. Youth inculcated social values such as ethics, religion, cultures and sense of community living. Members also moulded their characters, dietary habits, and work cultures from this social institute. It has been a place for training youths to become a responsible and able leader in the society.

The process of its disintegration has been a gradual one and it has slowly transformed into modern organizational systems such as local youth clubs, students' organizations, women societies, etc. These organizations now take up the roles of the then dormitory system and help in local developmental works. Introduction of modern education system in Maring society has changed the attitude of the youth. Educated youths are now no more interested in their traditional practices and have started focusing on their academic careers. In addition to this, parents begin to encourage their children more on education and send them abroad for studies as the standard of living has improved tremendously. Transition of agrarian society to industrial society now reduces the demands of agricultural workforce which has always been fulfilled by dormitory youths during those days. Modern education has significantly impacted on the life style of modern youths in their food habits, dresses, works, entertainments,

etc. Thus, the value of *Rakhaang* has gradually dwindled.

Almost every member of the Maring has accepted and converted to Christianity. Culture of head-hunting has become the thing of the past. Ethnic conflicts and wars among tribes are less seen and people strive for peaceful solution rather than violence. In such modern society, youth dormitory seems irrelevant and traditionally trained warriors are less useful. Also, traditional forms of entertainment are now replaced by modern forms of entertainment. Machinery and other modern inventions make the work less labour intensive. All these factors contributed to the downfall of the dormitory system among the Maring. Youth dormitory among the Marings has become talk of the past. Only negligible section of people in the society who had witnessed its existence lament and cherish its beauty till today. My informants have expressed their willingness to revive dormitory system and bring alive their cultural heritage though it seems near impossible in this modern society to practice such cultural practices in its original form.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the decline of youth dormitory systems in Maring society, their cultural practices and heritage has not disappeared in its entirety and is practiced in different forms. The present knowledge of wearing *Murshum* (turban), *Shamkin* (women's crown), weaving, war dance, rhythms of drum, etc. and other cultural and traditional practices of Maring community among the youths are the legacy of *Rakhaang*. Cultural festivals and events continue to be organized at village and state level. The Maring *War dance* still occupies a remarkable position among the tribal dances of northeast and brings alive their ancient war tactics.

In many Maring villages, we have seen youths under same age groups come together and form themselves a society called *Yinglam*. This society together with local youth club, students' organization, church societies help village community in various developmental activities such as cleaning playground, ponds, community hall, organizing cultural events, orientation programs, etc.

Speaking about the reformation of social practices of tribals, Prof. M.

Horam has opined that one can be a good tribal and at the same time a good Christian and changing the habits and imitating others' way of life does not necessarily make anybody a better Christian.[17] Therefore, the need of the hour among the interested researchers and youths is to preserve this unique symbol of Maring culture in the form of writings and in their daily practices though in modernized form. This will enhance their value of life and save their cultural identity in today's fast changing modern society.

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# Exploring the Link between Suicide and Marital Status among the Idu Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh

*Tarun Mene*

ABSTRACT

*Multiple research consistently demonstrates that marriage acts as a protective factor and divorce is identified as a risk factor for suicide. Additionally, indicators of domestic integration, such as marriage rates, divorce rates, and birth/fertility rates, significantly impact the overall suicide rate in a population. Unmarried individuals, those without children, and areas with a higher proportion of single individuals are found to have an increased suicide risk. Studies have also demonstrated that modern societies prioritise romantic love in marriage, creating burden on individuals and thus leading to increased suicide rates. However, traditional societies with arranged marriages limit autonomy, exerting control over behaviours. This, along with religious norms, values, and expectations associated with marriage, further reduce divorce rates, thereby lowering the risk of suicide.*

*Drawing upon these theoretical perspectives, the present study, which is exploratory in nature, aims to investigate the relationship and pattern between suicide and marriage in a sample of 218 completed suicides among the Idu Mishmi tribe residing in Arunachal Pradesh. Supported with the available suicide statistics from National Crime Record Bureau (NCBR), the study challenges previous study's assertions that marriage, particularly for men, protects against suicide. Also based on field data, this study among Idu Mishmis establishes a significant influence of culture on the suicide rates, underscoring the necessity for further investigation and analysis.*

**Keywords:** *Suicide, Marrital status, Idu Mishmi, Tribe*

## INTRODUCTION

Durkheim's seminal work in 1951 posited that marriage serves as a protective factor against suicide for men, fostering social integration and

regulation at both domestic and societal levels. Subsequent research has reinforced this notion, demonstrating that divorce poses a significant risk for suicide, regardless of the methodology employed[1]. Moreover, empirical studies have established that childbirth and larger family size are protective factors against suicide, particularly for women[2]. Additionally, it is hypothesised that women's participation in the labour force enhances their economic self-sufficiency, thereby increasing their social integration within the broader society and enabling them to better cope with the pressures of modern life[3].

Furthermore, investigations have underscored the unique impact of marital relationships on men and women. Lester and Hassan found that divorced men exhibit a higher susceptibility to suicide and have higher suicide rates compared to divorced women[4]. Kposowa similarly identified a robust association between divorce as a variable and fatal suicide, particularly among men.[5] Durkheim also posited that indicators of "domestic integration," such as marriage rates, divorce rates, and birth/fertility rates, play a pivotal role in influencing the suicide rate within a population. Supporting this association, Durkheim observed that countries characterised by high fertility and marriage rates, and low divorce rates tend to exhibit lower suicide rates, as low fertility weakens the society's protective mechanisms and fosters higher suicide rates.[6] Pescosolido and Wright further highlighted that divorced males aged 25 to 64 face an elevated risk of suicide, while divorced females aged 65 and over also face increased vulnerability.[7] Additionally, the study by Hoyer and Lund of Norwegian women revealed a heightened suicide risk among the unmarried and those without children.[8] An ecological study conducted in England by Guohua identified an increase in suicide rates in areas with a higher proportion of individuals living single.[9]

In his study, Giddens asserts that contemporary society places a significant emphasis on romantic love as the foundation of marriage, thereby placing a burden on individuals to independently seek companionship.[10] Supporting this perspective, Stack contends that in the United States, there exists a strong preference and inclination towards successful and happy marriages. Consequently, when a marriage dissolves,

individuals often experience intense feelings of shame, hurt, confusion, and guilt, which contribute to higher suicide rates. Stack further highlights that modern societies view marriage as an individual choice and minimise its role as a social regulation.[11] In contrast, in traditional societies, Burr et al. and Stack argue that marriages are arranged without the consent of the individuals involved. Consequently, in these societies, social systems function in a way that limits individual autonomy and shapes individual behaviour. Furthermore, the presence of established religious norms, values, and expectations associated with the institution of marriage and the family further contributes to a lower divorce rate and subsequently reduces the risk of suicide.[12]

Drawing upon these theoretical perspectives, the present study aims to explore and investigate the relationship and pattern between suicide and marriage in India and among the Idu Mishmi tribe residing in Arunachal Pradesh. This case study utilises data from Mene[13] and the National Crime Record Bureau, Government of India,[14] to provide insights into this association.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The present study represents an exploratory and descriptive investigation aimed at examining a specific phenomenon. In order to gather primary source data, extensive fieldwork was conducted within the study area, namely the Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh, over the period of 2007–2010.

The enumeration of households affected by suicide was carried out through structured interviews, utilising a methodical approach. A structured schedule was employed during the interviews, consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. These questions covered a range of topics, such as the victim's name, age at the time of death, gender, the name of their father or spouse, the place, time, and date of death, the means and materials used in the act, as well as the identified cause of death.

To supplement the primary data collected, secondary sources were also used. Data was obtained from the District Crime Branch and the State Crime Branch. Furthermore, relevant information was extracted from

the National Crime Records Bureau report 2021, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. These secondary sources provide additional insights into the subject matter and enhance the overall comprehensiveness of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In India, the recent data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 2021, recorded a total of 164, 033 suicides, showing a 7.2% increase compared to the previous year. Among the suicide victims, the male-to-female ratio was 72.5 to 27.5. The suicide rate was estimated to be 12.0, rising from 11.3 in 2020, indicating a 6.2% increase. Maharashtra remained at the top with the highest percentage (13.5%) of suicides, followed by Tamil Nadu (11.5%), Madhya Pradesh (9.1%), West Bengal (8.2%), and Karnataka (8.0%). Collectively, these five states accounted for 50.4% of the total reported suicides in the country.

In terms of suicide rates, the A&N Islands registered the highest rate at 39.7, closely followed by Sikkim (39.2), Puducherry (31.8), Telangana (26.9), and Kerala (26.9). On the other hand, the states with the lowest suicide rates were Bihar (0.7), Manipur (1.5), Uttar Pradesh (1.5), Nagaland (1.8), and Jammu and Kashmir (2).

Further, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Manipur experienced a higher percentage increase in suicides in 2021 compared to 2020, with Telangana having the highest increase at 26.2%. On the other hand, Lakshadweep, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, and the A & N Islands observed the highest percentage decrease in suicides, with Lakshadweep showing a decrease of 50.0%.

The primary factors contributing to suicides in 2021 were identified as 'family problems', (excluding marriage-related issues) accounting for 33.2% of the total suicides, followed by 'illness' at 18.6%. Other causes included 'drug abuse/alcoholic addiction' (6.4%), 'marriage related issues' (4.8%), 'love affairs' (4.6%), 'bankruptcy or indebtedness' (3.9%), 'unemployment' (2.2%), 'failure in examination' (1.0%), 'professional/ career problem' (1.6%), and 'poverty' (1.1%).The data shows that

proportion of female victims was higher in marriage-related issues, particularly in cases related to non-settlement of marriage and dowry.The age groups of 18 to below 30 years and 30 to below 45 years were identified as the most vulnerable in terms of resorting to suicide. These age groups accounted for 34.5% and 31.7% of the suicides, respectively.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2021), individuals who died by suicide were classified into seven categories based on their social status: "Unmarried, ""Married, ""Widow/Widower, ""Divorcee, ""Separated, ""Others, " and "Status Not Known." The data reveals that 66.9% of the suicide victims were married, with 81, 063 males and 28, 680 females falling into this category. Additionally, 24.0% of the victims were unmarried, consisting of 27, 305 males and 12, 096 females. Widows/widowers, divorcees, and separated individuals accounted for 1.5% (1, 470 males and 1, 015 females), 0.5% (494 males and 294 females), and 0.5% (626 males and 243 females) of the total suicide victims, respectively.

According to the NCRB report of 2021, there was no percentage change in the total number of suicide cases in Arunachal Pradesh compared to the previous year. The state accounted for 0.1% of the overall suicides in India, with a total of 160 cases involving 111 males and 49 females. The suicide rate was recorded at 10.4. Analysing the social status, the majority of cases, 72 in total (48 males and 24 females), were committed by unmarried individuals, followed by 53 cases (39 males and 14 females) of married individuals. No cases were recorded among widowed/widower, divorcee, and separated persons. Additionally, a total of 35 cases (24 males and 11 females) were reported under the category of "status not known".

According to the data, only one case of female suicide was reported to be linked to "marriage-related issues, " specifically extramarital affairs. There were other causes identified as well. Family problems were attributed to 4 males and 6 females, while drug abuse/alcoholic addiction was associated with 4 males and no females. Love affairs were cited as a cause in 3 cases for both males and females. Poverty was reported as a cause in 1 male case and no female cases. Additionally, one female suicide was linked to professional/career problems, whereas no male cases were

reported. The majority of cases fell into the categories of "Causes Not Known" (45 males and 18 females) and "Other Causes" (54 males and 20 females). No suicides in the state were reported to be caused by factors such as dowry-related issues, extramarital affairs, or divorce.

## THE CASE OF IDU MISHMIS

The Idu Mishmis, a borderland community, primarily inhabits the easternmost Dibang valley and the Lower Dibang valley districts, and few populations in Lohit, East Siang, and Upper Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. In terms of population, they are approximately 15,000 souls which is spread in as many as 250 villages.[15] They are Mongoloid and speak the Tibeto-Burman family language. Tracing the kinship they follow bilateral descent, and society is patrilineal, patriarchal, and patrilocal, having both nuclear and joint or extended family types. The basic rule of marriage is biological exogamy and tribe endogamy having features of polygyny. For establishing a matrimonial relationship, persons involved should not be consanguineous or consanguineal kin from both patrilineal and matrilineal lines of descent. Their religious world is largely animism and they believe in numbers of spirits called *khinu*. They are known to others for their expert handloom and handicraft works. Both men and women are experts in weaving and knitting. Their handlooms are generally designed with mixed colour of black, red, white, yellow, and dark green. Other day-to-day activities mainly revolve around agriculture, hunting, and gathering, fishing, horticulture, etc. The traditional system of administration of justice called *Abbelah* exists and functions as per the age-old traditions and customs. Like any other tribal societies, the Idu Mishmis celebrate *Rṛ* and *Ke-Meh-Ha* festivals every year. These festivals are family, clan, kin, or tribe based involving rites and rituals performances and animal sacrifice.

Among the various causes of mortality, suicide stands out as a prominent contributor to the mortality rate within the Idu Mishmi population. Baruah[16] and Bhatacharjee[17] were the first to draw attention to this issue, highlighting instances of suicide and the practice of live burial[18] among the Idu Mishmis. A comprehensive study conducted by

Mene[19] further emphasized the gravity of this social and public health concern, a position also supported by Singh, et.al.[20] Mene further argued that suicide in India, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh, is significantly underestimated and underreported, with official estimates prone to errors and inaccuracies.[21] Against this backdrop, the present case study aims to further explore the relationship between suicide and marriage based on field data collected during the period 2007–2010.[22]

Between 1980 and 2010, a total of 218 suicides were documented within the Idu Mishmi community, with a male-to-female ratio of 47:53. It is noteworthy that only one case of suicide pact, involving two individuals, was officially reported to the police. The estimated suicide rate for the Idu Mishmi community was 58.2 per 100, 000 population, establishing it as the highest rate among all tribal communities in India.[23] In contrast, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported a suicide rate of 9.9 for the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh in 2021. Mene's 2012 study employed an analysis of various socio-cultural, demographic, and psychological factors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics, severity, and contributing factors of completed suicide cases within the sample. Within this research, one of the variables investigated was marriage and its association with suicide, which is extensively examined and discussed in this paper.

Based on the analysis of the field data, the present study made three categories of social status, i.e., "Married, ""Unmarried, " and "Widowed, " as the study couldn't find a single case of suicide reported by a "Divorced" or "Separated" person among the Idu Mishmis. The study found 40.8% of suicides occurred among married Idu Mishmis and 49.6% among unmarried people. Widowed people account for only 9.6% of the population. This indicates that individuals aged 60 and above also made a significant contribution to the percentage of suicides within the study sample.The data further reveal that suicide among the married starts decreasing with increasing age, and among the unmarried cases, suicide is found to be vulnerable, particularly among individuals in the age group of 10 to 29 and for the widowed at their older age. Among the widowed, the number of widows is double that of their counterpart widowers. The age classification reveals that the age group 20–49 remained the most

vulnerable for males, whereas it is 10-39 for females. By gender, there is minimal variation in the rate of suicide for all three categories of social status, but the overall female share is higher than their male counterpart (Table 1).

The decadal trend of suicide among persons with different social statuses also reveals the fact that there has been a constant rise in suicide cases among both married and unmarried persons from the decade 1971–1980 to 1981–1990. During the decade 1991–2000, a slight decrease was noticed, which then experienced a gradual rise in the decade 2001–2010. Similarly, a gradual rise in the incidence of suicide was also noticed among widowed persons from the decade 1971–1980 to 1991–2000. However, during the decade 2001–2010, the trend went down (Table 2).

TABLE 1
MARITAL STATUS AND SUICIDE PER AGE GROUP (218 CASES)

| *Age Group* | *Total Suicide* | *Unmarried* | *Married* | *Widowed* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | | | | |
| 10-19 | 7.8 | 7.8 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 20-29 | 16.5 | 10.6 | 6.0 | 0.0 |
| 30-39 | 8.7 | 4.1 | 4.6 | 0.0 |
| 40-49 | 5.0 | 0.9 | 4.1 | 0.0 |
| 50-59 | 4.1 | 0.5 | 3.7 | 0.0 |
| Above 60 | 5.0 | 0.0 | 1.8 | 3.2 |
| Female | | | | |
| 10-19 | 21.1 | 16.5 | 4.6 | 0.0 |
| 20-29 | 13.8 | 7.8 | 6.0 | 0.0 |
| 30-39 | 8.7 | 0.9 | 6.4 | 1.3 |
| 40-49 | 2.8 | 0.5 | 1.8 | 0.5 |
| 50-59 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 1.4 | 0.5 |
| Above 60 | 4.6 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 4.1 |
| | 100 | 49.6 | 40.8 | 9.6 |

*Source*: Field Study (2007-2010)

TABLE 2
DECADE-WISE MARITAL STATUS AND SUICIDE

| *Decade* | *Unmarried* | | *Married* | | *Widowed* | | *G. Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *F* | *M* | *F* | *M* | *F* | |
| 1971-1980 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 1 | — | 2 | 19 |
| 1981-1990 | 15 | 22 | 17 | 13 | 3 | 3 | 73 |
| 1991-2000 | 14 | 16 | 10 | 15 | 4 | 5 | 64 |
| 2001-2010 | 19 | 12 | 11 | 16 | — | 4 | 62 |
| Total | 52 | 56 | 44 | 45 | 7 | 14 | 218 |

*Source*: Field Study (2007-2010)

As per the cause of suicide, the study found as many as twelve causes of suicide, such as domestic problems, grief on account of bereavement, love affairs (considered incest and socially prohibited), remorse and fear of prosecution or compensation, failure in examination, resentment at the rebuke, disappointments in life, illness, unclassified cases, et cetera. Out of all the causes of suicide, the highest number of suicides is reported concerning "Marriage Problems," which include 'marriage-related causes,' such as, extramarital affairs, barrenness, suspected and illicit relationships, and 'marriage-specific causes,' which include child marriage and forced marriage. These causes of suicide combined accounted for 23.3% out of a total of 218 samples of completed suicide among the Idu Mishmis (Table 3).

Based on table 3, some case study is provided below to substantiate the data.[24]

**Case Study 1**

Kama tragically ended her life during the summer of 2006 at the age of approximately 36. She was a married woman, residing with Nana, her second husband. Prior to her passing away, Nana had been married to Lami, who had unfortunately died one year prior, leaving behind her two daughters and a son, aged around six, four, and three respectively. During Lami's lifetime, there were rumours circulating that Nana was engaged

TABLE 3
GENDER WISE MARRIAGE RELATED CAUSE OF SUICIDE

| *Sl. No.* | *Cause of suicide* | *Male* | *Female* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Marriage related cause(Extramarital Affairs, Barrenness, Suspected/ Illicit relation) | 14 | 22 | 36 |
| 2 | Marriage specific cause(Child marriage/Force marriage) | 4 | 11 | 15 |
| | Total | 18 | 33 | 51 |

*Source*: Field Study (2007-2010)

in an extramarital affair with Kama.

Consequently, frequent conflicts arose between Lami and Nana, with reports indicating that Lami was subjected to physical abuse by Nana on numerous occasions. After enduring nearly two years of turbulence within the family, Lami eventually succumbed to her illness. Following a year of being widowed, Nana entered into matrimony with Kama as his second wife. However, this union came at a significant cost, as Kama was previously betrothed to another man, who happened to be Nana's cousin. In accordance with the customary practice of the Idu Mishmis, Nana was obliged to provide monetary compensation and relinquish some of his landed property to Kama's former husband in order to formalize the marriage.

Despite their efforts, domestic harmony eluded the couple. Reports suggest that the family environment remained tumultuous, with frequent conflicts arising between Kama and Nana. Even after three years of marriage, Kama was unable to conceive, and her relationship with her stepchildren was strained and acrimonious. On the day of her tragic demise, Kama had been toiling in the agricultural field throughout the day. Upon returning home in the evening, another heated argument ensued between the couple. It was reported that Kama had consumed alcohol (*yu*) that evening. Following the intense altercation, she left the house, leading Nana to assume that she had sought refuge at a neighbour's

residence. However, Kama was later discovered hanging in the toilet room, which was located at a distance from their home.[25]

**Case Study 2**

The case of Heke occurred during the summer of the year 1998. She was a married woman of around 38 years old from Anini town in the Dibang Valley district. It is worth noting that Heke was deemed to possess questionable moral character, having engaged in illicit relationships with two individuals from her own clan, which was considered a social taboo. These relationships, contravening established social norms, were disapproved by society. Consequently, in 1994, her family members arranged her marriage to a man from another clan. Following this union, Heke initially experienced a harmonious marital life and bore two daughters and a son. However, this period of contentment was short-lived, as she once again engaged in an extramarital affair, this time being caught red-handed by her eldest daughter, who later disclosed the matter to her father. Subsequently, domestic conflicts and altercations between the husband and wife became frequent, leading to bitterness and avoidance from her spouse. Heke endured acute frustration and remorse, with a history of more than twenty suicide attempts. Tragically, she succeeded in ending her life by hanging herself from a roof beam on her 23rd attempt.[26]

Among the documented cases of suicide related to arranged or forced marriages, a total of fifteen cases have been identified, comprising four males and eleven females. Of the eleven female suicides, eight were between the aged 10 to 19, while the remaining three were aged 20 to 29, all of whom fell victim to the coercive nature of their marriages. Among the suicide victims, three males and seven females had never cohabitated as husband and wife, despite being socially recognised as married individuals.

In such forced marriages, it is typically the man who is aware of the marriage proposal, and his consent is usually taken into consideration. Occasionally, the groom himself manages the proposal. However, the woman's consent holds little significance to her parents, resulting in her desires being scarcely considered. If the girl's party accepts such a marriage proposal, and the marriage is solemnized and recognized in accordance with customary practices and procedures, the bride is left with limited

choices, often leading to suicide as a means to express her anguish, sorrow, and resentment. In cases where the girl refuses to live with her husband after the betrothal, she may be captured by the boy's party, a socially approved practice known as *Ango.*

Traditionally, it is the boy's party that initiates the marriage proposal. Instances arise where the girl's party rejects such proposals due to various reasons. As a consequence of such rejection, individuals may experience a profound sense of damage to their societal image. Some individuals manage to endure such circumstances, while others opt to escape their discomfort by taking their own lives.

Reports also indicate male suicides resulting from forced marriages. Three male suicides occurred because their spouses failed to acknowledge them as their husbands. These individuals were devoid of the social status conferred by marriage, as they received little attention, love, and affection from their wives, instead facing intense hatred, avoidance, and dislike. Such circumstances arose from forced marriages where the girl's consent was not taken into consideration. Thus, for the girls, the burden of early marriage overshadowed any happiness they could have experienced. To counteract this, their resolute refusal to acknowledge their marriages and the individuals involved became an act of vengeance. In one particular instance, the bride chose not to live with her husband, expressing her preference for her brother-in-law. This deliberate act brought deep shame, defeat, and embarrassment to her husband, ultimately leading him to commit suicide in order to escape the situation and alleviate his discomfort. The following case studies provide further insight into suicides resulting from forced marriages.

**Case study 3**

Chimi, a student in the sixth grade, was approximately 15 years old when her unfortunate case unfolded in the spring of 1983. It has been reported that on the day of her tragic demise, mediators (*Ahellaya*) were dispatched by a man from a neighbouring village to propose marriage to Chimi. Upon learning of this, Chimi took a firm stance against the marriage proposal. However, her father, in contrast, favoured the man and agreed to accept the proposal. Distressed by the situation, Chimi impulsively fled

from her home to a nearby forest, where she took her own life by hanging herself from a tree. This tragic event serves as a poignant testament to the profound subjugation and disappointment Chimi experienced, with her act of suicide serving as a powerful expression of resentment towards her family members. Subsequently, Chimi's father accused the man of abetting the suicide, leading to the man being compelled to provide compensation in the form of a monetary settlement.[27]

**Case study 4**

The case of Loto took place in March 1994 in Anini village. He was approximately 45 years old at the time and worked as a diligent farmer. Loto and his younger brother became orphans at a young age and were subsequently cared for by their maternal uncle. As Loto grew older, he began to earn a living and, through hard work, built his own house. After some years, he entered into a marriage with a young lady from Italin village. However, this union was one-sided, as the woman's consent was not considered, and she was compelled into the marriage. She had no choice but to accept her fate. Consequently, she developed a dislike for Loto and had no regard for him. Over time, it became known that she had feelings for her brother-in-law. Learning of this, Loto chose not to intervene in their relationship and, in accordance with socially approved customs, allowed them to live together. Meanwhile, Loto lived alone in his own home, never remarrying after his first marriage. He felt ashamed and apprehensive about societal judgement. For approximately a year, he lived a solitary life until he ended his own life by hanging from a beam inside his house.[28]

In many other instances, suicide occurred as a result of the societal norms and regulations associated with the institution of marriage. In Idu Mishmi society, the solemnization of a marriage undergoes a rigorous process, particularly concerning genealogical considerations. Blood relations carry significant weight, and individuals intending to marry must not have consanguineal ties in both their maternal and paternal lines of descent. This cultural norm makes it challenging for many individuals to find suitable partners. Any violation of this socially accepted custom is regarded as a heinous crime within society, necessitating a thorough

understanding of both parties' genealogy when selecting a partner. Maintaining records of such genealogical knowledge, particularly of distant relatives, proves to be a difficult task for the younger generation. As a result, many young individuals unintentionally fall in love within restricted degrees of consanguinity. When such illicit relationships are discovered by concerned family members, they face criticism and shame, often leading to separation. Ultimately, many individuals choose to end their lives due to the failure of their relationships. Such cases of suicide account for approximately 12.8% of young suicides within Idu Mishmi society. A case study is provided below as an example.

**Case study 5**

This case was a suicide pact involving two individuals who agreed to end their lives together. It is the only registered case with the local police station. The incident occurred in April 2002 in Desali village, located in the Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh. The individuals involved were Yichee, approximately 20 years old, and Khimo, approximately 25 years old. Yichee was a student in the seventh grade, while Khimo worked as a load carrier (LC) in the Government service. The case reveals that Khimo and Yichee were engaged in a romantic relationship. However, due to their shared blood relations as cousins, their relationship was deemed illegitimate by society. Additionally, Yichee was already betrothed to another man against her own wishes and consent. When their affair was discovered, their clansmen warned and threatened them with severe consequences. The constant fear and precariousness of their lives left no room for peace. Faced with a hopeless situation, both planned a suicide pact. The day before their final act, Khimo stole a bottle of sulfuric acid (H2SO4) from the school laboratory in the village. The following day, they met at Khimo's government quarters, where they consumed the chemical and ended their lives. A day later, when inquiries were made regarding their whereabouts, Khimo's friend discovered their lifeless bodies in his residence.

Similarly, extramarital affairs are not permitted. Anyone found violating the norm has to pay a huge penalty, not only in terms of cash and property but also socially and emotionally. On the one hand, there is

a popular myth that labels an unmarried person as incomplete, socially inferior, and a failure in life. This deeply impacts the personal and emotional lives of many individuals who represent such a social status. On the other hand, the practice of polygyny is considered a matter of pride for men and has social approval. Such individuals are seen to have a greater capacity for controlling a large family and providing for them financially. However, at the family and personal level, such marriages create power struggles, familial love and rejection, conjugal love and hatred, parental love and avoidance, family politics, and an unstable family social organisation. Thus, if a person engages in an illegitimate love affair, is involved in an extramarital affair, remains unmarried, or becomes a victim of polygyny also indicates a high possibility of contemplating suicide. These are some of the major causes of marriage-related suicides among the Idu Mishmis.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the analysis based on the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report of 2021 challenges previous assertions that marriage protects against suicide, especially for men. Contrary to this proposition, the data from India indicates that suicide is more prevalent among married individuals, with males outnumbering females compared to other social status categories. The situation in Arunachal Pradesh is particularly characterised by a significant number of cases committed by unmarried individuals, with only one reported case attributed to marriage-related issues. The majority of the cases fall under the category "cause not known". When considering professions, it is also important to note that being a housewife was the second leading cause of suicide (14.1%) in India. In the specific context of Arunachal Pradesh, only 14 cases were reported among housewives.

Unlike the above, the field data collected by the researcher reveals a gender disparity in suicide cases, deviating from the patterns observed in India and Arunachal Pradesh. Females, among the Idu Mishmis, are identified as the most vulnerable group, with the highest number of suicides occurring within the 10-29 age group, while males are more

affected within the 20-39 age group. The study further uncovers that 40.8% of suicides among the Idu Mishmis are committed by married individuals, with 65% being female suicides and 35% male suicides. Marriage-related causes account for 23.3% of completed suicide cases among the Idu Mishmis, including issues such as forced marriage, extramarital affairs, barrenness, unmarried status, and illicit relationships. These findings and case studies suggest that suicide within the married Idu Mishmi population is heavily influenced by cultural conditioning and the social regulations and norms surrounding marriage practice. Suicide among the Idu Mishmi community is directly linked to gender disparity, evident in the unequal treatment faced by women. They are frequently subjected to rigid gender roles, norms, and behaviours that confine them to domestic duties and limit their personal aspirations and autonomy. Meanwhile, men are typically assigned positions of power and authority as the primary providers and decision-makers within both the family and society.

It is noteworthy that the prevalence of suicide among the Idu Mishmi tribe remains a significant concern despite ongoing socio-cultural changes in areas such as education, occupation, and economy. These changes have had minimal impact on the suicide trend. Disturbingly, the issue has received limited attention and intervention from relevant stakeholders, including the government and other agencies. Additionally, it is worth noting that suicide cases within the Idu Mishmi tribe are often underreported and underestimated, posing a serious challenge for effective response due to the scarcity of recorded incidents. Given the relatively small size of the community, with only around 15, 000 individuals, the magnitude of this social epidemic is alarming.

Furthermore, for the Idu Mishmi community, the issue continues to be an internal matter guided by their traditional social norms and customary practices. While organisations like the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society (IMCLS) and the All Idu Mishmi Students Union (AIMSU) occasionally organise 'suicide awareness camps', these efforts alone prove insufficient in comprehensively addressing and understanding the complex dynamics underlying the situation. A holistic response demands the mobilisation of all available resources and the active involvement of stakeholders. Simultaneously, an interdisciplinary

approach, drawing on academic expertise, must be urgently promoted, employing a community-based participatory framework. Such initiatives should also incorporate regular evaluation processes to continually assess and refine strategies and action plans aimed at mitigating the issue of suicide within the Idu Mishmi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

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24. Pseudonyms have been applied to all the case studies presented to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This measure upholds the ethical integrity of the research, ensuring that the identities of individuals involved in the study are kept anonymous, thereby mitigating any potential future consequences.
25. The interview was conducted on October 12, 2007, in Mayu village, Roing, Lower Dibang Valley, AP. The interviewee was a close neighbour and a family friend of the victim.
26. Data was gathered from two sources: one being Heke's cousin sister and the other his sister-in-law. The interview was conducted on January 12, 2008, in Anini village, Dibang Valley, AP.
27. Data was obtained from Chimi's uncle. The interview was conducted on February 12, 2010, in Anini, Dibang Valley, AP.
28. Data was gathered from Loto's cousin sister. The interview took place on March 17, 2009, in Anini, Dibang Valley, AP.

# REALISING RIGHT TO EDUCATION (RTE) BY TEA TRIBES: FIELD STUDY FROM DIBRUGARH DISTRICT OF ASSAM

*LENIN GOGOI*

ABSTRACT

*The right to education has been implemented in India through Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. This act provides a legal basis to the right to education and ensures free and compulsory education to the children between 6 to 14 years. However, despite the notable intentions of the RTE Act, its execution faces significant hurdles. This paper attempts to study the implementation of right to education through the multifaceted dimensions of the RTE Act, 2009. The study has been conducted to understand the impact, challenges and future prospects of the right to education. Certain issues have been addressed under this study such as efficiency, delivery of services, work culture and effectiveness of implementation of the RTE Act, 2009. This study finds numerous hurdles regarding implementation of right to education such as inadequate infra-structure, shortage of subject/stream wise teachers, language difficulties amongst students and socio-economic barriers. Based on the findings, the study also provides certain suggestions such as establishing residential schools, Government's initiative to implement Open Door System, proper measures to maintain existing properties, initiative to solve language difficulties etc.*

**Keywords:** *Tea Tribes, Right to Education, Efficiency, Service Delivery*

## INTRODUCTION

India's Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 remains the landmark Act undertaken by the Government of India (GOI) to provide free and compulsory education. This Act has enforced free and compulsory education as a fundamental right under article 21(A) of the Indian Constitution. It has been introduced to ensure quality elementary education to children between 6 to 14 years. The 86$^{th}$ Constitutional Amendment,

2002 establishes Right to Education as a fundamental right under Article 21(A). Originally, Articles 45 and 39 of the Constitution dealt with state funded equitable and accessible education. In fact, enormous demand from the masses, judgements of the courts and recommendations of different committees forced the Government to establish right to education as a fundamental right under Article 21(A). The committee reports and court's judgements such as Ramamurti Committee Report in 1990, Supreme Court's landmark judgment in the Unnikrishnan Vs State of Andhra Pradesh, 1993, Tapas Majumdar Committee, 1999 etc. have supplemented the introduction of right to education as a fundamental right. As a result, the Government of India has introduced this RTE Act in 2009. Since then different state governments have taken steps to implement this RTE Act. For instance, the government of Assam has formulated the "Assam Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2011" to implement the central RTE Act in the state.

However, different reports and studies have found lacunas towards implementation of RTE Act, 2009. Runumi Gogoi (2015), the former chairperson of the State Child Right Commission of Assam (SCRCA) opines that the quality of education particularly in government schools is a matter of serious concern[1]. She has also mentioned that the quality education aspect of the RTE Act in Assam is a goal yet to be achieved. CAG Report (2016) reveals that Government of Assam didn't prepare any perspective plan incorporating timelines to implement provisions of the RTE Act[2]. The Annual Plan at the state and district levels was prepared without ensuring the bottom-up approach. The CAG report states that the school-wise PTR was not maintained as per the RTE norms. It also highlights other lacunas such as existence of single teacher schools, schools without teachers, teachers without adequate qualifications, inadequate monitoring and grievance redress mechanism etc.

Regarding the role played by the states, RTE Forum (2014) finds that many states of India have followed casual approach to ensure the right to education. It can be said that unwillingness of numerous governments results in poor implementation of RTE Act, 2009[3]. So far as efficiency of schools is concerned, Ambarish Rai (2014) mentions that only 10% of total schools in the country are compliant with all the norms of the RTE

Act[4]. It has clearly indicated inadequacy of existing schools to implement RTE Act, 2009.

Regarding the North-Eastern states of India, NAS report (2021) has highlighted that students' performance in North-Eastern states is found lower than the national average in most of the subjects[5]. In addition, CAG (2016) finds that 57.33% of the school didn't prepare Annual Development Plan which is the basis for micro-level planning during 2010-2016 in Assam. It can be said that negligence of concerned agencies at micro-level has affected the development of school's environment.

The tea-tribes of Assam are the descendants of people from West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand. The British tea planters brought them to Assam as "Bound Labourers" during British Rule.Tea-tribes of Assam consist of numerous communities such as Munda, Santal, Bhumij, Kurmi, Gowala, Mahli etc. These groups have been provided Schedule Tribe (ST) status in other states but in case of Assam, they are still fighting for the same.They have their own cultural identities, languages and traditions and contribute to Assam's multicultural society. Tea-tribe people are integral part of tea-industry of Assam and effort has been made to empower them through various government policies, acts and schemes such as education, healthcare etc.The tea tribes' community constitutes 12.45% (around 3.88 million) of Assam's total population[6]. So far as the tea tribes are concerned, Bora (2002) finds certain obstacles in case of primary education among tea-tribes in Assam such as poor infrastructure, absence of congenial atmosphere, parents' illiteracy, early marriage etc[7]. It can be said that tea-tribe students don't have a convenient environment where the students can realize their fullest development.

Social environment is crucial for ensuring right to education. Lakshinandan Nath (2011) states that majority of the tea-tribes children are either drop-outs or illiterate and the main social reasons behind their poor educational status or dropout are related to their family system, problems regarding housing facility and home environment, lack of study room at home, illiteracy of parents, disturbance from neighbours, social bad habits, peer group influence, early marriage and household works[8]. These can be regarded as major hindrances towards realization of right

to education amongst tea-tribes in the state of Assam.

The above discussion has shown existence of an unsound educational system in different parts of Assam that are adversarial to the effective implementation of RTE Act, 2009. So far as the schools existing in tea-tribes areas are concerned, the situation is more critical in different areas such as inadequate PTR, absence of stream/subject wise teachers, adverse social conditions etc. Taking all this into account, this study has been undertaken to see the present status of right to education amongst tea-tribes of Dibrugarh District of Assam where a large number of tea-tribes are living in different parts of the district.The main focus of the study is to understand the effectiveness of the implementation of RTE Act, 2009. In addition, this study has focused on the efficiency of implementing agencies, the quality of education and services delivered under Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

To conduct the study, the following research questions have been set:

1. What is the quality of services delivered under RTE Act in tea tribes areas?
2. Are the implementing agencies of RTE Act, 2009 able to deliver appropriate services?
3. Are the tea tribes' children able to realize Right to Education?

## METHODOLOGY

Dibrugarh district has been selected for this study that has comprised highest number of tea tribes' people amongst all districts of Assam. Regarding the implementation of right to education, the RTE Act, 2009 gives special emphasis on disadvantaged groups like tea-tribes community. Section 8 (c) of the chapter III of the RTE Act 2009 states "appropriate government has to ensure that the child belonging to weaker section and the child belonging to disadvantaged group are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds."In fact, the literacy rate of tea tribes in Assam is 46% as against Assam's 72% overall literacy rate[9]. Thus, these factors have necessitated a study on the realization of right to education by tea tribes

with special reference to Dibrugarh district. The RTE Act was introduced in 2009 and it is thus crucial to understand the effectiveness of the same after 15 years of its introduction in the country.

There are seven development blocks in Dibrugarh district. Out of them, 2 blocks, i.e. Lahowal and Barbaruah have been randomly selected for the study. 10 schools (5 from each block) have been purposively selected for the study. Purposive sampling has been used because this paper attempts to study the schools where a large number of tea-tribe students are enrolled. Total of 220 respondents have been contacted for this study. Respondents from parents, teachers, non-teaching staff and villagers have been randomly selected to conduct interview. On the other hand, respondents from officials and members of SMCs have been purposively selected for the study. Interview schedules have been used to collet primary data from the respondents. Simple analytical methods such as table, figures etc. have been used to discuss the collected data from primary and secondary sources. Following table shows a detailed account of the respondents:

TABLE 1
CATEGORY-WISE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

| *Sl. No.* | *Development Block* | *Total School* | *Category* | *No. of Respondents* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lahowal | 05 | Parents (15 from each school) | 75 |
| | | | Teachers *(one from each school)* | 05 |
| | | | Non-Teaching Staff*(one from each school)* | 05 |
| 2 | Borbaruah | 05 | Parents | 75 |
| | | | Teachers *(one from each school)* | 05 |
| | | | Non-Teaching Staff*(one from each school)* | 05 |
| 3 | Lahowal & Barboruah | N/A | Officials (5 from each block) | 10 |
| 4 | Lahowal & Barboruah | N/A | SMC's Members (*two from each school*) | 20 |
| 5 | Lahowal & Barboruah | N/A | Villagers (*2 from each locality*) | 20 |
| | **Total Respondents** | | 220 | |

The study considers issues such as efficiency, effectiveness, work culture and quality of services. To begin with, certain indicators have been set to examine efficiency such as student-teacher ratio, availability of subject-wise teachers, availability of separate classrooms, quality of school infra-structure, smart classroom, digital access to resources, playground/ play materials, availability of TLMs, availability and quality of dining hall, availability and quality of kitchen, fund provided by public, availability of safe drinking water, availability of books, availability of quality uniform, availability of toilet, availability of physical instructor, availability of music teacher, add on classes such as computer/others and existence of Cub & Bulbul/Scouts & Guides.

In addition, the study follows certain indicators to understand the work culture, quality of services and effectiveness such as availability of time-slot for co-scholastic activities conducted as per class routine, existence of students facing linguistic problems, conduction of annual sports, the progress level of children, number of teachers engaged in non-teaching works, availability of subject/stream wise-teacher and class load of teachers per/day. Following section deals with analysis of collected data from primary and secondary sources.

## DATA ANALYSIS

According to World Bank (2017), around 61 million primary school-age children remained out of school in 2014, of which a third of them are from India, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sudan[10]. The report states that a huge number of children are from poor households. In addition, UNICEF (2019) states that 175 million children were not enrolled in pre-primary education in 2019[11].Apart from that, enrolled children haven't received quality education. Regarding India, UNICEF (2019) finds that the poor quality education is leading to poor learning outcomes in India, ultimately pushing children out of the education system and leaving them vulnerable to child labour, abuse and violence. Following table shows overall achievement score of children reading at different levels in Assam and Dibrugarh:

TABLE 2
OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT SCORE IN ASSAM AND DIBRUGARH

| *Sl. No.* | *Issue* | *Class Wise Percentage* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *III* | | *V* | |
| | | *Assam* | *Dibrugarh* | *Assam* | *Dibrugarh* |
| 1 | Children at basic and below basic level | 52.8% | 61.4% | 62.8% | 63.7% |
| 2 | Percentage of children at proficient and advance level | 47.2% | 38.6% | 37.2% | 36.3% |

**Source:** *National Achievement Survey (NAS), 2021*

The above table shows class-wise overall achievement scores of students in Assam and Dibrugarh.So far as class III is concerned, the above table shows that 52.8% of the children are at basic and below basic level in Assam and it is 61.4% in Dibrugarh District. It is 62.8% and 63.7% in Assam and Dibrugarh respectively regarding class V. The table shows that the children at basic and below basic level in Dibrugarh are higher than the state's average regarding all cases. It is also noticed that the percentage has increased at every next level of classes , i.e. III to V. Regarding the percentage of children at proficient and advance level, the table shows that the percentage of Dibrugarh district is lower than the state average in all classes. It is also seen that the percentage has decreased at every next level of classes, i.e. III to V. Thus, it can be assumed that decrease of performance at every preceding level shows poor performance of the stakeholders towards ensuring quality education.

The primary data shows that 70% of teachers are not satisfied with the level of critical thinking. Regarding the issue of numerical aptitudes and general science, 56% of teachers are unhappy with the understanding level of students. Field investigation finds language problem amongst the tea-tribes children that have slowed down educational growth of students. Sarma and Minakshi (2020) also find that tea-tribe students of lower classes suffer from linguistic difficulties leading to poor academic progress in Assam[12]. It can be assumed that some children couldn't understand the languages used by teachers while teaching different subjects , which has

further affected the educational growth of such children.This situation creates a learning gap between tea-tribes students and other students of the same age and it continues in different stages of schooling. It can be regarded as one of the major obstacles responsible for poor educational status of tea-tribes students in Assam. Thus, it is understood that many challenges still have to be overcome to realize right to education in different regions in the country.

TABLE 3
TEACHER'S OPINION REGARDING CERTAIN SCHOOL RELATED ISSUES IN ASSAM

| *Sl. No.* | *Issues* | *Percentage (Class Wise)* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *III* | *V* |
| 1 | Teachers have adequate instructional materials | 18% | 19% |
| 2 | Teachers have adequate work space | 35% | 36% |
| 3 | Teachers say that they are overloaded with the work | 27% | 27% |
| 4 | Teachers have responded that the school building needs major repair | 43% | 40% |
| 5 | Teachers have responded that there is lack of drinking water facilities in school | 28% | 28% |
| | Teachers have responded that there are inadequate toilet facilities in school | 24% | 23% |
| 7 | Teachers participated in professional development program | 34% | 35% |
| 8 | Teachers have responded that the parents take interest in school activities | 91% | 91% |

**Source:** *National Achievement Survey (NAS), 2021*

The above table shows the response of teachers regarding certain school related issues. The table reveals that majority of the teachers are not satisfied with the issues such as availability of instructional materials and adequate work place. Regarding the issue of major repair of school buildings, 43% of the teachers of class III and 40% of the teachers of class

TABLE 4
TOTAL NUMBER OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, ENROLMENT AND PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO (PTR) IN DIBRUGARH DISTRICT AND ASSAM (1951-2023)

| *Sl. No.* | *Year* | *School* | *Enrolment** | | *Teachers* | *Teachers/per School* | | *PTR** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Total No.* | *Increase(+)/ Decrease(-)%* | | *Total No.* | *Increase(+)/ Decrease(-)%* | |
| 1 | 1990-91 | 34579 | 4771995 | — | 113833 | 3.2 | — | 41.92 |
| 2 | 2000-01 | 41255 | 5135991 | 7.62%(+) | 143869 | 3.4 | 6.25% (+) | 35.70 |
| 3 | 2010-11 | 48050 | 5760967 | 12.16 %(+) | 235072 | 4.8 | 41.17% (+) | 24.51 |
| 4 | 2022-23# | 39752 | 3005020 | 47.83% (-) | 142998 | 3.5 | 27.08% (-) | 21 |

*Source: Census of India from 1951 to 2011*
#Data has been taken from *Statistics of School Education in Assam* https://ssa.assam.gov.in>resource dated 02/05/2024[13]
* Data has been taken from *Statistical Handbook of Assam* from 1951 to 2011[14]

V have mentioned that there is need for major repair of school buildings.

The primary data reveals that 70% of the schools don't have adequate number of class rooms to adjust all the classes (see figure no. 3). Due to unavailability of adequate classrooms, 2/3 classes are held in a single room at the same time and it creates a clumsy situation during class hours in the schools. It can be said that children are largely affected by such environment and become victim of poor educational system. It can be seen that the schools in Assam are still not fully equipped with basic facilities that could help proper implementation of RTE Act, 2009.

Section 27 of the chapter IV of RTE Act, 2009 provides that no teacher shall be deployed for any non-educational purpose other than the decennial population census, disaster relief duties or duties relating to elections to the local authority or the state legislative assemblies or parliament, as the case may be. Following the same, Government of Assam (GOA) issued a notification on 26 February, 2014 to enforce section 27 of the chapter IV of RTE Act, 2009. The field investigation reveals that majority of the teachers are engaged in different works apart from the decennial population census, disaster relief duties or duties relating to elections to the local authority or the state legislative assemblies or parliament. Teachers have been assigned official duties such as Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator (CRCC), Nodal Officer, attendee of different government programmes etc. It is found that numerous teachers couldn't take their assigned classes regularly. It can be assumed that extra duties of teachers affect the teaching-learning process in different times.

Regarding the issue of teacher's participation in professional development programmes, the table shows that only 34% teachers have participated in such programmes who have taught in class III. It is 35% in case of class V. So, the table reveals that majority of the teachers have not participated in professional development program. However, primary investigation shows that the teachers attend different Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs) conducted by government in different times. But it is known that some teachers attend the programmes only to fulfil terms and conditions imposed by concerned authority or to fulfil their personal interests such as getting promotion. On the other hand, it is also found that many organizers are inactive and inefficient towards effective

TABLE 5
TOTAL NUMBER OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, ENROLMENT AND PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO (PTR) IN DIBRUGARH DISTRICT AND ASSAM IN 2022-23

| *Sl. No.* | *Category* | *Location* | *Schools* | *Teachers* | *Enrolment* | *PTR* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lower Primary | Assam | 33937 | 101603 | 2186373 | 22 |
| | Dibrugarh | 1192 | 3066 | 60084 | 20 | |
| 2 | Upper Primary | Assam | 5815 | 41395 | 818647 | 20 |
| | Dibrugarh | 180 | 1118 | 21389 | 19 | |
| 3 | **Total Elementary** | Assam | 39752 | 142998 | 3005020 | 21* |
| | Dibrugarh | 1372 | 4184 | 81473 | 19* | |

*Source: Statistics of School Education in Assam* https://ssa.assam.gov.in>resource dated 02/05/2024 & *Statistics of School Education in Assam*, accessed from https://ssa.assam.gov.in>files dated 02/05/2024[15]
**Total enrolment has been divided by total teachers.*

conduction of events and these are only organized to fulfil the formalities.So far as the usability of knowledge acquired from FDPs is concerned, it is noticed that the available infrastructure in the schools is not adequate to practice the skills. For instance, unavailability of smart classrooms results in impracticality of knowledge acquired in FDPs. Hence, it can be said that there is a massive gap between steps taken to empower teachers and the availability of facilities to practice the skills.

The above table shows that during the period 1990-91 to 2010-11, there was gradual increase in enrolment of students. But the enrolment has decreased by 47.83% % in 2022-23, which. reflects poor performance of service providers as well as existence of unattractive educational environment at the concerned schools.The table also shows that there has been a gradual increase in teachers/per school between 1990-91 and 2010-11. But it has decreased by 27.08% in 2022-23. Here, the field investigation shows that numerous schools don't have subject/stream wise teachers to teach different subjects such as Maths, English, Social Sciences etc. However, government of Assam has taken steps to amalgamate schools based on certain circumstances such as low enrolment. It can be said that though government has amalgamated schools for better performance in

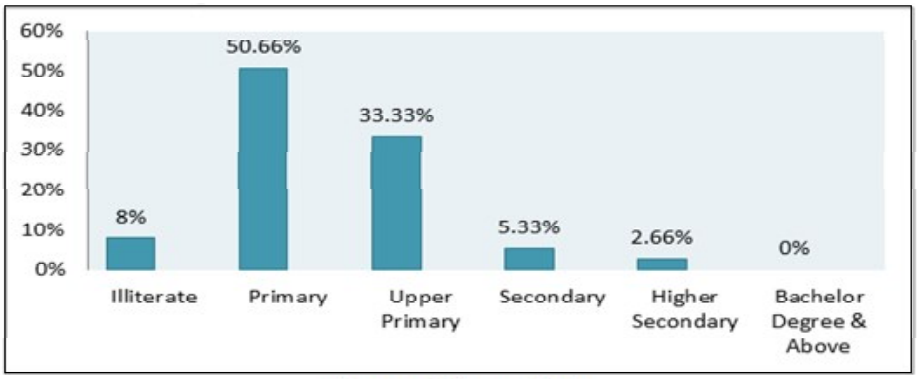
the state, it cannot fulfil the required strength of teachers as per norms of RTE Act, 2009. Following table shows total number of elementary schools, teachers, enrolment and pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) in Dibrugarh district and Assam in 2022-23.

The above table shows that the PTR in Dibrugarh district is lower than the PTR of Assam (average) in case of lower primary section. It is 20 and 22 in Dibrugarh and Assam respectively. The PTR is 19 and 20 in Dibrugarh and Assam respectively in case of upper primary section.

Regarding the issue of PTR, section 25 (1) of the chapter IV of the RTE Act, 2009 provides that within six months of the commencement of this Act, appropriate government and local authority shall ensure that pupil-teacher ratio as specified in the schedule is maintained in each school. Again, section 25 (2) provides that for the purpose of maintaining pupil-teacher ratio under sub-section (1), no teacher posted in a school shall be made to serve in any other school or office or deployed for any non-educational purpose, other than those specified in section 27 (*No teacher shall be deployed for any non-educational purposes other than the decennial census, disaster relief duties or duties relating to elections to the local body or state legislatures or Parliament, as the case may be*). Section (b) and sub-section (1) of the schedule (RTE Act, 2009) provide that there should be at least one teacher per class each for (i) Science and Mathematics (ii) Social Studies and (iii) Languages.

Table no. 4 and table no. 5 have shown that the PTR has decreased in the last 10 years compared to early decades. Simultaneously, primary data reveals that subject/stream wise teachers are not available in the schools.It can be said that unavailability of subject/stream wise teachers has affected academic growth of the students. It is also found that one teacher has to take more than one class at the same time and , therefore, it affects the quality of lectures delivered by the teachers. In addition, it is observed in numerous cases that the language/social science teachers have to teach maths, science and other subjects and vice-versa. Thus, these situations create an unhealthy educational environment at the elementary schools where a large number of tea-tribes' children are enrolled. Following figure shows educational status of tea-tribes parents/guardians of tea-tribes children:

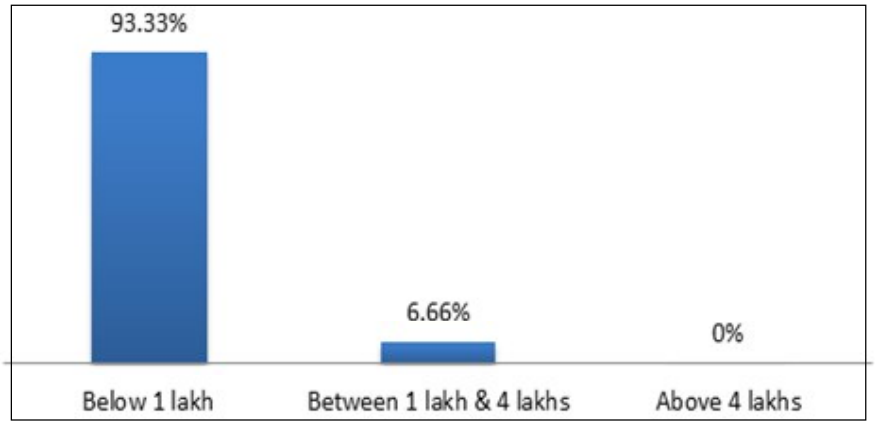
FIGURE 1
EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS




**Source:** Primary Data

Above figure shows educational status of parents/guardians. The figure reveals that no parent has acquired Bachelor Degree or above. Here, 8% of the parents/guardians are illiterate and only 2.66% of the parents/guardians have completed higher secondary level. Parental guidance is a key factor for proper educational growth of children. After observing the figure, it is realized that poor educational status of parents/guardians has affected effective parental guidance amongst tea-tribes.Following figure shows economic status of parents/guardians of tea-tribes children:

FIGURE 2
ECONOMIC STATUS OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS



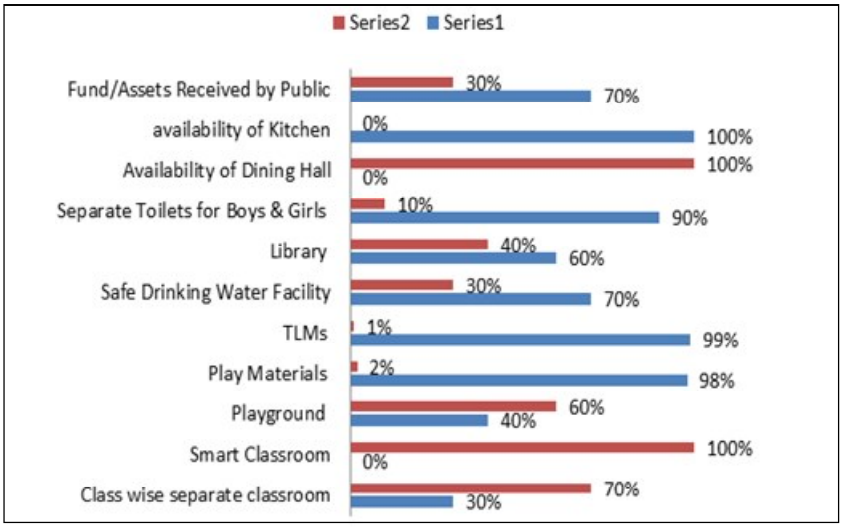

*Sources*: Primary Data

Figure no. 2 shows that the annual income of 93.33% of the parents/

guardians is below 1 lakh. On the other hand, annual income of 6.66% of the parents/guardians is between 1 lakh and 4 lakhs and no parent/ guardian's annual income is above 4 lakhs. Here, the field investigation shows that students have received poor quality uniforms from the concerned agencies. It is found that many parents can't manage winter clothes like sweater, socks and shoes for their children and for this reason, many students couldn't attend classes during winter session.

The children of rich and middle class families often get sufficient learning materials as well as sound educational environment at their homes such as separate study room, 24 hours electricity in terms of using inverters, smart phone/laptop to access digital contents etc. On the other hand, field investigation finds that these facilities are miracles for the students belonging to numerous tea-tribes families. Sound economic condition is another key factor to provide effective parental support to children in different regards. After observing the table, it is understood that poor economic condition of tea-tribes' families affects the educational journey of children.Following figure shows availability of certain infra-structures at different schools.

FIGURE 3
RESPONDENT'S VIEW ON CERTAIN INFRASTRUCTURE RELATED ISSUES OF THE SCHOL

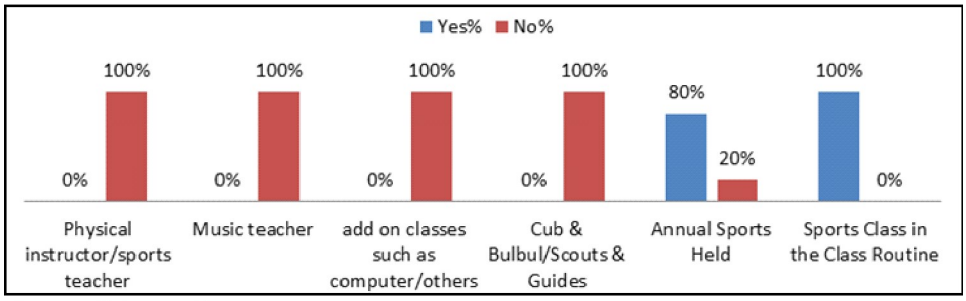



*Sources* : Primary Data
*Note: Series 1: Yes% & Series 2: No%*

Figure no. 3 shows existence of certain infrastructures in the schools situated in tea-tribes areas.The figure reveals that only 30% of the schools have class wise separate classrooms in the schools. Regarding smart classroom, the figure reveals that 100% of the schools don't have smart classroom and 60% of the schools don't have sufficient playground in the school campus. The primary data shows that available grounds aren't adequate to be used as playground for students. Regarding the availability of library, 60% of the schools don't have required library in the schools. It is observed that the existing libraries are inadequate in different aspects such as insufficient books, absence of separate library room, unavailability of bookshelves, reading room etc. The figure shows that 100% of the schools don't have dining hall to serve Mid-day-Meal (MDM). The field visit reveals that the school authority serves MDM in classrooms or in the open places available in the school campus. It is observed that the hygiene is also not maintained. So far as the availability of kitchen is concerned, 100% of the schools have kitchen but field visits find that the available kitchens are insufficient due to poor roof top, congested, unhygienic, insufficient place to keep cooking materials, absence of shelves to keep utensils etc.

However, primary investigation reveals that existing infrastructures are also not properly maintained by concerned agencies. It comes to know that the allotted funds for maintaining schools are not adequate to manage the properties. It can be said that such factors are responsible for existence of poor infrastructures and it has further hampered in proper implementation of RTE Act, 2009.Following figure shows availability of certain co-scholastic agencies/activities:

FIGURE 4
AVAILABILITY OF CERTAIN CO-SCHOLASTIC AGENCIES/ACTIVITIES




*Sources*: Primary Data

RTE Act gives emphasis on co-scholastic activities. Section 2 of the Chapter V of RTE Act, 2009 provides that the Academic Authority, while laying down the curriculum and evaluation procedure under sub-section (1), shall take certain aspects into consideration such as all-round development of child, development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent etc. It can be said that co-curricular activities are vital towards fullest development of children. Figure 4 shows availability of certain co-scholastic agencies/activities. The figure indicates absence of physical instructors/sports teachers and music teachers in 100% of the schools. The figure also highlights that sports class is listed in class routine but field investigation shows that the classes are rarely held in the schools.

So far as the co-curricular activities are concerned, Cub & Bulbul and Scouts & Guides are the key agencies to foster overall growth of students. The table reveals that 100% of the schools don't have such agencies.The figure also shows that no school has innovative practices such as add on courses like computer or others. Regarding the co-scholastic activities, Nirmala Sarma (2011) finds that no particular programme is planned in school to hold co-scholastic activities in regular basis[16]. The author also mentions that there is no process for evaluation of the students' performance in co-scholastic activities. It can be assumed that absence of such programmes and procedures has affected the overall growth and development of the students.

Jitendra Gouda et al (2013) opines that private primary schools provide better quality of education than government schools[17]. The author also mentions that the trend of sending children to private primary school was first started by parents living in urban areas and the middle and lower income classes tried to send their children to private schools. Now, poor people also do their level best to send children to private schools. It can be said that there is qualitative difference of education provided in private schools and government schools. Thus, people want to send their children to private schools. It is understood that in spite of having government fund for school development as well as reasonable salary for teachers, government schools couldn't ensure quality education for children. Thus, it can be assumed that the students enrolled in government schools are deprived of realizing their educational rights from numerous

angles compared to students of private schools. The concerned authority has failed to provide equal treatment to all children irrespective of economic status, class, regional disparities and so on.

TABLE 6
CERTAIN ISSUES RELATED TO WORK CULTURE & DELIVERY OF SERVICES

| *Sl. No.* | *Issues* | *Responses* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Yes%* | *No%* | *No Idea%* |
| 1. | Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) as per time schedule | 82% | 04% | 14% |
| 2. | Visit of resource persons/educationalists | 40% | 10% | 50% |
| 3. | Visit of officials | 60% | 10% | 30% |
| 4. | time table maintained by teachers/ non-teaching staff | 38% | 20% | 42% |
| 5. | classes taken as per class routine | 48% | 32% | 28% |
| 6. | Examination conducted as per fixed time interval | 80% | 02% | 18% |

*Source*: Primary Data

The above table shows response of the respondents on certain issues related to work culture and service delivery. Here, 82% of the respondents mention that Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) is provided as per time schedule but field investigation reveals that adequate and quality food can't be arranged with allotted financial aids. For instance, Government has formulated compulsory provision of one egg per week per child but market price for an egg is seven rupees approximately.Whereas Government allocation per child/per day is only 5.45 rupees in case of LP stage and it is 8.17 rupees for UP stage & NCLP since October, 2022[18].Thus, it is very difficult to manage nutritious meal as per guideline provided by the concerned authority with limited financial allocation.

In the above table, 80% of the respondents mention that examinations are conducted as per fixed time interval but field investigation reveals that results are not satisfactory.Majority of the teachers are not happy with the progress of students regarding different subjects.

Regarding the issue of time-table maintained by teachers and non-

teaching staff, only 38% of the respondents mention that it is maintained by the employees. On the other hand, 42% of the respondents mention that they don't have any idea regarding the issue and it reflects inadequate involvement of stakeholders in the management of schools. Here, field investigation shows that the working hours couldn't be fully used by teachers to teach their own subjects because they have to teach more than one classes at the same time and in some cases, it is found that some arts background teachers have to teach science and mathematics and vice-versa. It happens due to unavailability of sufficient teachers as per requirement.

Regarding the issue of inviting resource persons/educationalists, the primary data shows that resource persons/educationalists are rarely invited to interact with students.On the other hand, CRCCs have mostly visited the school as compared to rare visit of higher officials. It can be said that poor coordination between the schools and concerned offices affects the delivery of services in the elementary schools. Following table shows involvement of parents and community in school management:

TABLE 7
INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS & COMMUNITY IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

| *Sl. No.* | *Issues* | *Highly Unsatisfactory* | *Unsatis-factory* | *Satisfactory* | *Highly Satisfactory* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Involvement of parents | 05% | 74% | 20% | 01% |
| 2 | Involvement of community | 10% | 68% | 20% | 02% |

*Source*: Primary Data

The above table shows that 74% of the respondents are not satisfied with the involvement of parents in the management tasks of schools.The field survey also reveals that majority of the parents are unaware of things related to the future of their children. Regarding the issue of community involvement, the table provides that 68% of the respondents are not satisfied with the issue. The field investigation reveals that people from localities are basically daily-waged workers and they are busy with their

regular activities in the tea-estates and others. Apart from few cases, all are unaware of the activities held in the schools. Similarly the local people are inadequately involved in the activities related to governance of the schools such as parent teacher meet, annual sports, examination report analysis etc. Active involvement of parents and community is crucial for effective service delivery to the students. Through this study, it is understood that majority of the tea-tribes people inadequately participated in school management activities.

## FINDINGS

The study reveals that performance of students has decreased at every preceding class in government schools. It can be said that poor work culture, inadequate service delivery and unavailability of sufficient agencies and infrastructures together results in poor performance of the students in government schools.It thus reflects existence of poor education system in the government sector.

The study finds that the schools in Assam are still not fully equipped with basic facilities such as adequate number of classrooms, library, smart classroom etc. In addition, poor maintenance is responsible for gradual deterioration of existing properties of the schools. It is realized that there is poor understanding of ethics about how to use public property. The deteriorated conditions of government's sponsored toilets, sports materials, water supply systems etc. reflect the misuse of public property.

At this highly advanced global age, advanced facilities are essential to acquainting children with new world so that they can efficiently compete with their peers. Here, the study shows that unavailability of different advanced facilities has hampered proper dissemination of knowledge amongst tea-tribes students. It can be also said that these children have been deprived of their current needs regarding acquiring elementary education.

Apart from infrastructures, teachers' related issues, management, work culture, parental support and guidance are vital for proper educational growth of children. The study shows that poor educational status of parents/guardians has affected effective parental guidance

amongst tea-tribes. Many parents can't realize the importance of education for their children. Majority of tea-tribes people of Assam are daily waged labours. They work for the day at tea-gardens and get little time to participate in other activities such as parents-teachers meet conducted by school managements. On the other hand, economic conditions of tea-tribes' families are not sound. Therefore, numerous parents can't fulfil the requirements of children such as separate study room at home, purchase of study materials, digital equipment to access and practice digital resources etc. The study reveals that many parents can't manage winter clothes like sweater, socks and shoes for their children and for this reason; many students couldn't attend classes during winter session. Thus, unsound economic conditions of tea-tribe families have affected the educational journey of their children. Simultaneously, community participation in the management of schools is crucial to ensure effective delivery of services. The study shows that inadequate involvement of local people in the school management has made too much flexible environment in the schools. Most of the local people are unaware of management issues and they often try to avoid the school related issues. Thus, lack of conscious community participation causes deterioration of school environment.

Regarding the issue of teachers' empowerment, the study finds that poor implementation of teacher's empowering programmes results in poor services from the teachers. The study reveals that the faculty development programmes are not effective from different angles such as unwillingness of numerous teachers to acquire and practice new knowledge, corruption at different levels, negligence of duty, weak management etc. On the other hand, the study also shows that whatever knowledge is acquired through the programmes is unusable because some facilities are not available in the schools such as smart classrooms, smart boards, projectors etc. Thus, the study highlights massive gap between steps taken to empower teachers and its implementation in terms of practicing the skills in the schools.

The government of Assam has taken steps to amalgamate the schools but it cannot fulfil the required strength of teachers as per norms of RTE Act, 2009. The respondents have mentioned that class routine can't be maintained due to unavailability of teachers as per subject/stream or classes. Besides, the working hours couldn't be fully used by teachers to

teach their own subjects because they have to teach more than one classes at the same time. Thus, it can be said that unavailability of class wise or subject/stream wise teachers has affected children's proper understanding of different subjects. In addition, the language/social science teachers have to teach maths, science and other subjects and vice-versa. Simultaneously, the teachers perform numerous non-teaching duties and these extra duties have largely affected the teaching-learning process in different times. These issues need to be addressed by policy makers and policy implementers for the sake of realising right to education by different sections of the society like tea-tribes.

For developing a healthy work-culture, there is need of strong coordination between concerned offices and schools. Regarding the issue of visit of officials, the field study shows that the CRCCs have mostly visited the schools but higher officials have rarely visited the schools.Here, the officials mention that there is insufficient number of employees in the department and therefore it is very difficult to visit all the schools frequently. There is also delay in solving different problems at different levels. It can be assumed that poor coordination and understanding between the offices and school has affectedwork culture and delivery of services.

Creation of a sound, attractive and enjoyable educational environment depends on different factors. Acquiring knowledge from different sources can be a stimulus to motivate students. Timely invitation of resource person/educationalists/experts from different fields can be a leading factor to create such environment. The primary data shows that resource persons/educationalists/experts are rarely invited to interact with students in the schools situated in tea-tribes areas.

The field data provides that examinations are conducted as per fixed time interval but results are not satisfactory. The teachers are not happy with the development of students in different areas such as critical thinking, conceptual understanding, numerical aptitudes and grammar as per different levels. The study also finds language difficulties amongst tea-tribes children.It comes to know that numerous students reading at different levels can't read English and Assamese sentences properly.

According to Census 2011, prominent languages spoken by tea-tribes in Assam are Sadani/Sadri, Santali, Odia, Kurukh/Oraon and Munda. So, their mother tongues are distinct from native languages such as Assamese and others. It can be assumed that the tea-tribes children couldn't properly communicate with teachers due to language problem and are thus unable to acquire proper knowledge during class hours.This language problem slows down the educational growth of the children and it has further manifested a learning gap between tea-tribes students and other students of the same age. It is thus one of the major hurdles that have caused poor educational status of tea-tribes students in the state of Assam.

The issues discussed above reveal that the problems such as insufficient and advanced infrastructures, poor management of available properties, unavailability of required teachers, inadequate parents/community involvement, language difficulties, poor coordination between agencies etc. lead to poor implementation of right to education amongst tea-tribes of Assam.

## CONCLUSION

Various conditions are responsible for realization of right to education such as existence of sound educational environment, children's accessibility to resources and acceptability of services provided by service providers. Effective teaching-learning cannot be achieved without coherent and adaptable educational environment. For creating a sound environment, there is need to focus on different issues such as adequate infrastructures, access to knowledge system, reasonable PTR, subject/stream wise availability of teachers, sound work culture and adequate support from parents and community. Through this study, it is understood that there are several areas yet to be improved to realize right to education such as critical thinking and conceptual understanding of children. In addition, there is need to provide sufficient infra-structure where students can receive quality education and realize their fullest development. Furthermore, it is realized that unless resolving language difficulties among tea-tribes children, it would be difficult to establish right to education among tea-tribes. Apart from that socio-economic problem is also a major obstacle to

achieve right to education in tea-tribes arras. Therefore, the concerned authority should focus on improvement of the whole system so that children could realize their fullest educational development without feeling deprivation and regional disparities. So there is :

1. Need to establish residential schools in tea-tribe areas so that children could be guided in a disciplined way.It will benefit the children from two angles, i.e., abstain from social-economic hurdles and getting personal guidance which is mostly absent at their homes.
2. Need to provide more emphasis on communication language of tea-tribe children so that they can communicate with teachers effectively. A significant percentage of teachers from tea-tribes communities can be appointed in those schools where large numbers of tea-tribes students have been enrolled because they can use their mother tongue while teaching different subjects.
3. Need to concentrate on the obstacles highlighted in different reports and studies and immediate measures taken to provide justice to the tea-tribes children.
4. Instead of focusing more and more on PTR, the concerned authority should concentrate on availability of stream/subject wise teachers. The government should adopt strict measures to shuffle teachers to fulfil this criterion.
5. Need to think about introduction of Open Door System (ODS) so that advance infra-structures and facilities could be experienced by children from poor economic background. In this regard, government should take initiative to utilize available opportunities for the sake of unprivileged sections.
6. Need to introduce strict measures regarding maintenance of existing properties so that users become alert while using the same. In addition, adequate funds should be provided to maintain the schools.

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# Sustainable Development vis-à-vis Tribal's Right to Environment in Northeast India : Case of Zeme Nagas, Senapati District, Manipur

*Samiksha Godara and Kiloigombe Joseph*

ABSTRACT

*Tribals in India are governed by their own customary practices; in most cases, the legality of the statute is overshadowed by this right. Indigenous people are the owners and dwellers of the forest. Zeme is one of these tribes living in the natural environment of northeast India. Their lives depend on the natural environmental habitat. Their main occupation being agriculture, their annual income depends on the cycle of seasons. They hardly have access to market facilities, yet they facilitate themselves with a barter system - their own organic products. Apart from their agricultural by-products, 90% of their food habits depend on the forest and river vegetation. Thus, absorbing forest products for rites, food and medicinal purposes is one of their fundamental rights, a right to livelihood cherished in the Constitution of India. In contrast to these rights, the vision to protect and improve environmental degradation was inserted into the Constitution. These principles to "safeguard and advance the natural environment, as well as the flora and fauna," are likely to impact upon the fundamental rights of the tribals. This legal ethnographic study about sustainable development and urbanization at the village level seeks to portray, protect, and preserve the culture and rights of the people. This study is carried out through a doctrinal and partially empirical telephonic interview method to showcase their socio-cultural lives and the glitches of marginalized people within marginalized regions of northeast India.*

Keywords: *belief, food, habitation, right, rite*

India is one of the most populous and one of the fastest developing countries in the world, with rural population covering seventy percent of the country's total area.[1] The data collected by the World Bank for

development indicators, such as rural population in India was reported at 65.07 % in 2020.[2] The most marginalized members of our society, the tribals, are primarily dependent on the forests for their sustenance.[3] The tribal population covers not less than 50% of these rural areas and they totally depend for their livelihood on the natural environment. While tribal populations in the northeastern states represent less than 20% of the total Scheduled Tribes (ST) population.

The entire northeast region has been neglected from the developmental process, mainly because of the detached geographical and reserved cultural seclusion.[4]The majority of these people live from hand to mouth, and almost half of them live on one meal a day. No doubt, gathering food (hunting and fishing) from the forest and rivers is the most common occupation apart from agricultural activities. When a comparatively underprivileged group lists sluggish progress in poverty reduction, it can be beneficial to discover fluctuations in other poverty measures-particularly those that study "poverty gap" and "poverty severity."[5]The forests in the northeast are abundant in natural resources, as well as a large number of tribal communities who have always led their own way of life irrespective of the central laws.[6]

Zeme[7] people living in Senapati district are a minor community compared to other Naga tribes. Though they owned a vast area of land, in reality they had very little to harvest. It is not only due to their lack of technical knowledge but also because they solely depended on their limited traditional knowledge.Thus, cultivation and farming are their primary occupations. They are self-sufficient and barter system is prevalent not only in kind for kinds but also for cash and security.The people love to share their harvest without imbursement and take pride in sharing their food to build a strong clique in the course of poor transportation.

Due to these static, self-contented customs and their stern traditional conventions, they are not only economically or educationally backward, but are also exploited socially and politically by the wealthy and corrupt politicians. Their votes are sold for a few hundred bucks or a meal a day during the elections, which compromises jobs and other developmental schemes in return. Developmental works in these areas were sluggish even after the central approval, and moreover, they give up their

compensational rights not only for want of better facilities but also due to their innocent ignorance. Thus, sometimes they suffer psychologically and materially and do not enjoy the new facilities. They live without scientific medical facilities, yet they develop medicines from trees, shrubs, and even grass with their traditional knowledge. Though they freely access the forest and rivers, their lives are empathetic and pathetic due to progressive mechanical fusion. Culture is recognized "as a priority component of urban plans and strategies in the adoption of planning instruments, including master plans, zoning guidelines, building codes, coastal management policies, and strategic development policies that safeguard a diverse range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and landscapes;" so, it is necessary to "protect them from potential disruptive impacts of urban development."[8] However, the poor implementation devastated the lives of the tribals.

## INDIGINITY AND BIODIVERSITY

Ancient people learned to live with the basic five principles of elements of natural resources: the earth, the water, the air, the light, and the cosmos, and they were symbolically worshipped.[9] It is assessed that nearly 300 million aboriginals are living in the world, out of which about half, i.e., 150 million, are located in Asia, about 30 million of them in Central and South America and enough number of them are spread over Australia, Europe, New Zealand, Africa, and the Soviet Union.[10]India is a union of states,[11] the world's largest democracy, where unity in diversity is the essence of its democratic tenet. Sixty-seven million people in India are in the category of 227 racial and consisting 573 tribal groups derived from six racial stocks, namely - Negroid, Proto- Australoid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean, West Breachy and Nordic, living in various plarts of the country.[12]It is a long-established habit for these people to respect nature and live in natural environments. With recent technological advancements in public services, foundation support and transportation, one cannot imagine why aboriginal and society should be measured as "marginalized" merely based on the place of their living or the suppleness they practice that endures their livelihoods in an environmentally sound manner.[13]Yet,

Zeme still lives remotely, not only due to the lack of modern amenities but also due to the impact of marginalization within marginalized groups in the Northeastern states of India.

The Indian subcontinent represents two out of eighteen hot spot biodiversity, one in the Western Ghats, another in the northeastern Himalaya and is one of the twelve biodiversity mega-centers.[14]This ensures that about 60% forest land of India lies in the 187 tribal's districts which is under Fifth and Sixth Schedules treasured in its Constitution for sustainable development.[15]The 'sustainable development' concept insists that those persons displaced should be appropriately restored.[16]It is the folklorist and aborigines who conserve varieties of flora and cultivate rare agricultural crops such as rice, maize, millets, grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables at the lowest and in sundry agro-ecological weathers in the northeasterly, peninsular and central part, in the region where indigenous groups live.[17]What is worse is the conflict between tribal groups competing claims over their forest homelands and the need for conservation of forest wealth, including flora and fauna.[18]To tackle the hostile living situations of various ethnic groups taking shelter in the forests on account of the non-recognition and vesting of pre-existing rights of the recognized tribals and forest inhabitants, who have been living for ages, but their rights being denied or unaccounted, a momentous regulation has been enacted for the recognition and give their fundamental right and right of forest occupation in forest land.[19]

However, due to the meager application of this and other related rights, it leads to weakly accessible services and majority of the population misuses the environmental policy and abuses its power. As a result, numerous cases have been decided in their favor to make the right decision and protect the exploited tribals. The court in the State of Karnataka[20] emphasized the enactment of common legislation to save the land granted to both Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes, which provide that "purchase of such lands by people who do not belong to these groups would be null and void."[21] Additionally in Sacchidananda Pandey vs. State of West Bengal & Others[22], it reiterates that "industrialization, urbanization, explosion of population, overexploitation of resources, depletion of traditional sources of energy and raw materials, the search for new sources

of energy and raw materials, the disruption of natural ecological balances, the destruction of a multitude of animal and plant species for economic reasons and sometimes for no good reason at all are factors which have contributed to environmental deterioration."[23]Also, in the case of P. Rami Reddy vs. State of Andhra Pradesh, [24]too, the court upheld, under the 1959 Regulation, that "any transfer of immovable property situated in the Agency Tracts, by a member of a Scheduled Tribe, was declared null and void unless, made in favor of any other member of a Scheduled Tribe or a registered cooperative society composed solely of members of the Scheduled Tribes or with the previous consent in writing of the Agent."

Thus, the minority fundamental right cannot be denied and these rights need to be preserved to protect the interests of the schedule tribes and schedule castes and respect their economic and educational requirements. At the same time they cannot be subjected to any social injustice and exploitations.[25]The National Green Tribunal (NGT), the Indian environmental court, can play a vital role in Pubic Interest Litigation (PIL) through articles 32, and 226 of the Indian Constitution. Gitanjali N. Gill[26] explains the important role of NGT:"The role of NGT in this context is laudable as its judgments recognize that 'development' is the essence of any pragmatic and progressive society based upon a 'balancing act' of not only supporting economic benefits but also encompassing the guarantee of protecting the environment and the fundamental human rights of the poor. The 'balancing act' includes the full spectrum of civil, political, cultural, economic and social processes in a holistic manner to conserve ecology and improve the well-being of tribal and marginalized people."

The condition of the tribal was miserable in the past, and it continued to be so in spite of several ameliorative efforts made on the part of states.[27] It was only at the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972, [28] that the common outlook and guiding principles for the global preservation and enhancement of the human environment were considered. In the same manner, the most recent development for Schedule Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers is the acknowledgment of their right to forest land[29] under the Forest Right Act, 2006[30] which is an important step to mitigate the prejudice against the aboriginal and tribal people[31] in India. The drafted National Policy on

Tribal Affairs in 2004 recognized that ST in general are the repository of indigenous knowledge and wisdom, which must be protected.[32]The right to progressive society is a method of extensive expansion that comprises of self-sufficiency, upliftment and free from oppression, fixed or limits the prospect of transformation and reconstruction and confirms justness or the lessening of inequalities.[33]Thus, common conviction for a basic human right to ensure self-determination, impartiality, and acceptable conditions of life and a solemn accountability to guard and advance the environment preservation are important for both intra and inter-generational equity.[34]

Tribals are socially, culturally, and spiritually entrenched in their ecological system for their survival. However, development is an evil necessity for a progressive society, yet it is taking these rights away from them with urbanization and detaching their ecosystem. Thus, under the Forest Rights Act, certain rights and duties of the tribal, as forest dwellers, were recognized to do away with injustice, and Gram Sabhas[35] were empowered to make decisions and regulate access to community resources. Certainly laws protect and provide respectable status to the tribal but these cannot resolve their interest and support life in the absence of smooth administration and equitable legislation to uplift the marginal groups in cases of acquisition of land, structural advancement – persuaded dislocation and political autonomy.[36]Presently, India's developmental aspirations have sidelined the tribals' sense of belonging due to the endless quest of industrialization and urbanization.[37]

## CULTURAL PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Every religion has embraced and endorsed the essence of a deep relationship with nature. Most religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Abrahamic traditions of Judaism take a view of natural world being the God's creation of self-expression through the exhibition of the universe, a disclosure to be betrothed upon.[38]They mention the need to protect and preserve the environment through different interactions with each other. People of different races, creeds, colors, and faiths have peacefully adapted to each other and coexisted since time immemorial. Religion also influences political orientations that often inform environmental beliefs and

actions.[39]The concept of environmentalism is more than a demographic trait because it has a clear connection between those ideas, credentials, and principles.[40]

The concept of sustainable development and religious practice is assumed to provide ultimate good for maximum benefits. The two utilitarian aspects of religion that are of great significance so far as the goal of environmental protection is concerned[41] are those of:

1. Religion as a value system
2. Religion as a belief system

As much as it provides humankind with a sense of sacredness, religion has the potential to fill the ethical vacuum left by scientific solutions and legal prescriptions.[42] Of course, the value systems that form the bedrock of ethics vary from religion to religion, but they complement and supplement each other. For example, Hinduism stresses non-violence as a value; Buddhism emphasizes compassion: Christianity lays stress on love; and Islam brings egalitarianism and oneness of human beings into focus.[43] Each religion emphasizes one or more values and implies others.

The utility of religion as a belief system for serving the cause of environmental protection depends a lot on the value religion places on certain belief system are woven up.[44]We also come across those beliefs that prove detrimental to the natural system of resources.[45] For example, rivers identified as very sacred have become the most polluted.

In one of the most important environmental jurisprudence cases, M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India[46], a case has been decided based on the concept of sustainable development and the court placed emphasis on balancing between the development of and maintaining of the land and environment. But individuals failed on their part out of greed until the mechanical mandate principle was invoked.Modern analysis of the concept of sustainable development has identified the following principles as constituting its essential substance, all of which find place in important instruments of international environmental policy[47] and they are:

1. Respect for Nature (RN)
2. Integration of environmental and economic concern (IEEC)
3. Polluter Pays Principles (PPP)

4. Precautionary Principles (PP)
5. Intragenerational and Intergenerational Equity

Mankind has overlooked that the obligation to pay attention to the earth is deeply attached in the ultimate bond between God, His creation - the Universe, and the humanity.[48]Theologically our life here on earth is a mission to exalt God the creator. Mankind has behaved like an unfaithful servant of God by destroying the environment.[49]In spite of the differences, every religion has a significant configuration with the environment.

All religions in India have environmental overtones for the compliance of natural codes of conduct and thus express veneration of the flora and fauna and its creation.[50]People believe that environmental complications are a consequence of the isolation of mankind from his creator God.[51]Good governance has its direct connection between belief and culture through environmental sustainability and promote understanding, peace building, benign, comprehensive and pacific civilizations, and durable establishments.[52]

## RITES AND ECOLOGY

Forest is not only economic well-being of the tribal people but it is an important part of their day-to-day life because it provides mental and spiritual regulation through the year.[53]Using the natural resources for their sustenance while at the same time maintaining ecological balance is a feature of the tribals. Tribals worship and revere spirits and sometimes specific flora and fauna are taken as totem and they believe that their gods and ancestors' spirits abide in the forests.[54]As tribe, viz., Zeme Naga, follows an indigenous religion, hunting and fishing constitute integral parts of their ritual performances. Thus, by constructing a dam and preserving the forest, converting it into a park, and seizing the indigenous rights of hunting and fishing, we are violating their fundamental rights and their livelihood. As an illustration, it may be mentioned here the sacred performance of *Kazuo-Teiguo/Haram* (fishing-hunting) of Zeme.

***Kazuo***: The *Kazuo*, an annual community fishing trip between *Ndu-Hezing kei* (March-April), is performed in *Mbeii-Kiand Teifui-Ki* (Barakand Dzuku rivers), not only for food alone but to pray for rain before cultivation

starts. They also believed that through rites, good omens were foretoken to enhance life and wealth. They use an environment-friendly, chemical-free traditional method obtained from *Tekie* tree and *Ntei* rope to catch fish. For preparation, *Dekie guoi* (the itchy tree bark) is pounded into powder and dried in the sun and *Ntei* (bark of the rope-type tree) is collected. Once the appointed man picks his first fish, the whole community is announced to engross themselves. Ze-Mnui people believe that, even if there is not much fish, revisiting the river side itself leads to healing and prosperity. The village is fifteen to twenty kilometers away, yet the villagers are keen to perform this fishing rite, surrendering themselves to the river goddesses.

***Heriahk Teiguo***: The Teiguo-Hunting occurs during *Heriahk-Tingna* (house construction) in *Heri-Ndu kei* (month of February-March) at the time of or after the construction of a new house/building (more emphasis on the construction of the village Morung, without which the Morung cannot access normal traditional activities) and in *Ntei-kei* (month of October)-*Settau-Tingna*[55] festival before the harvest. This is a pious religious mandate for affluence and entreating a good portent. *Heriahk-tingna* is similar to *Vungtak renet*, which is said to have been observed in commemoration of the establishment of the village ritual.

***Vungtakrenet Teiguo***: This is one of the greatest and most important rituals for the Zeme tribe, which is performed by the Hoi and Hau clans for good fortune in health and wealth. The sacrificial procedure is said to have been taught to their forefather, viz., *Nvung*, by their benevolent spirit in the wilderness. According to Namteilungbe Abraham (interviewed), "*Nvung* was taken to the wilderness for seven years by the spirit, where he was taught this ritual." He was asked to teach this performance to his people, in order to rever the benevolent spirit so that they would be blessed favorably. The main ritual starts by sacrificing a spotless black cow for all the villagers and followed by the killing of a roaster individually for their own family. This ritual is strictly observed, where only the purest person(s) from their respective clan, seven generations down, shall be selected for killing the animal (ox). The cutting of the meat shall be initiated by the *Hauna* clan and the *Hoina* clan will act as a helper. *Kakeboibe* (the main celebrant) could be selected from either of the clans. The ritual ends with

two days of hunting *Kidolam* and *Kichailam* (west on the first day and east on the next day). However, *Kakeboibe* continues the ritual of undertaking certain food restrain and living only on fish and wild animals till the completion of the ninth month.

## TOTEMIST FESTIVALS AND CULTURAL APPRECIATION

In contrast to these influences, as a *totem*, cultural activities and festivals are also organized for the preservation and promotion of wild life. It became a trending connotation celebrating different festivals at various levels in the northeastern states. The ten-day annual *Hornbill*[56] festival is celebrated in Nagaland from December 1 -10, every year. The *Hornbill* is lionized and admired by the Nagas. The adorned headgear of Zeme, worn as traditional attire along with the *Nzaei* (black and blue colorful bird) feathers as an earring, is the symbol of the *Hornbill's* tail/feather to showcase the wealth and pride of an individual. *Mithun*[57] which are rarely found in the world, are also preserved and possessed by some wealthy individuals. It is also the state animal embraced by the Government of Nagaland. *Sangai* (stag) is venerated in Manipur and its feast is celebrated as a sign of prosperity. The *Barak*[58] festival is celebrated in Senapati district, Manipur. Barak is a life saving river that flows at its maximum length in tribal areas of Northeast India. It is also one of the rivers that provides fish. But dejectedly, due to rapid developmental work, the natural river is depleting and animals in the forest no longer enjoy the biological ecosystem and they are in danger of extinction.

Common heritage of nature for a common goal needs constant effort from mankind to protect and preserve the resources. It is the failure of humans to control their activities that depletes the environment. However, scientific and technological expansion has caused an imbalance between man and nature that brought about the need to control activities affecting human life and the environment. In almost all cases, human activities aggravate the situation. Repeatedly, these incidents compel us to introspect about the development models we have adopted, about the sanguinity of our actions, and about the impact of our species on this planet[59]and the dislocation of the indigenous people. However, one may mention one of

the reasons attributing to environmental depletion pointed out under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[60], which states that:

> "The root causes of such dislocation are diverse – sea level rise, drought, and other extreme events that uproot people from their social, environmental and economic fabric of life; policies that favor urban and industrial growth rather than rural development that inadvertently create a "pull" for rural migrants to cities; increasing poverty and inequality within and between nations; wars, terrorism and other forms of conflict; and the ambiguity of the role of religion during times of conflict and therefore its potential as a destabilizing force."

## LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS FOR PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT

Apart from the constitutional dictat to guard and improve the environment, there are other regulations on the issue, but the most related legislations for our study[61] are Water Act,[62] the Environment Act,[63] the Wildlife Act,[64] and the Forest Act.[65] One of the most important pieces of legislations balancing the twin objectives of conservation and livelihood security for forest-dwelling tribal communities is the Recognition of Forest Rights also known as Forest Right, Act 2006.[66]

There are some other pertinent sections from different Parliamentary enactments. Firstly, the Indian Penal Code, 1860[67] and secondly Criminal Procedure Code, 1973[68]which also provide for public safety and tranquility and make the defaulter punishable. Chapter IV of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is the subject on offences against public health, safety, decency, convenience, and morals.[69] The provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code[70] (CrPC) also enhance the operative, immediate, and protective remedies for public from pollution free including hygienic surroundings as fundamental environmental right. It also encompasses provisions for the implementation of several provisions of the substantive law.[71]It may be worth mentioning here the Municipal Council, Ratlam vs. Shri Vardhichand & Others[72]case which is a substantial landmark judgment in the development of environmental legal philosophy in India.[73] The court laid stress on the obligation of the municipal government to its people, which includes the provision of hygienic services and the prevention of street pollution from a nearby alcohol plant under section 133 CrPC for

public nuisance. The movement for environmental protection took a new turn and gained massive support after the deliverance of the judgment. In this case, the Apex court pointed out the task of local bodies in the direction to safeguard the environment and established the law of civic nuisance in the Code of Criminal Procedure as a compelling apparatus for the application of their duties.[74]The case relates to a public nuisance, but the remedy claimed was that the Municipal Council, a statutory body, be directed to carry out its obligation to the public by creating community health amenities in a stipulated period for clean environment.[75]The right to life, article 21, includes a clean environment and now it is recognized as fundamental right.

## CONCLUSION

It is the customary practices that form the habits of the tribal people, and they are entrenched in their daily lives. People are traditionally skilled and independently self-sufficient. In spite of the new developmental and progressive work, they find it hard to adapt to such a culture, and it impedes their traditional proficiency. However, with the influence of the modern educational system and technological advancement, they are compelled to improve their lives. But it may take another generation to adapt and adopt the viability for the forest dwellers to enlighten themselves with such sophistication. It is essential to draw a distinction between those who are in the forest for survival and livelihood and those who are there for commercial purposes and to make profit.[76] It is definitely the latter that should be prevented from exploiting the ecological balance.

In the modern era, the influence of religion on human life has been high.[77] Religion and religious specialists who functioned in the closely held societies of the pre-modern days enjoyed a direct and strong influence in adding religious fervor to many human affairs.[78] Thus, to liberate and protect the rights of the tribal people while at the same time protecting the environment and maintaining ecological balance, it should be a blended version of customary law and legislation with an effective administrative mechanism. The need of the hour, for the present generation, is to revisit the role of education and to render social welfare services to bring back

the natural habitation of ecology. The ministry should also include the role of NGOs and indigenous women, who are the forerunners of sustainable environmental protection. They played an important role in offering knowledge, rendering social welfare services, administering the law, providing community leadership, etc. Now the influence of religion and religious specialists has diminished. Human life seems to have been influenced by the economic and political wealth of individuals in the era.

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55. The feast is celebrated by the whole community to reassure the *ngua-rai* (solemnity) made by the newly inducted members of the Morung, especially the young ones. During this fest the boys and the girls go for hiking to get fruits for their old parents and tender siblings.
56. *Hornbill* known as *Herie* in Zeme dialect, is a bird which have cultural importance to Naga and has different anecdotes attributed to each tribe. This bird is black in color with white strip in feathers and tails with huge double step long beak.
57. *Mithun* is the typical type of buffalo or yak/Bovidae family are found in the Arunachal, Manipur and Nagaland. They are partially domesticated by some few people in the reserve forest. It has a material value and considered as assets which can be exchanged for money and other valuable property.
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# Gender and Performance: The Buchen of Pin Valley, Spiti

*Nilza Angmo*

ABSTRACT

*This paper investigates the Buchen tradition of oral narration and enactment of life stories associated with popular Tibetan Buddhist personalities and the ways in which gender and sexuality are embedded in such performances. As an exclusively male tradition, the Buchen and their troupe perform the parts of both male and female characters in rituals and in their dramatization of edifying religious stories. An accidental discovery of a video clip displaying a group of women impersonating the Buchen in Mane village, Spiti, provides an opportunity to study how certain characteristics are marked by gender roles in this society and what the implications of cross-dressing entail for both categories. An interdisciplinary approach has been employed to understand this representation of gender in the larger context of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and culture.*

**Keywords:** *Performance, Crossdressing, Gender Impersonation, Tibetan Buddhism, Comparative Literature*

## INTRODUCTION

Opinions concerning the inclusion or exclusion of women from institutional and societal practices have been much debated since the establishment of Buddhism as a religion[1]. Scholars have noted the prevalent misogynistic attitudes toward women in early Buddhism and cite the popular example of the Buddha's outright refusal to allow his aunt Mahapajapati and her retinue to be ordained as nuns. He only grants them permission after Ananda, his personal attendant, intervenes on their behalf, but with the condition that all nuns accept the eight precepts, the first being "Nuns, no matter how senior, must defer to monks, no matter how junior[2]."

However, several other examples display Buddha and his teachings in the opposite light. Such differing accounts point to the existence of multiple schools and sects of Buddhism and the pluralistic nature of thought and practice centered around a growing religion[3]. This ambivalent position of Buddhist literature on gender has led to the cross-examination of texts and certain conclusions, two of which I highlight here. First, according to Buddhist philosophy, gender bias ceases to exist once all worldly concerns are removed. Second, numerous commentaries state that Buddhahood cannot be attained in a woman's body[4]. Buddhism like other religions is riddled with such contrary claims and this may not have become a serious concern had these ideas not seeped into the broader social fabric and determined every day choices available to contemporary Buddhist women. This paper demonstrates how such opinions enter the Tibetan Buddhist social space and inhibit, prohibit, or regulate women and their activities, both lay and spiritual, by examining on the one hand, the Buchen impersonating and crossdressing during rituals and on the other being parodied by a group of village women in a one-time performance held in Mane village, Spiti, in 2017.

Tibetan Buddhism as a religion is practiced in communities largely located in the Himalayan belt and has also been successful in creating a global impact on individuals seeking spiritual well-being. While most members of the traditional Buddhist communities continue to believe in Tibetan Buddhism as a religion of rituals, the Western communities focus more on soteriological practice. Even as the latter's approach appears to be different, the practice of differentiation made by religious institutions based on gender continues to affect women from both communities[5].

Many advocates of institutional change have challenged such practices in the past and their constant efforts in this direction culminated in an improvement in the form of moral as well as material support for women practitioners. While supporters of the egalitarian outlook of Tibetan Buddhism often list popular female practitioners of the past and the handful in the present as examples of gender equality, they falter when questions such as funding and control of nunneries surface[6]. This may not be the case with all Tibetan sects or sub-sects, as many are working on making necessary changes, but a simple comparison of the size and number of

nunneries and monasteries today can help sum up the situation. Since texts and performances are predominantly religious in Tibetan Buddhist literature and substantially the domain of male intellectuals, this study tries to examine the consequences of parodying an all-male Buchen tradition by the ani(s) of Mane village, Spiti in Himachal Pradesh.

## BUCHEN AND PERFORMANCE

The Buchen belong to villages scattered in Pin Valley in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India and are mostly famous for performing a ceremony called *pho bar do dcog* or the ceremony of breaking the stone[7]. A usual troupe would comprise of five male members: the leader who is called Meme Buchen or Lochen, two assistants called Onpas and two novices called Nyawa[8]. During this ritual the Meme Buchen dances with swords, pierces his cheeks with a trident and breaks a large stone on a person's chest to ward off evil omens. This ceremony is said to have been performed for the first time by the great 14th- century Sidda Thangton Gyalpo (Thang Stongr Gyal Po) in Lhasa, Tibet.

The Buchen are also lay farmers belonging to the Nyingma sect who work in their fields in summer and travel to other parts of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh in winter to trade as well as to perform this ritual. It is during the idle months of winter that they narrate the life stories of religious personalities. Narrating a single life story can last for 3-4 days at the end of which the Buchen put up a play in the village.

As the heart sons or disciples of Thangton Gyalpo, this tradition is exclusive to male members of the villages in Pin Valley. Earlier the tradition was transmitted from father to son, but today any young boy or man can choose to become a Buchen. A novice is expected to undergo rigorous training before he even begins learning the texts or performing physical feats described earlier. He must first make one lakh prostrations, recite the mantra of Avalokitesvara (*Om Mani Padme Hum*) one lakh times, and sit in meditation for at least a year. To become the leader or Meme Buchen, the trainee meditates for three years and then continues to meditate each year for a week or two, thereafter. Once a Buchen has completed his training, he is expected to carry out his first ritual performance in Pin

Valley. Senior Buchen and members of the village asses his performance after which he is allowed to perform outside the Valley.

## CROSSDRESSING AND FEMALE IMPERSONATION IN BUCHEN PERFORMANCE

Out of the Buchen's repertoire of picture storytelling, dancing, singing, and conducting rituals, this paper examines two examples of crossdressing and female impersonation. Firstly, a dance that occurs during the breaking of the stone ceremony, and secondly, the impersonation of female characters in their dramatization of life stories of famous religious personalities.

1. In the first case, an open space is chosen where a scroll painting is unfolded, below which a temporary altar with a clay or bronze statue of Thangton Gyalpo and other ritual objects are placed. The head Buchen is dressed in his red robes and dons a hat with colourful ribbons. He is joined by his assistant who is also dressed in a red robe but wears a crown with five Buddhas painted on it. In this moment, the assistant is called a Lhamo or goddess. The head Buchen begins by offering prayers followed by a dance. Here the movement of the assistant is graceful and feminine compared to the more powerful strides taken by the head Buchen[9]. This dance lasts for around ten minutes and is the only part of the ceremony with a feminine or sacred feminine presence carried out by a male performer.
2. The Buchen are also known for narrating the life stories of religious personalities. Many of these stories called *rnam thar* (pronounced *nam thar*) are depicted on scroll paintings which the Buchen points to at regular intervals during the performance. As mentioned before, the narration of a single life story takes 3-4 days after which a play based on the story is performed. During the play, the head Buchen wears his ceremonial robes while the rest of the troupe dresses up in costumes to represent different characters of the life story. For example, the life story or *Namthar* of Khandroma Drowa Zangmo features several characters. This story, in a nutshell, has

> Drowa Zangmo, the dakini or celestial being who wishes to eradicate suffering and is born to an old couple and marries King Kala Wangpo of Mandralgang. She gives birth to a son and a daughter, but returns to her celestial abode when her husband's first wife, the evil Hachang plots to have her killed. This life story narrates the suffering inflicted upon Drowa Zangmo's children and their ultimate victory against the wicked Hachang. During the play, the male members of the Buchen troupe dress as Drowa Zangmo and the Hachang. Khandroma Drowa Zangmo, as Pascale Dollfus notes, is "dressed like a princess with a lovely woollen robe tied at the waist with a beautiful belt, a perak on the head, and as many ornaments as possible[10]."

The Buchen, in this manner, solve the problem of female representation in a male performative tradition through crossdressing and impersonation. During a field trip in 2019, I enquired about the absence of women in these performances and received the same answer. Women cannot become Buchen because the rituals associated with the tradition require physical strength. Along with the physical aspects of the ritual there is also the moral aspect to be considered, as the head Buchen has to remove his upper body clothing during the sword dance to have a ritual yellow cloth pinned to the skin on his back. Additionally, the original story of the Buchen details the creation of five men by Thangton Gyalpo from his five fingers which reinforces the notion of male exclusivity in this tradition.

Patrick D. Murphee makes a similar observation while discussing female impersonation in Indian religious theatre. "Patriarchal performance traditions marshal a variety of arguments to justify the continued use of female impersonators in most forms of Indian religious theatre. First, since many traditional troupes tour, they can cite the logistical difficulty of providing separate dressing areas for female performers. Second, male performers argue that women's inferior mental and physical capacity renders them unsuitable for the rigors of training and performance in complex and physically demanding genres[11]."

Another argument made in favour of the male-only Buchen tradition

is embedded in their additional role as local priests located between the lay community and monastic institutions where knowledge is handed down either from father to son or from master to novice. Serinity Young (2001) identifies two types of male lineages prominent in Tibetan Buddhism: the guru/disciple and the tulku system where the lineage is maintained through reincarnating masters. As she observes, "Both types of male-only lineages take reproduction out of the physical realm and place it in the spiritual: the first by displacing reproduction on to the transmission of knowledge from male to male (master to disciple) and the second by emphasizing the male ability to continually reincarnate as a male in the same monastic office, it is not as exactly the same person. One is succession and perpetuation by the transmission of spiritual power (*dbang*) and the other by reincarnation, in this case, a shadow form of the self-fathering discussed above. Both types of male lineages are strengthened, indeed held together by the absence of women as productive agents and by emphasizing female powers of pollution[12]." Young's visualization of this replacement of women in re-producing successors of a lineage focuses on celibacy and does not consider certain lineages that are passed down from father to son, through a legitimate spouse. For instance, the highest position of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism has historically been transferred from father to son or uncle to nephew of the Khon family[13]. Having pointed this out, I am still largely in agreement with Young's critique of gender in Tibetan Buddhism, as the wives or daughters of the Sakya lineage do not inherit their husband's or father's position and perform marginal roles within the hierarchy of spiritual leadership.

Such rationalization deters women from contemplating the possibility of entering the religious performative world without meeting resistance. The female body becomes a site of "pollution" that regularly requires women to move within designated spaces, usually located at the fringes of religious worship.

## ANI(S) OF MANE VILLAGE, SPITI

Since the primary objective of my research was to study the life stories of

the Buchen tradition, the question of gender did not arise until the chance discovery of a video clip on YouTube in September 2019. The video was uploaded by Tashi Palden, a resident of Mane Village, located outside Pin Valley, but within Spiti in the month of February 2017[14].

It is a sunny winter's day and the people of Mane village have gathered around an open space to celebrate Republic Day. Carpets cover the floor, there is a small podium with a plastic replica of a scroll painting hanging from it, chairs are placed on two sides, and microphones with speakers have also been arranged. The video is five minutes long and showcases an argument between two women dressed as shepherds, resembling the stock character called 'Lukzi' in the Buchen tradition. They are preceded by two women who appear to be impersonating the head Buchen, dressed in red robes, their faces half covered by colourful ribbons, one carries a lute and the other a pair of cymbals. The first woman dressed as a shepherd mimics the Lukzi's entrance by swinging the sling in her hand and shouting. The second woman holds a spindle and sings a popular Kinnauri song. On one occasion, the first woman (dressed as a shepherd) sits on a middle-aged woman's lap in the front row and refuses to be removed from there, stating that "he" has found a beautiful girl for "himself". The seated woman responds by hugging the shepherd tightly which has the whole gathering in splits. There are several moments when both the women posing as shepherds address the crowd who respond with funny remarks and laughter. Their spontaneous dialogues and effortless comic timing make them come across as professional entertainers, especially to the eyes of an outsider.

The fact that this performance was in many ways a parody of the Buchen tradition is clearly obvious to the locals. For instance, the women dressed as Buchen have substituted ritual ornaments worn by the head Buchen with necklaces made of dried cheese and apples. Traditionally, this scene is played out between the head Buchen and the Lukzi or the shepherd, while here we have the women working in pairs with two head Buchen and two shepherds. It seems some technical decisions were made backstage that necessitated the doubling of characters. Lukzi is conventionally a humorous character who challenges the Buchen and the Tibetan Buddhist faith but is later converted. By cutting out the spiritual

debate between the Buchen and the Lukzi, these double characters bring the secular element of the skit to the fore. The women impersonating Buchen stand by with their musical instruments and laugh along with the crowd. By relegating the Buchen impersonators to the background, we witness a shift in power as the women dressed as shepherds representing the common folk take center stage to discuss mundane affairs and not matters of religion. Another way of looking at this performance would be to imagine that the decision to stick with two shepherds and not the Buchen would have been made to avoid committing sacrilege. The skit as mentioned before offers a window for the secular expansion of a performance carried out by women. The video ends abruptly and unfortunately the rest of the footage and more could not be procured for further examination. The person who uploaded the video, Tashi Palden, was kind enough to share that these women were not performers but *anis* belonging to Mane village. The term *ani* should not be confused with its more popular usage for ordained nuns. In the villages of Spiti and many other parts of the Tibetan Buddhist world, *ani* is used for aunts and married women. I was also told that there has never been a performance like this in Spiti, by lay men or women. There is no information on how the *anis* prepared and trained for this performance, except that they are not professional entertainers and this was a one-time event. Women are more well-known for singing and dancing to folk songs in these regions.

In 2019, I asked Meme Dorjee Phuntsog, a head Buchen from Mudh village in Pin Valley if he had heard about this performance. He laughed good-naturedly and said that he had and added that the local god of Mane village later on fined the organizers for imitating the Buchen. This 'divine intervention' put an end to any future performances while simultaneously sending out a warning to the inhabitants of Spiti and beyond about the consequences of religious transgression. The question is whether an all-male cast would have faced a similar backlash, whether this resistance originated from gender bias, or simply condemned as an act of sacrilege or both. Whatever the reason, it has certainly put an end to such performances potentially evolving into acts with more secular content and the possible participation of women in creative pursuits in the future. This is not to say that the Lukzi portion in the Buchen tradition

was previously devoid of secular material, rather, as stated earlier, the prime reason for selecting this section may have been for its dramatic and subversive potential.

Speaking in the context of male impersonation in women-run theatre group WOW's performance of Richard Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, Kate Davy comments on how female impersonation in theatre, television and film has a long history whereas there is no "institutionalized paradigm for reading male impersonation[15]". As she notes, "Male impersonation has no such familiar institutionalized history in which women impersonating men say something about women. Both female and male impersonation foreground the male voice, and either way, women are erased[16]". The women impersonating their male counterparts in the above-mentioned skit also speak and act like men who talk about "their" women. Yet we cannot ignore the caricatured manner in which they speak of their women. The women in the video make jabs at male stereotypes and must be acknowledged for pioneering a first-of-its kind performance, with no institutional history to lean on.

There is, however, evidence of religious women performers belonging to the Manipa tradition dating back to14$^{th}$C[17]. Women and men hailing from diverse backgrounds in pursuit of spiritual liberation, travelled through out Tibetan Buddhist regions, singing the mantra of Avalokitesvara (*Om Mani Padme Hum*) and narrating life stories of religious personalities with the aid of narrative scroll paintings[18]. Both the Buchen and Manipa tradition are similar with respect to religious picture storytelling, but there is no indication that the women Manipa performed the ceremony of breaking the stone or enacted the life stories in their repertoire. One of the last women Manipa Lama Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche was born in Tso Pema (Rewalsar, Himachal Pradesh) in 1865[19]. Her biography carries details of her spiritual journeys and of her singing at the court of the king of Rampur, but does not mention her enacting life stories nor establishes any connection with the Buchen tradition.

The only other performative tradition where women abound in Tibetan Buddhism is the Ache Lhamo tradition[20]. Women belonging to these troupes are trained actors. In a documentary on Ache Lhamo, Namkha Lhamo, a veteran artist from the Kalimpong troupe mentions

being part of a production of the life story of Khandroma Drowa Zangmo composed only of women actors and remembers receiving much praise for their efforts[21]. Perhaps innovation in the realm of ritual-less performance like that of the Ache Lhamo tradition is welcome but not otherwise. The nuns of Amitabha Drukpa Nunnery in Kathmandu, Nepal were encouraged by their spiritual leader Gyalwang Drukpa to conduct all rituals, including Chham or spiritual dance which was never before performed by women[22]. They also practice and teach Kung Fu to young girls of their locality. For this, the nunnery and the Drukpa sect received heavy criticism from conservative Tibetan Buddhist sects and even threats to burn down their institution. Although these nuns remain under the leadership of a male practitioner, this innovation and the repercussions faced by them reveal the cracks that lie hidden. This surface is stacked with ideas and practices that are internalized by women to the extent that they become accomplices in the maintenance of their 'culture'. Any criticism of gender in Tibetan Buddhism is met with the age-old statement that women enjoy many liberties in this culture. Barbara Nimri Aziz observes that "the appeal of egalitarian Buddhist philosophies on the one hand, and of feminist perspectives on the other, now confronts us, calling for an early clarification[23]." This paper has endeavored to open up this dialogue on the subtle, unconscious gender bias that limits the growth of a woman's selfhood by scrutinizing gender impersonation in the Buchen tradition and its subversion however short-lived, by the anis of Mane village, Spiti.

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# New Footprint in Virgin Valley : The Bodos Odyssey from Ancestral Home to Brahmaputra Valley

*Nushar Bargayary*

ABSTRACT

*Human evolutionary theories suggest that Homo-sapiens did not originate in Assam. Instead, various branches of human races have migrated to North-East India from prehistoric to modern periods, establishing settlements and creating a melting pot of cultures. Consequently, it is likely that indigenous ethnic groups like the Bodos migrated to Assam from East and Southeast Asian regions in successive waves, driven by factors like climate change, resource depletion, and conflicts. The Bodos' settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley was likely due to the region's fertile soil, abundant resources, and strategic location. Over time, they developed a distinct culture, language, and tradition shaped by their interactions with the land and other ethnic groups. This paper seeks to capture the essence of the Bodos' journey, highlighting their resilience, adaptability, and contribution to North-East India's rich cultural heritage. By exploring their origin, migration, settlement, and connection to the land, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of their history, experiences, and connection to Assam.*

**Keywords:** *Trans-Himalayan, Origin, Migration, Settlement, Bodo*

## INTRODUCTION

The Bodo community is one of the prominent ethnic groups in Assam and other parts of North-Eastern India. Historically, the Bodos are considered to be among the earliest settlers in Assam and the surrounding regions. Their presence spans a significant part of the Brahmaputra Valley, with scattered settlements in other North-Eastern states, as well as in neighboring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.[1] Linguistically

and racially, they show close affinity to East and South East Asia. This reflects their linguistic and cultural ties to Trans-Himalayan regions. They are part of the Sino-Tibetan group, specifically within the Tibeto-Burman language family which is related to Tibetan languages, reflecting some historical and linguistic connections. Physically, the Bodos exhibit Sino-Tibetan features, which is consistent with their ethno-linguistic affiliations.[2] This rich heritage and geographical spread contribute to the Bodos' unique cultural and historical identity within the region.

The term "Bodo" has a complex and somewhat recent history in ethnographic and linguistic studies. It was first introduced by B. H. Hodgson[3] in 1847 to describe a group of languages and people in the Darjeeling district, specifically referring to the Meches. Hodgson's usage of the term was later confirmed and expanded upon by G. A. Grierson[4] in his *Linguistic Survey of India.* Historically, the term "Bodo" was initially a linguistic label but has evolved into a more generic term used to refer to a range of Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples of Sino-Tibetan origin. The Bodo community encompasses various ethnic tribes, including the Koch, Kachari, Lalung, Demacha, Garo, Rabha, Tipra, Chutiya, Maran, and others, all of whom share physical characteristics and linguistic ties with Trans-Himalayan regions. In particular regions, such as the area west of the present Kamrup district, members of the Bodo community are referred to as "Mech" by their Hindu neighbors. In North Bengal, Nepal, and Bhutan, they are also called Mech or Meche.[5] This term "Mech" is believed to be a corruption of the Sanskrit word "Mlecchа, " which historically referred to people considered non-Sanskritic or outside the Vedic fold. In the area between the Sonkosh river and the Brahmaputra river, they were historically known as Meches, but are now commonly referred to as Bodo. In Tripura, they are referred to as Tripuri or Kok-Borok. The term "Kachari" was also used to describe some groups within the Bodo community[6], reflecting the diverse and overlapping identities among the Tibeto-Burman speaking populations.

## NEW FOOTPRINT IN VIRGIN VALLEY

The peopling pattern of Burma, China, Tibet, and the sub-Himalayan

regions shares a common origin. Various tribes of the Trans-Himalayan regions intermingled, producing a diverse range of tribes, all still rooted in the same racial stock. This absorption of various tribes continued until the late 19th century.[7] The habitations in North-East India are very unique and differ from the rest of the country, necessitating a distinct study that includes Southern and South-East Tibet, Burma, China, and South-East Asia. The Trans-Himalayan region was characterized by its virgin lands, which led to frequent migrations within the area. Different races from eastern and southern Tibet, particularly the sub-Himalayan regions, entered India, including North-East India, in consecutive waves of migration. These groups settled in the foothills and plain areas, shaping the rich demographic landscape of the region. North-East India has been a hub of human migration since prehistoric times, with various branches of human races settling in different areas. This phenomenon has earned the region its reputation as a "melting pot of human races" from time immemorial.[8] Noted anthropologist Christoph von Fuer-Haimendorf[9] corroborates this, citing prehistoric and other remains to illustrate that Assam, a key part of North-East India, was inhabited by diverse racial elements. He aptly describes Assam as a "great anthropological museum" due to its rich tapestry of primitive communities. Among these groups, the Sino-Tibetan peoples were among those who migrated in successive waves, traversing diverse regions and eventually settling in the Brahmaputra valley and other parts of North-East India. As a result, the culture of North-East India has been significantly influenced by the Trans-Himalayan traditions, as these regions have been the home to different stocks of Trans-Himalayan groups since ancient times.

Based on scientific studies and research into the origins of the Trans-Himalayan language group, it is generally agreed that their ancestral homeland was in North-Western China. From there, they migrated southward to North Burma and westward along the sub-Himalayan ranges. Another group moved into the Brahmaputra Valley, passing through North-Eastern and South-East Asia. It is likely that some of the groups also settled in various parts of Manipur.[10]Historical evidence indicates that different Trans-Himalayan groups intermingled, absorbed, and merged with one another, forming a mixed ethnic group. Despite

their shared ancestry, this fusion resulted in a diverse and complex ethnic landscape.[11] Many scholars concur that the earliest homeland of the ancestors of Sino-Tibetan speakers was the North-Eastern region of China, located between the Huang He (Yellow river) and Yangtze rivers. From this area, they migrated southward, reaching as far as Northern Burma (Myanmar), where they diverged into several subgroups. One group moved westward along the lower Himalayan foothills, another traveled southward into South-East Asia and neighboring regions, while a third group entered North-Eastern India and established settlements upon their arrival. North-East India became the native soil of Trans-Himalayan groups who had migrated from South or South-East Asia since the remote past.[12]

Hem Barua describes North-western China as a hub of Trans-Himalayan racial groups. According to her, these groups gradually migrated into neighboring regions, including the Assam and Burma Hills, and other areas along the Himalayan range. Some groups traveled down the Chindwin river and other rivers to the south, eventually populating areas such as Burma (now Myanmar) and Thailand. Additionally, a significant wave of Trans-Himalayan groups migration moved down the Brahmaputra river, spreading through the hills and river valleys of Assam in search of new settlements.[13] Their migration into India can be traced back to significant geographical changes, where the sea receded, giving way to the Himalayan mountains. From these mountains, mighty rivers like the Ganga, Indus, and Brahmaputra emerged. These fertile valleys cradled and nourished Indian civilization. It is suggested that around 5,000 B.C., some Trans-Himalayan groups traversed the Bod region of Tibet and the Khyber Pass, eventually arriving in the Sind Basin of India. Another group made their way to the eastern and northeastern regions of Assam and the Nathuk Pass in Sikkim. Over time, various branches of these Trans-Himalayan peoples settled in the northwestern and northeastern parts of India. However, the details of their history have become obscured over time, leaving behind a shroud of mystery.[14]

It is widely accepted that tribes from Eastern and Southern Tibet, particularly the sub-Himalayan regions, migrated to India, including the North-Eastern part, in multiple waves since prehistoric times.[15] The Sino-Tibetan groups, who were initially concentrated in the upper reaches of

the Yangtze and Huang He rivers in China, expanded their territories to the upper waters of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers in Upper Burma, and eventually entered North-East India.[16]Some of these groups settled in the Brahmaputra Valley, while others proceeded to the Garo Hills and the Hills of Tippera (present-day Tripura), where they established their own settlements. A segment of the group halted at the head of the Brahmaputra valley and later turned south, occupying the Naga Hills. Another section, based in the Chindwin and Irrawaddy river basins, advanced towards southern Assam in search of new settlements, eventually founding their habitations in the Lushai, Cachar, parts of Manipur, and Naga Hills.[17] The majority of people in the sub-Himalayan foothills and various plain areas exhibit Sino-Tibetan characteristics. This suggests that the North-Eastern region was primarily settled by immigrants with Trans-Himalayan physical features from the north and east. The tribes in this region speak languages from either the Tai-Kadai or Tibeto-Burman sub-families, part of the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family, indicating migration from South-East Asia or the Trans-Himalayan regions.The migration of Trans-Himalayan groups to North East India is a topic of debate among scholars, with no consensus on the exact date. However, it is clear that these groups had been migrating from their original homeland since prehistoric times, with a significant large-scale movement occurring in early first century B.C.[18] The successive waves of migration from Tibet to the Himalayan states likely took place between the first and seventh centuries A.D.[19] The Trans-Himalayan groups from eastern and southern Tibet entered India through multiple waves of migration around the second millennium B.C., passing through the valleys of the Kosi river branches in eastern Nepal and along the Indus river.[20]

Noted British ethnologist and colonial administrator R.B. Pemberton identified mountain passes of Bhutan and Tibet as the route of migration.[21]In contrast, A.P. Phayre argued that the communication route between Gangetic India and Tagaung was exclusively through Manipur, in North-East India.[22] G.A. Grierson, meanwhile, described the migration of Tibeto-Burman groups as having followed the Brahmaputra, Chindwin, and Irrawaddy rivers, as well as traversing the mountain passes of India and Burma, to arrive in Assam from the North-East and South-East.[23]Chang

Kien's accounts, as refered by Pelliot, reveal that an established land trade route to China via Assam, Upper Burma, and Yunnan existed from at least 200 B.C. Moreover, Pelliot mentioned two routes from Burma that traversed Manipur.[24] According to the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, the Mikirs, Lalungs, and Boros (Kacharis) followed the North-Eastern routes during their migration.[25] The Trans-Himalayan people migrated from western China in multiple waves, pouring into the Indian plains through the Assam gateway. As a result, they constituted a substantial element of the population in Eastern Bengal and Assam, especially within the tribal demographics.[26]According to Sidney Endle, the Sino-Tibetan migration followed two probable routes. The first group traversed North-East Bengal and Western Assam, crossing the valleys of Thr, Tista, Dharla, Sankosh, and other rivers, ultimately founding the powerful kingdom of Kamarupa. The second group took a northerly and north-easterly route, leading them to the Subansiri, Dibong, and Dihong valleys in Eastern Assam.[27] P. C. Bagchi proposed three routes from Pataliputra to China via Assam-Burma: (a) Patkai to Upper Burma, (b) Manipur to Chindwin and (c) Arakan to Irrawaddy. All three routes converged in Kunming, China.[28] The probable migration routes are: (a) Through the mountain passes of Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan in the north, (b) Through the Ganges and Brahmaputra valleys from India and the west, (c) By sea via the Bay of Bengal, passing through Bengal or Burma, (d) The Assam-Burma routes: over the Patkai passes in the north-east, leading from the Lidu-Margherita road to China through the Hukawang valley in Burma through Manipur and Cachar in the south-east or south of Assam. While the northern route was uncertain for human migration, trade routes existed through the mountain passes between Assam and Tibet, and by waterway through the Brahmaputra and Ganges. Additionally, Bagchi mentioned other routes passing through Donkin, Natu, and Jilap. These routes facilitated the infiltration of Trans-Himalayan people from South-East Asia and China into Assam.[29] There were three significant trade routes that connected Tibet, Assam, and Bengal through Bhutan: (a) The Manas river valley route, (b) The Kariapara Duars route, (c) The Paro Valley route. These routes facilitated a well-established trade between India and Tibet, with the Bhutanese collecting various goods from Bengal and Assam, including dyes, *Endi* or *eri* cloth and cocoons,

areca nuts, tea, tobacco, etc. This trade network highlights the historical connections and exchange between these regions. In the annals of Tibetan history, the legendary journey of Nythai Tsangpo, the first Tibetan king, is said to have traced the ancient Manas Valley route, a historic highway connecting Eastern India and Central Tibet. For centuries, pilgrims from Tibet have followed in his footsteps, trekking along this hallowed path to reach the revered Hajo shrine near Gauhati in Assam, a testament to the enduring cultural and spiritual ties between these two regions.[30]

The migration routes to this part of India are traced through three main pathways: (a) The Cachar-Manipur route, which facilitated the influx of racial elements from South-east Asia, including the Ahom and other Sino-Tibetan groups, via the Patkai route, (b) The Sino-Tibetan groups' migration through the Himalayan hills of Bhutan, Tibet, and Nepal, (c) The primary route of human movement was from the West, via the Ganges-Brahmaputra valley, which enabled the Aryan penetration into Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa, present-day Assam. Assam's strategic location made it a significant conduit for diverse human races, resulting in a rich cultural tapestry woven from various racial elements. This region has witnessed a unique ethnic composition of people, shaped by its history as a migration hub. The confluence of cultures has enriched Assam's cultural heritage, making it a fascinating study area for anthropologists and historians alike.[31]The extensive trade relations between India, including North-East India, and its neighboring countries are well-documented and leave no room for doubt. Assam, in particular, has a long history of being renowned for its high-quality textiles and valuable forest and mineral products. These goods were not only exported to neighboring provinces but also traded extensively with foreign countries such as Tibet, Burma, and China. The existence of this trade route can be traced back to an even earlier date,[32] further emphasizing the significance of Assam's strategic location in the regional trade network.

The ethnogenic history of Trans-Himalayan groups dates back to the Middle Pleistocene epoch, around 500,000-300,000 years ago, with the discovery of Sinanthropuspekinensis (Peking Man) in Choukoutein, China. This fossil man shares physical characteristics with modern Chinese, Eskimos, and Mongolian groups, indicating a direct genetic relationship.[33]

Around 2,000 BC, Mongolian people migrated to Siberia and Mongolia, and later entered North-Eastern India and Assam via the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries, trading in silk, known today as Endi-Muga in Assam. By around 1,000 BC, Trans-Himalayan groups had interactions with Aryans, as is evident from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata.* The physical features of Kiratas, a Trans-Himalayan group, are described in ancient texts like *Mahabharata*, *Kalika Purana*, *Yogini Tantra*, *Ramayana*, and *Vedas* such as *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*.[34]These records highlight extensive connections between Trans-Himalayan groups and ancient civilizations.

Repudiating the notion of tribal migration into India before the Christian era, some historians argue that the country's geographical barriers, such as the seas and the Himalayan mountains, made it impossible for tribes to migrate into India from outside during that period. This assertion is based on ancient history and geography, with G.P. Singh stating that "both ancient history and geography bear witness to the fact."[35] Singh also claims that many ancient Kiratas, who inhabited the northern and eastern Himalayas, were of indigenous origin. Those Kiratas who had settled in the Valley and mountain regions since time immemorial were, in fact, the original inhabitants of the country. However, a significant number of Kirata tribes of Trans-Himalayan origin did inhabit Nepal and Sikkim (known as Indrakil in the epic age and later as Sukhima) in the second half of the first millennium AD. Those who migrated from Tibet (first referred to as Bhotadesh in the 7th century AD) to the eastern frontiers, sub-Himalayan tract of Nepal, or eastern Himalayan states of Sikkim before the 7th century were of pure Tibetan origin.[36] The tribes that migrated from the 7th century onwards, identified as Sino-Tibetan based on their physical features, are generally considered to be of Trans-Himalayan origin.

## AUTOCHTHONES OR IMMIGRANT: AN UNENDING DEBATE

Regarding the Bodos, who are identical to the Kacharis, Rev. Sidney Endle believes that the Kacharis (Bodo) were the original autochthones (indigenous people) of Assam.[37] Similarly, Anderson described the Bodo

as the aborigines of the Brahmaputra valley.[38] Like other ancient Indian tribes, the Bodos, who were akin to the ancient Kiratas, have been depicted as aborigines who originally inhabited various regions, including the Ganga plains, the wild tracts along rivers, the Kailasa mountains, and the Northern and Eastern Himalayan border lands. However, their status as autochthones has often been misinterpreted as that of immigrants. This misconception may lead to a wrong notion, as the fact remains that they were largely autochthones.[39] The statements above testify that the Bodos evolved on the very soil of Assam. Whereas, Kasten Ronnow classified the Kiratas into two sections: (a) those with Sino-Tibetan affinities and (b) those of mixed origin. He also noted that most Kirata tribes in Northern and North-Eastern India are of Indian origin.[40] However, Robert Shafer disagrees with this view, arguing that the Kiratas were a Sino-Tibetan race and spoke a Tibeto-Burman language. This contradicts the notion that the Kiratas were indigenous to Assam and suggests that they may have had a different ethnic and linguistic origin.[41] However, modern research on human origins has remained silent on Assam as the first place of human evolution, suggesting that Assam was not the land of human origin. It is likely that the people who settled in Assam migrated from different directions and places during various stages of human dispersal.

The following oral tradition of the Bodos provides valuable insights into their origin and migration of the Bodos: *Joumafutumabifahajwma* and it translates to "of all the mountains, the highest and whitest is the father." This suggests that the Himalayas or Trans-Himalayan region was the ancestral homeland of the Bodos. The folk song's reference to the whitest and highest mountain, covered in snow, appears to be addressing their ancestors.[42] The ancient Bodo tradition of disposing of the dead, with the head of the corpse facing south, supports this notion. The deceased are placed in graves with their heads facing south, allowing the departed soul to see the Himalayas, their ancestors' native place. This also enables the soul to return to the primeval mountains.[43] Based on this tradition, it can be concluded that the Bodos originated from the Himalayas, which was the domicile of their forefathers.

The Bodos, a Tibeto-Burman tribe from the Eastern Himalayas, migrated south-west into the Brahmaputra valley. However, the exact

timeline of this migration is unknown. W. I. Singh suggests that the Bodos likely arrived in the Brahmaputra valley around the 8th century AD, but this date is not definitive and requires further investigation. Notably, the modern Trans-Himalayan tribes of North East India, including the Bodos, are believed to be descendants of the ancient Kiratas, who were present in India since the Vedic period or even earlier.[44] This raises questions about the accuracy of W. I. Singh's proposed migration date, and his view requires critical examination through scientific inquiry. Therefore, the arrival of Bodos in the 8th century AD is a topic of debate and cannot be fully accepted without further evidence. The primeval homeland of the Bodos, who belonged to the Trans-Himalayan group, is believed to be the upper Hoang-Ho region of China. From there, they migrated south-west towards India, settling in the South-Eastern Himalayas along the way. This migration pattern is consistent with human movement trends observed since pre-historical times. The Bodos from the southern Himalayas later moved to the Brahmaputra valley around 8th century AD, specifically to areas such as Koch Behar, Garo Hills, Cachar, and Tripura. It is possible that they arrived in the Southern Himalayas or Lhasa around 7th century AD. Interestingly, the Tibetans referred to the areas south of the Himalayas as "Bod" or "Pot", meaning "land of the snows", which may be the origin of the name "Bodo".[45]

## CONCLUSION

It is an undisputed fact that human history is characterized by waves of migration from one region to another, dating back to prehistoric times. The Bodos are considered one of the earliest inhabitants of Assam, originally hailing from the region between the Huang He (Yellow river) and Yangtze rivers in China. They began migrating to North-East India in various periods of the distant past, eventually settling in this part of India since ancient times. While this is supported by multiple schools of thought, the exact date of their arrival remains a topic of debate and controversy, leaving room for further research. The tribes of North-East India are a heterogeneous group, having migrated from various regions such as South-East Asia, Tibet, and Burma. In ancient times, the concepts of 'immigrant'

and 'son of the soil' were not strictly defined or widely applied. Human movement has always been a natural phenomenon, occurring throughout history and across the globe, since the earliest stages of food gathering. The use of terms like 'Indian origin' or 'original' and 'autochthones' by some scholars to describe certain tribes or groups in North-East India may suggest that these tribes settled in the region since earliest times. The term 'autochthones', specifically used to describe the Bodos, may imply that they have evolved in the soil of Assam, but it could also indicate that they have been inhabiting the region since time immemorial or before the historical period, and thus are aptly credited with such a designation.

Migration is a universal phenomenon that has touched every country, making them points of origin, transit, and destination for migrants.[46] It can be seen as a geographical phenomenon driven by human necessity, as people have always sought to leave areas where life is difficult and move to places where survival is easier and better. In a true sense, we are all migrants, as human history is marked by waves of human movement from region to region and place to place. This phenomenon is ongoing, with each group of people considering those who arrived later as migrants, and so on.[47]It's a continuous cycle, where the concept of migration is relative and subjective, depending on one's perspective and context.

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# Evolving Religious Identity of ZeliangrongNagas: A Study of Tingkao RagwangChapriak in Manipur

*Kamei Beeju*

ABSTRACT

*Religion evolves through a dynamic interconnectedness of historical events and cultural exchanges, adapting to changing social and political contexts. Understanding other religions significantly contributes to this evolution as it facilitates comparative insights and the integration of diverse influences. This study explores the evolving religious identity of the Zeliangrong Naga tribe in Manipur, with a focus on their indigenous faith of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak. It investigates how this tradition has adapted in response to both internal and external factors, particularly the influence of Christian conversions. By analyzing the core concepts, philosophy, and cultural practices of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, this research sheds light on how the religion has maintained its distinctive identity despite various cultural shifts. The study also examines the institutionalization of places of worship and the interactions between internal and external forces that shape the development of this religion. Through this analysis, valuable insights are gained into the broader processes of religious change and cultural resilience, illustrating the enduring power of indigenous traditions in the face of external influences.*

**Keywords:***Ragwang, Religion, Rongmei, Tingkao, Zeliangrong*

## INTRODUCTION

Religion evolves through a complex relation of internal and external factors, shaped by the needs, experiences, and interactions of its adherents[1]. At its core, religious evolution often begins with a response to fundamental human concerns such as fear, the search for protection, or the quest for meaning[2]. These existential questions drive individuals and communities to develop and refine their spiritual beliefs and practices. Leaders and

spiritual guides play a crucial role in this process, providing direction and interpretation that align with the prevailing needs and experiences of the community[3].

Over time, religious beliefs and practices undergo significant transformations as they adapt to changing social, cultural, and environmental contexts[4].This evolution is influenced by various factors, including interactions with other religious traditions, social changes, and shifts in political or economic conditions[5]. For instance, the introduction of new ideas or external influences can challenge existing beliefs, leading to reinterpretations or modifications of religious doctrines. Such interactions often stimulate the evolution of religious practices, either through syncretism—where new and old elements blend—or through the emergence of entirely new religious expressions.

The Zeliangrong people's adherence to their indigenous religion, Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, exemplifies how a religion evolves while maintaining its core identity[6]. Despite the influence of external religions like Christianity and Hinduism, the Zeliangrong have preserved their spiritual traditions through adaptation and resilience[7]. This preservation involves both upholding traditional practices and integrating new elements in ways that align with their cultural and social values.

The ongoing evolution of the Zeliangrong religion illustrates the broader processes of religious change and cultural preservation. It highlights the ability of indigenous faith systems to adapt and thrive despite external pressures. By continuously adjusting their beliefs and practices while remaining rooted in their historical and cultural contexts, the Zeliangrong people demonstrate the dynamic nature of religious evolution. Their experience offers valuable insights into how religions navigate the challenges of modernity while preserving their unique identity and heritage.

The Zeliangrong tribe, one of the oldest indigenous ethnic groups among the Nagas in Northeast India, has a rich and complex cultural and religious heritage. The term "Zeliangrong" is an acronym derived from the names of the three cognate tribes: "Ze" from the Zeme, "Liang" from the Liangmai, and "Rong" from the Rongmei[8]. This grouping underscores a shared history and collective identity among these tribes, which has persisted through millennia. The Zeliangrong people practice a primordial

religion, characterized by its ancient and eternal nature, believed to have existed since the beginning of time[9].

Central to Zeliangrong spirituality is the belief in Tingkao Ragwang, a supernatural being often described as the "heavenly god," "god of the sky," or "lord of the universe".[10] This deity, though initially unknown to the outside world, has become increasingly recognized as the primary figure of worship among the Zeliangrong, particularly as other dominant religions like Christianity and Hinduism have spread throughout the region. The religion, now formally known as Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC), plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural, social, and religious identity of the Zeliangrong community. Through various rites, rituals, and ceremonies, the Zeliangrong people maintain their traditional practices and strive to achieve spiritual goals, reflecting the enduring significance of their indigenous beliefs.

Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural milieu of the Zeliangrong Nagas. Although the religion has been closely associated with the Rongmei tribe, it is widely recognized as the Zeliangrong religion due to the shared heritage of the Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei tribes. These tribes, though distinct, are united by a common ancestry and a collective identity, which is affirmed through the use of the term "Zeliangrong." This nomenclature highlights their historical and cultural connections and reinforces a sense of brotherhood and unity among the tribes[11].

Historically, the Zeliangrong religion lacked a specific name or formal designation, leading to its description as "animism" by early anthropologists and Christian missionaries[12]. The term "animism" was used by Western scholars to categorize tribal religions broadly, often simplifying and misrepresenting the complexities of these spiritual systems. However, contemporary scholarship has moved beyond this outdated classification. As noted by Gangmumei Kamei (2004) and Chaoba Kamson (2011), the label "animism" is insufficient to describe the sophisticated and evolving nature of the Zeliangrong faith[13]. The followers of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak do not view their religion as mere animism but as a structured and well-defined spiritual system centred around the supreme deity, Ragwang.

The Zeliangrong religion encompasses a comprehensive set of beliefs and practices, including the veneration of deities, ancestral spirits, and household gods. Central to their spiritual life is the belief in a benevolent supreme God who resides above the sky and is worshipped through various ceremonies and offerings. These rituals are conducted to ensure good health, prosperity, and successful harvests, reflecting the community's dependence on and reverence for divine intervention in their daily lives[14]. Ancestor worship also plays a significant role, with ancestral spirits being regarded as protectors of the household and family. These spirits are believed to influence the fortunes of the living, and their favor is sought through specific rites and offerings.

The Zeliangrong people's religious practices are deeply intertwined with their cultural identity, social organization, and community cohesion. Their rituals and ceremonies serve not only to honor the divine and ancestral spirits but also to reinforce social bonds and communal solidarity. Through these practices, the Zeliangrong maintain a sense of continuity with their past while adapting to contemporary challenges. The evolution of their religion, as reflected in the formalization of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, illustrates the dynamic nature of their spiritual life and its capacity to endure and adapt in the face of external influences.

The current study seeks to understand the evolving nature of the Zeliangrong Nagas' indigenous religion, Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, amidst external influences such as Christianity and Hinduism. By examining the adaptation and preservation of their spiritual practices, beliefs, and cultural identity, the research aims to provide insights into how the Zeliangrong have maintained their traditional religion while integrating new elements. This exploration highlights the resilience and dynamic nature of their faith system, offering a broader understanding of religious change, cultural preservation, and the interaction between indigenous traditions and external pressures.

## METHOD OF STUDY

This study adopts a qualitative and ethnographic approach to investigate the evolving nature of the Zeliangrong Nagas' indigenous religion, Tingkao

Ragwang Chapriak. The research employs a combination of primary and secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this religion interacts with external influences and maintains its cultural identity.

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of 65 respondents, including villagers, community leaders, priests, and individuals. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing participants to express their views and experiences in their own words while ensuring that specific themes related to the evolution and resistance of their religion were addressed. The interview schedule was designed to elicit detailed information on participants' beliefs, practices, and perceptions of the changes occurring within their religious context. This method provided rich, qualitative data that offers insights into the lived experiences of the Zeliangrong people and the ways in which their religion adapts to external pressures.

In addition to primary data, the study utilized secondary sources to supplement and contextualize the findings from interviews. These sources included local books, manuscripts, journal articles, newspapers, and other unpublished content. Local books and manuscripts provided historical and cultural context, while journal articles offered scholarly perspectives on the evolution of indigenous religions and their interactions with external influences. Newspapers and unpublished content contributed to understanding contemporary issues and current debates related to the Zeliangrong religion.

The analysis of data was conducted using thematic analysis, which involved identifying and analyzing patterns and themes within the qualitative data. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how the Zeliangrong religion resists and adapts to the intersectionality of various external influences, such as Christianity and Hinduism. Thematic analysis helped in uncovering key themes related to religious identity, adaptation strategies, and the preservation of cultural practices amidst changing social contexts.

The study is about external influences and the preservation of religious integrity within the Zeliangrong Naga community, drawing upon the concept of intersectionality as articulated by Kimberlly Crenshaw (1989).

Intersectionality adheres that marginalized groups experience unique forms of oppression due to the convergence of multiple social identities[15]. In this context, the study focused on how Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak is shaped by the intersection of external religious influences, community dynamics, and the Zeliangrong people's strategies for cultural and spiritual self-determination. By examining these aspects, the research aimed to provide an understanding of the resilience and adaptability of the Zeliangrong religion in the face of external pressures.

## EVOLUTION OF TINGKAO RAGWANG CHAPRIAK: THE ZELIANGRONG RELIGIOUS COUNCIL

The Zeliangrong Naga tribe, with a population of approximately 450,000 according to the 2011 census, is predominantly distributed across three states in Northeast India: Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. In Manipur, their primary concentration is in the Tamenglong and Noney districts, with significant populations also residing in Jiribam, the Kangvai subdivision of Churachandpur, Kangchupgeljang and Bungte Chiru subdivisions in Kangpokpi district, and the Tadubi subdivision of Senapati district. Regarding religious practices, the tribe exhibits a distinct religious dichotomy between Christianity and traditional beliefs (Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak), with Christianity representing approximately 85% of the population. While the text doesn't provide specific numbers for those practicing Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak or those who adhere to both belief systems simultaneously, it does indicate that religious conversion, particularly to Christianity, has been a significant social phenomenon over the past 150 years. This transition has not been without controversy, occasionally resulting in social tensions, including instances of village expulsion for converts. Despite these challenges, religious freedom is generally maintained within the community, provided it doesn't interfere with other religious practices, and there are ongoing efforts among intellectual and religious leaders to preserve traditional cultural and religious identity alongside Christian practices[16].

The indigenous religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas, Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, has undergone significant evolution over time, reflecting a

broader process of religious development and institutionalization[17]. For a substantial period, the religion lacked a unified authority, standardized organization, or formal religious literature, which often led to local variations and a fragmented practice. This absence of centralization and codification posed challenges for preserving and propagating the religion's core beliefs and customs.

In response to these challenges, a pivotal moment in the evolution of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak occurred in 1993 with the convening of the 'Zeliangrong Custom and Religious Protection Committee of Manipur.' This committee recognized the pressing need for a consolidated effort to preserve and systematize the Zeliangrong religion. The ensuing discussions highlighted the necessity for a common authority that could oversee the religious practices and ensure the continuity of traditions amidst external pressures and internal diversities.

The culmination of these efforts was the historic conference held from April 14-16, 1994, in Imphal. This conference marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the Zeliangrong religion. It resolved to establish the apex religious authority known as the 'Ra-chapriak Phom, ' or the Zeliangrong Religious Council, which was endowed with a formal constitution. This council was tasked with consolidating the religion's practices, preserving its rites, and promoting its beliefs across the Zeliangrong community, which spans the states of Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. Additionally, the conference officially named the indigenous religion as "Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, " formalizing its identity and distinguishing it from other faiths[18].

Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak is deeply rooted in the historical traditions of the Zeliangrong people, having evolved through the teachings of lawgivers, religious diviners, and prophets. Despite the absence of written scriptures for much of its history, the core philosophical tenets of the religion have remained consistent. Local variations in practices have existed, but the establishment of the Zeliangrong Religious Council has provided a structured framework to unify and standardize religious observances.

One of the council's significant contributions has been the compilation and publication of rites associated with major life events such as birth,

marriage, and death, under the title *Ringlon-Theilon* (Rites of Passage). This compilation has become a foundational text for the faith. Additionally, the council has produced hymns and prayers for various occasions, collected in volumes titled *Ra-KalummeiLuhKhatniKashoi*. These hymns are distributed in cassette form and have been disseminated across the Zeliangrong villages, supported by teaching groups that facilitate their learning and performance[19].

A notable reform introduced by the Zeliangrong Religious Council was the abolition of the taboo (*Nuhmei*) on unnatural deaths, ensuring that all deceased individuals receive proper rites and honors. The Council also established various organizational structures, including the Ecclesiastical Council, and developed fellowships for women and youth, organizing training camps and community activities to engage and educate the younger generation.

Furthermore, the Council has constructed a central place of worship known as Kalum Kai in Chingmeirong, Imphal, funded by donations from devotees and the public[20]. Regular prayer meetings and sermons are held at this site, fostering a sense of communal worship and continuity.

The Zeliangrong people are renowned for their vibrant and colorful religious and cultural life, closely intertwined with their natural environment. The structure of their villages, traditionally governed by a headman and a village court, reflects their communal and participatory approach to resolving issues. The ongoing evolution of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak demonstrates the adaptability of indigenous religions in responding to internal and external changes while preserving their essential traditions and cultural identity.

**The Beliefs and Principles in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak**

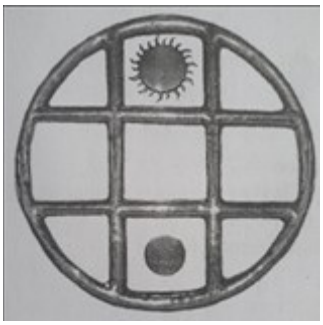
Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, the indigenous religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas, is centered on the veneration of Tingkao Ragwang, a supreme deity believed to be the creator of the universe, encompassing the sun, moon, earth, nature, and all living and non-living entities. According to Gangmumei Kamei, Tingkao Ragwang is characterized by eternal existence, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, making Him the ultimate source of life, wisdom, and

human destiny. As an invincible and invisible God, Tingkao Ragwang represents the supreme deity in this indigenous faith.

Despite its deep-rooted traditions, Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak has managed to sustain and even expand its following amidst the rising influence of dominant religions such as Christianity and Hinduism. The core philosophy of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak emphasizes the preservation of cultural, social, and religious identity through various rites, rituals, and ceremonies aimed at achieving the ultimate spiritual goal, known as *Tingkao Kaidai* or heaven[21]. This religion is distinguished by its doctrines, dogmas, and norms, which have been revealed through diviners, religious teachers, gods, goddesses, and deities from both higher and lower realms.

"The fundamental beliefs of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak include:

1. Supreme God: Acknowledgment of Tingkao Ragwang as the benevolent creator and protector of the universe and humanity.
2. Deities and Gods: Belief in multiple gods and deities appointed by Tingkao Ragwang to oversee various aspects of the world and human existence.
3. Heaven and Afterlife: Faith in the concept of heaven, Tingkao Ragwang Kai or Tingkao Kaidai, as the divine abode, and the land of the dead where souls journey after death.
4. Village Deities: Worship of deities who serve as guardians of individual villages, ensuring protection and prosperity for the inhabitants.
5. Ancestor Worship: Reverence for ancestors as integral to spiritual practice and community cohesion."[22]



The religious symbol of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, locally known as *Boudaan*, is emblematic of the religion's cosmological view. The symbol features a circle representing the universe or cosmos, with criss-cross lines within the circle depicting the zodiac in the sky. The sun and moon are also included, symbolizing the celestial bodies created by Tingkao

Ragwang. This symbol is used extensively in religious practices, underscoring the integral connection between the divine and the natural world in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak[23].

"The symbol is meticulously designed to reflect various aspects of the universe and its creation:

1. Outer Circle: The outer circle represents the universe or cosmos, symbolizing the vast and encompassing nature of creation.
2. East and West Poles: The two vertical poles positioned in the east and west are referred to as *Didet* (Bread), representing fundamental aspects of existence and sustenance.
3. North and South Poles: The two horizontal poles situated in the north and south are known as *Ditung* (Length), signifying dimensions and the spatial orientation of the universe.
4. Center Space: The central space within the circle is called *Dichung* or *Dila* (Centre). This area represents the core or focal point of existence, symbolizing unity and balance.
5. Sun and Moon: The circle itself signifies the sun, while the white circle within it represents the moon. These elements highlight the celestial bodies created by Tingkao Ragwang.
6. Usage: The *Boudaan* symbol is used in religious rituals and prayers, including ceremonies held on every full moon day and Sunday. It is integral to the worship of Tingkao Ragwang and is employed in all significant religious occasions.
7. Cosmic Creation: The symbol underscores the belief that the universe, sun, moon, earth, and all cosmic entities are creations of the Almighty God, Tingkao Ragwang, who is revered as absolutely benevolent."[24]

*Boudaan* functions not only as a symbol of cosmic order but also as an integral element of religious practice within Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, illustrating the interplay between the divine and the cosmos.

## Afterlife in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak

According to mythological and traditional narratives, Tingkao Ragwang, the supreme deity, is credited with the creation of the universe,

gods, humanity, and nature. He is also the source of the human soul, known as *Bu* or *Bumang*. Tingkao Ragwang is described as Businmeipu-Bunschameipu, the ordainer and guardian of the soul, from which the soul emanates and to which it ultimately aspires. Although the soul resides within the body, it is capable of temporarily departing and experiencing various phenomena, a phenomenon referred to as the "out-of-body experience." The process of summoning the soul back into the body is known as "Catching the Soul" or "Calling the Soul" (*Bu-Kaomei*)[25].

Upon death, the soul transitions to the realm of the dead, known as *Taroiram*, where it continues to exist in a state distinct from the living world. The exact location of *Taroiram* remains unknown, though it is variously conceived as residing within the bowels of the earth or coexisting with the world of the living in a manner imperceptible to the living. Death is not considered an end but rather a transformation in the soul's ongoing existence. Rituals and ceremonies associated with death are aimed at ensuring the soul's safe and prosperous journey to *Taroiram*, where it joins the souls of ancestors who are believed to be leading an existence similar to that which they had on earth[26].

The concept of salvation within this framework addresses the soul's continued existence and the notion of an afterlife. Upon death, the soul separates from the body and enters the land of the dead, where it is overseen by *Taroigwang*, the deity or King of the Dead, appointed by Tingkao Ragwang. *Taroigwang* adjudicates the fate of the deceased based on their earthly deeds, with outcomes broadly categorized into heavenly reward or rebirth as a living being, with rebirth in human form being considered the highest reward. Conversely, souls that have experienced unnatural death are believed to be excluded from *Taroiram* and instead remain in a liminal state between the material world and the realm of the dead, experiencing a form of suffering known as *Thundijang*, which signifies the boundless torment of the soul[27].

*Neihmei* represents a succinct prayer used by both individuals and the community in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak. This prayer is recited on various occasions and activities, serving to invoke divine protection against natural calamities and to prevent unfortunate events, such as death during childbirth.

Another form of worship in this tradition is *Kalummei*, which encompasses prayers and rituals dedicated to the Supreme God, the deities of the Rongmei pantheon, village spirits, and ancestors. Additionally, *Rakhaangmei* involves propitiation to deities and lesser spirits to ensure they do not interfere with human affairs.

The worship practice includes reverence for the Seven Brother Gods: Ragwang, the King of Earthly Gods; Bisnu, the powerful deity overseeing human affairs, nature, and animals; Chonchai, who guards human health and abstains from wine; Napsinmei, the deity responsible for food grains; Charakilongmei, who maintains peace and prevents disturbances; Koklou, the keeper of the divine court; Karangong, who disciplines unruly youth and heals dizziness; and Dimei, a deity associated with the earth who remains unhatched[28].

In Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, cultural festivals are intrinsically linked with religious worship and celebration. Festivals such as *Gaan-Ngai*, *Rih-Ngai*, *Nahnu-Ngai*, and *Napkaodai* are celebrated with enthusiasm and prayer, reflecting the deep interconnection between religion, culture, and identity[29].

Rites of passage and the essence of religion are deeply interwoven and interdependent. Worship practices range from simple offerings of water to significant sacrifices such as *Banru* and *Tarangkai*, emphasizing the role of charity. Cultural elements, including traditional songs, dances, and attire, are integral to religious practice[30]. The adherents of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak are actively engaged in preserving and promoting the theological and cultural aspects of their religion.

"The devotees of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak are required to follow the following basic rules:

1. Strict following of the teaching of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak:Belief in Tingkao Ragwang, the supreme God;
2. Listening to the teachings and stories of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak;
3. Offering and sacrifices to Tingkao Ragwang;
4. Offer of charity in the name of Tingkao Ragwang;
5. Love and help the poor;

6. Don't hurt a man physically and mentally;
7. Don't tell a lie and don steal;
8. Be polite to everybody;
9. Don't show vanity;
10. Don't commit incest;
11. Don't commit adultery;
12. Be just while making a judgement;
13. Understand the relationship of men and let there be no jealousy;
14. Understand the creator is the surest way to heaven;
15. Be truthful, be good to others, good to the guests and please them.Such act of piety will atone hundred sins".[31]

To attain heaven in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, devotees must adhere to specific rules: believe in the Supreme God, follow teachings, make offerings, practice charity, avoid harm, lying, stealing, vanity, incest, and adultery, and exhibit justice, politeness, and truthfulness. Embracing these principles is essential for divine favor and atonement.

**Kalum Kai: The Sacred Temple in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak**

*Kalum Kai*, translating to "house of worship," epitomizes the religious and cultural center within Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak. The term *Kalum* denotes worship, while *Kai* signifies house, reflecting its purpose as a dedicated space for religious practice and communal discourse. The *Kalum Kai* serves not only as a site for ritualistic worship but also as a space for religious education and community gathering, embodying a continuity of tradition and legitimacy[32].

The architectural and ritualistic design of the *Kalum Kai* is deeply rooted in historical precedent, notably the original temple constructed by Haipou Jadonang and Haipei Rani Gaidinliu. This historical model serves as a foundational prototype, ensuring that each new *Kalum Kai* maintains a connection to the revered tradition and its cultural heritage. The adherence to this model underscores the temple's role in preserving and legitimizing religious practices.

One critical architectural element is that every *Kalum Kai* must face either east or north. The eastern orientation is particularly significant due

to its association with two essential aspects: it represents the direction of Bhubon Cave and the sunrise. Bhubon Cave holds a sacred status in the cosmology of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak, while the sunrise symbolizes renewal and divine presence. This orientation is integral to aligning the temple with cosmic and spiritual principles[33].

Central to the worship practice within the *Kalum Kai* is the depiction of *Boudaan*, the symbol of Tingkao Ragwang. This symbol is not only a visual representation but also plays a functional role in religious ceremonies. *Boudaan* is prominently featured during Sunday prayers, Full Moon Day observances, and other occasions dedicated to the worship of Tingkao Ragwang. The *Boudaan* symbolizes the divine and cosmic order, and its presence in the *Kalum Kai* reinforces the spiritual significance of these rituals[34].

The *Kalum Kai* provides a space for congregational worship where devotees gather to perform prayers, sing hymns, and shout "Hoi, " an exclamatory expression of devotion. This communal worship is complemented by discourses led by knowledgeable individuals who impart religious teachings and interpretations. The temple thus functions as a locus for both individual and collective spiritual enrichment, allowing adherents to deepen their understanding of their faith and engage in communal dialogue.

Furthermore, the *Kalum Kai* serves as a venue for invoking divine blessings from Tingkao Ragwang. Devotees seek blessings for courage, wisdom, strength, and longevity, reflecting the comprehensive nature of their spiritual aspirations. The temple becomes a focal point for these supplications, reinforcing its role in the spiritual lives of the community.

Historically, before the establishment of formal temples, worship was conducted in the courtyards of individual homes. The development of the *Kalum Kai* represents a significant evolution in the practice of worship, providing a dedicated and structured environment for religious activities. This transition underscores the community's commitment to formalizing and institutionalizing their spiritual practices, thereby fostering a more organized and cohesive religious life.

The *Kalum Kai* embodies the intersection of tradition, religious practice, and community life in Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak. Its design, orientation,

and function reflect deep-seated cultural values and historical precedents, while its role as a center for worship and religious discourse highlights its significance in the spiritual and communal spheres.

## CONCLUSION

The evolving religious identity of the Zeliangrong Naga tribe, with a central focus on Tingkao Ragwang, vividly illustrates the complex dynamics between internal cultural preservation and external religious influences. Despite the increasing presence of Christianity and Hinduism, the Zeliangrong community has adeptly preserved its traditional spiritual practices through the establishment of *Kalum Kai*, a center dedicated to maintaining their cultural heritage. The tribe's participatory governance model not only reinforces their collective identity but also highlights their resilience in the face of external pressures. This study, through the lens of intersectionality as proposed by Kimberly Crenshaw, sheds light on how marginalized groups like the Zeliangrong navigate the confluence of various social and religious influences. The Zeliangrong Religious Council's organized efforts exemplify how the community has strategically addressed these intersections to safeguard their religious integrity. By intertwining the effects of external religious encroachments with internal communal strategies, the study underscores the broader themes of cultural resilience and adaptation. It demonstrates that traditional beliefs, while evolving, can maintain their essence and coexist with external influences, reflecting a dynamic interplay of preservation and adaptation within indigenous religions.

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# Traditional Governance and Customary Laws of Angami Nagas

*Neisakhono Yano and Yamsani Srikanth*

ABSTRACT

*Traditional governing institutions refer to the age-old socio-political institutions prevalent among the tribes to maintain order, settle disputes, and administer the village. The tribals, in general, had their system of administration at the level of tribe and village. These bodies mainly deal with settling inter-personal or inter-household disputes, administration of customary regulations of marriage, divorce, inheritances of movable property, etc. They also regulate religious performances, festivals and rituals. Indigenous tribal communities in northeast India are known for varied yet decentralized traditional governance systems. The region comprises Nagas, comprising various ethnic tribes with unique histories, languages, and other socio-cultural traditions. Angami Naga is one of the major dominant tribes in Nagaland and is known for the democratic functioning of the grassroots governance system at the village level. Their unique culture, identity, and local self-governing institutions have the right and responsibility to rule their village by themselves. The study's findings are based on empirical data collected from Kigwema village, inhabited by the Angami tribe in the Kohima district of Nagaland. The data collection tools for this study include an interview schedule, observation, group discussions and oral history.This paper explains various elements of traditional governance system at the village level in terms of customary laws, village administration, management of agriculture, maintaining social order, crimes and punishments, and conflict management methods.*

**Keywords:** *Angami Nagas, conflict management, customary laws, traditional governance, tribe, village administration.*

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional governing institutions refer to the age-old socio-political institutions prevalent among the tribes to maintain order, settle disputes

and administer the village. The traditional village councils among the tribal communities functioned as effective village governments in the past. There is a general impression that pre-colonial Indian villages were isolated, self-governing little republics having nearly everything they could want within themselves.[1] It is also found among the hill tribal communities living in the northeastern part of India.

The tribal, in general, had their system of administration at the level of the tribe and the village. These bodies mainly dealt with settling inter-personal or inter-household disputes, administration of customary marriage regulations, divorce, inheritance of movable property, etc. They also regulated religious performances, festivals and rituals. They fix dates for festivals. These self-governing institutions liaised between the officials, the tribe, and the villagers. The village authority finalizes the dates for communal hunting and fishing, organizes the villagers for such cooperative ventures, and distributes the collections among the villagers. This authority also looked after some development activities like the building and maintenance of paths, sources of water supply, etc.[2] The self-governing bodies performed the village's administrative, judicial, and developmental functions, making the governing institution autonomous and independent of their customary laws and practices.

The Nagas are the indigenous people of a Mongoloid race with a distinct culture. They speak the Tibeto-Burman languages. Whatever the theory of this term's origin, one thing common to this race is that the term Nagas popularly came into use only after the advent of the British to this land. Until then, they have been known by their distinctive names, such as Aos, Angamis, Semas, Konyaks, etc. Traditionally, Nagas lived in the village, and each village had its government, internally supreme and externally free from outside control.[3] The Naga villages are homogenous, self-sufficient, and autonomous, with unique administrative structures. Each of these villages forms a distinct unit, which is conducive to the people's happiness and enjoyment of freedom and independence.[4]

Every Naga village has a chief or headman with different names. For example, the Tangkhuls called their chief *Awunga*, the Lothas *Ekyungs*, the Semas *Akukau*, and the Angamis *Kemevo.* The chief is responsible for the practical defence of the village.[5] The Konyak Naga chief is not only

the chief but also the community priest, called *Wanghan*. He not only administers the village but is also entrusted with administering justice.[6] In Sumi society, the chief (*Akukau*) is the head of the village, and the administrative authority is vested with him. He takes all crucial decisions in case of dispute or conflict. Before the advent of the British in the Naga territory, there was no police system in the Sumi village, so all executive and judicial functions were vested in the hands of the chief and his councillors.[7]The Ao community has a traditional system of governance, *Putu Menden*, based on a more democratic system where members are elected to the decision-making body from different clans. The village government is the supreme authority for the Aos, and their decision is binding on all its citizens. The village governance is managed by the representatives from all the clans.[8]

The Angami Nagas are one of the major tribes in Nagaland state in India. They primarily inhabit the Kohima district and parts of the Chumoukedima and Dimapur districts in the state. According to the 2011 Census, their population is around 1.5 lakh people. The Angami Nagas have their unique culture and identity, with their local self-governing institution having the rights and responsibilities to rule their village.A local self-governing system at the village level plays a vital role in the village's development. The village people rule themselves and control the people by knowing their problems and difficulties and making relevant laws, projects, policies, etc., for the village people. In this background, this paper attempts to describe the functioning of the indigenous traditional self-governing institution among the Angami tribe.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study uses both primary data and secondary data to collect information. The study's findings are based on empirical data collected from Kigwema village, inhabited by the Angami tribe in the Kohima district of Nagaland. The village is approximately 13 kilometres away from Kohima.The sample of respondents for the present study is selected from all five *Khels*: Meramak, Kiphoma, Khamima, Makhumaand Secha of Kigwema village. Six people from each *Khel* were interviewed, with both

males and females in equal numbers from each *Khel*.In total, 30 people were interviewed. All these respondents were selected through a stratified random sampling method. Fieldwork has collected the required information from every *Khel* in the village.The data collection tools for this study include an interview schedule, observation, group discussions, and oral history collection.The study also uses a secondary source for data collection, from published books and other literature sources.

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NAGA VILLAGES

In the pre-colonial days, each Naga tribe occupied its specified territory, and each tribe was grouped into several villages, and each village occupied a well-marked area. Over time, each village emerged as autonomous and had its own administration. The village assembly alone developed as the apex organization among the Nagas. J.P. Mills notes, "As with all Nagas, the real political unit of the tribe is the village." The village was thus the highest form of organization among the Nagas, representing political, social and religious bonds.[9]

Since early times, the Naga village administration has been accepted by the Nagas. They ruled themselves and administered and managed the affairs of the Naga village republics without outsiders' interference. Every citizen was like a trained soldier guarding and protecting the village, and every older person was like a judge in a modern civil court. The village government could manage the village's affairs by safeguarding and promoting welfare schemes, though the villagers were illiterate.[10]

Each Naga village owns and governs its resources, plans development activities, maintains law and order, delivers justice and secures defence. At the same time, the villages forge and maintain diplomatic relationships and make agreements to share or jointly manage resources in contiguous areas.[11] In the traditional governing system of Kigwema village, the village had a headman called *Phichii-u*.Furthermore, all religious, political and social functions are conducted under his advice.

## TRADITIONAL VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

In Kigwema village, there is no elected village council; however, they have

the village elders, where the village *Phichii-u* (village head) and the village elders make decisions, and everyone obeys their decisions. There are no written laws or rules about the governing of the village. In the village, customary law was the highest authority, and the people used to obey and highly respect the established laws. There was no authority and power above customary law. In the village, the village head and his councillors, i.e. the village elders, are the custodians of customary law. Oral traditions and customary laws control the behavior or life of the Kigwema people for the smooth functioning of society.The traditional governing institution people followed was called *Pfiitsana*, which implies norms, rules, beliefs and practices. The village had a headman called *Phichii-u* or the *Kemovo-u* (*Phichii-u/ kemovo-u;* it is a local term which means the oldest man), the old man in the village. The head of the village used to be only a male member, usually a married person. The head of the village, by his high rank, along with village elders, holds meetings whenever necessary, usually at his house or the *Tsekwhe*. Moreover, all social, religious and political matters are mooted and decided by the *Phichii-u* and the village elders. Besides being a distinct political and economic unit, the village is a religious community. Most religious ceremonies involve the entire village, and the village as a whole is affected by *Genna*.

There are two groups in the village, but only one group used to become the village *Phichii-u*. These two groups of people are differentiated by how they address their parents. Some people addressed their father by a different name in the village; they are;

i) ***Thevo*** group: This is a group of people who call their father *Apo* and mother *Azo*.
ii) ***Thepa*** group: This is a group of people who used to address their father as *Apfii* and mother as *Apfii*.

## SELECTION OF THE HEAD OF THE VILLAGE

It is the traditional custom that there is no specific requirement to become the *Phichii-u*. The oldest man in the village usually becomes the head of the village; however, he should belong to the *Thevo-u* group. That means only those belonging to the *Thevo-u* group can become the *Phichii-u*,

whether rich or poor, irrespective of educational qualifications. The succession of *Phichii-u* is not hereditary in the village. Once the person is selected as the village headman, he stays in power until he dies or resigns due to health issues. If he dies, the village people again select another oldest man as the village's headman. In case of war, the *Phichii-u* does not go to war because of his physical weakness due to old age.Nevertheless, he takes care of the village administration and maintaining peace and order is his responsibility.The Angamis have a village, *Phichii-u*, but do not have duly elected village councils. The Angami villages have internal cohesion and do not lack internal discipline despite the lack of village councils. The whole village gathers in case of any dispute, and anybody who has to say something can say and the people hear it after hours of prolonged and tiring discussions; they arrive at a specific decision or consensus, and the dispute is settled—the decision being made by the *Phichii-u* and the village elders.

## DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF *PHICHII-U/KEMEVO*

The duties and responsibilities of *Phichii-u* are mainly related to social affairs, religion, and ceremonies. He is the one who informs *Genna*. The observance of *Genna* is an act of worship among the Angami community. The word *Genna* in the Angami dialect is called *Kenyii* (a local term which means prohibition), meaning something forbidden. The expression of *Genna* can be summed together under three heads: *Kenyii*, *Penna* and *Nanyii* (*Nanyii* refers to the rites performed by the priest*)*.The village headman (*Phichii-u*) is responsible for informing the *Genna* to be observed by the people.

Some of the *Gennas* observed by the people of Kigwema village are discussed below:

- ***Pi-mena:*** This *Genna* is observed twice yearly in February and December. The first one is observed during *Tsakanyi* (sowing festival). During *Tsakrii*, people are not allowed to burn fire in the field or forest for the first five days. On the fourth day of *Tsakrii*, *Pi-Mena* is observed. It is observed that *methapi* (meteoroid/ hailstorm) will not destroy the crops. The second one is observed

during *Sekrenyi* (Sekrenyi; it is a local festival name). During the observation of this *Pi-Mena,* no one is allowed to go to the field for work or even to the forest.

- ***Thikesamena:*** This *Genna* is observed during March and is a day of rest. It is observed so that the crop and vegetation will not die.
- ***Thimipokemomena*:** This *Genna* day is also observed during March. It is observed so that the crop and plantation will develop roots and not die.
- ***Tsaka die*:** This *Genna* falls in April and is observed for three days. During these *Genna* days, no one could go to the paddy field or the forest. These days are observed so the wind and rain will not destroy the plantation.
- ***Kijiikenwimena:*** It is a *Genna* day where everyone is expected to stay home. They are not supposed to go to the field. People believed that if anyone went to the field and heard the earth's groan, they would die or fall sick and lose all their hair. He will be sick for one year and recover only the following year when the same *Genna* day comes.
- ***Metsilevamena*:** This day is observed to protect the crop against *metis* (insects). On this day, people are allowed to go to the forest and work but not in the paddy field.
- ***Teha-sie*:** It is observed for five days. During this *Genna*, the *Phichii-u* fasts for five days without eating rice, but he can have the traditional drink. On the first day, the *Phichii-u* or *kemovo-u*, accompanied by one or two people, takes an unblemished rooster to *Mezierii* (the name of a stream) and releases the rooster on top of a big stone in a place called Pamelanear the stream, and pray for good rain for the cultivation. The rooster should be black or red or even black and red mixed, but there should not be a single patch of white on it.There is also a collection from the villagers, known as *Yasekho*, in the form of grain or money, given to the *Phichii-u*, who does the ritual. On that day, villagers cannot cross the stream or go to the field. People can go to the area and forest for work on the second, third and fourth days. However, on the fifth day, people cannot go to the field and forest or cross the *Mezierii* stream.

- ***Uwo-chii*:** *Phichii-u* takes an unblemished rooster on this *Genna* day, goes to the Teviiku stream between Jakhama and Kigwema, and releases it. The rooster should be black or red or even black and red mixed, but there should not be a single patch of white on it. During this *Genna*, a collection from the villagers, known as *Wothosa*, is given to the village *Phichii-u*. It is a *Genna* observed asking God for the blessing of good health upon the villagers. On this day, the villagers are prohibited from going to the field or forest or even going for a journey crossing the stream. Even visitors are not allowed to enter the village. If any person goes out for some necessary work, he/she will not be allowed to return to the village before sunset. If anyone comes to the village crossing where the rituals have been done, he is believed to bring sickness wherever he goes. If anyone meets a person on the way who has not observed the *Genna*, they remark by saying, 'May good health be mine and may you take the sicknesses.'
- ***Siekhumena*:** It is a *Genna* day observed to protect the crop against *sie–khu* (insect/pest) so that it will not destroy the crops. On this day, people are not allowed to eat any insects. They are also not allowed to go to the field or even clean and grind the rice, especially the *Leiphinoma* of the *Sale* and *Ziitso* clans. This day is observed by collecting the *sie-khu* of the Chale clan and frying it on a clay pot, which is thrown away as a symbol that the *sie-khu* has been destroyed and the crop is protected.
- ***Te-chii:*** It is observed for five days to clear the sky so that there will be no storm or heavy rain to destroy the plantation and that people will have a good harvest. During these five days, the *Phichii-u* will fast without eating rice and will have only the traditional drink, and the villagers are not allowed to work or even wash clothes in the well or dry clothes in the sun. They are also not allowed to kill animals. If people wash clothes, they should dry them inside the shade for the first five days of *Te-chii* and the remaining days of the month; people can dry their clothes in the sun with the condition that they must place leaves on top of the clothes they are drying. Anyone who does not observe the *Genna*

is believed to get the curse, die, or become paralyzed.

- ***Mi- mena*:** *Mi* means fire. This *Genna* is observed so that fire would not burn their house, field and people. During *Mi-mena* day, people cannot go to the farm and work. They are also not allowed to weave and stitch at home. If urgent stitching needs to be done, they must go to the surrounding gardens to stitch. If anyone does not observe this *Genna*, it is believed that fire will burn their house, field or even themselves. If any house in the village got burned on the appointed day for the *Genna* to be observed, it is postponed to the next day.[12]

## PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATION OF GENNA

In the early days, people respected the *Gennas* or taboos highly, so very few violations of *Gennas* were found among the people. Still, if, in some cases, anyone in the village goes against the *Gennas*, they are punished by telling him/her to confess and ask their god to bless them. In some cases, the villagers would curse the people or give punishment to the taboo-breakers, mainly in the form of sacrifices of animals and other ceremonies to placate an angry supernatural power.

## MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER

Before the advent of the British in the Naga territory, there was no police system in the Angami village. All executive and judicial functions were vested in the hands of the headman and the village elders. Any villagers who committed any crime or offence were arrested, and the customary laws were strictly observed and given to the offenders. First, to solve the dispute between two people or groups, the *Phichii-u* and the village elders from every *Khel* come together and solve the problem. These laws are meant to maintain peace and prosperity in the village. Some punishments given to a person who commits certain crimes are mentioned below.

**Theft:** If a person steals anything from others, as per the village law the thief must restore seven times the value of the stolen goods. If he breaks into another house and steals other things, he is imposed double the fine of the usual punishment, i.e., he must pay fourteen times the value of the

stolen goods. Moreover, he will be chased out of the village if he cannot repay or steal other things again. In the Angami dialect, a thief is called *keriiguma.*

**Homicide:** Homicide means killing of a person by another, whether premeditated or unintentional. In Kigwema, the culprit of homicide was punished with seven years of banishment. Further, he will have to leave the village along with his family, to live in another place. Before seven years, if he returns to the village, the victim's family members can kill him as revenge. However, he could risk his life by coming to the village. Still, it is a *Genna* to stay and sleep in his house before the completion of seven years because it is also believed that if he comes and stays, it is not good for him and his family. They may die or may not live like other people. Moreover, after the completion of seven years, if the victim's family members did not call the murderer and his family members to come back to the village, it is believed that it is not good for the victim's family. On the other hand, it is also the same if the murderer and his family do not come back even after the villagers call them after the completion of seven years ; then it is not good for the murderer and his family.So, after seven years, even if they do not want to return and stay in the village, they would show that they returned so that bad things would not happen. After completing the seven-year punishment, the victim's family cannot take revenge on the culprit in any manner.

**Intentional Killing:** It is similar to homicide; the murderer must leave the village with his family for seven years. In this case, the victim's family can kill the murderer or his family as revenge by killing seven people. Nevertheless, the village elders can stop the victim's family from killing the other family members; once the elders tell them to stop killing, they would obey them because, in olden times, elders' voice was strictly obeyed by the people. The victim's kindred would destroy the house of the murderer on the day the dead body is buried. However, only the right side of the house can be destroyed but not the left side of the house because they consider that the left side of the house is the wife's share, so it is a *Genna* to destroy the left side of the house. Furthermore, if the murderer's home is damaged, he should not stay, sleep, cook , or eat in that house for seven years; if he did all this, his family would die or vanish. After seven

years, he can come back to his village.

**Rape:** Rape is an act of sexual violence committed towards a woman or man against their will. In Kigwema village, rape hardly occurs, but there is undoubtedly a custom prescribing punishment for this act. For this crime, the rapist was beaten by the kindred of the woman and expelled from the village for three months. A fine is also imposed on the culprit. If a girl gets pregnant without getting married and does not know who the father is, she will be chased out of the village for her entire life.

**Adultery:** Adultery is an act of sexual intercourse between a married and unmarried person. There has been no prostitution as such since time immemorial. However, there were instances of 'loose character' among women as perceived by society. However, the character of a man hardly matters in society. Adultery is punished by divorce, and in the case of a woman, she would be deprived of her 1/3$^{rd}$ share of movable property from her husband. In a man's case, divorce will follow as punishment; however, it is treated as divorce by mutual consent, while his wife will be given 1/3$^{rd}$ of the property.

If a person kills animals belonging to other people, like a hen or dog, he has to sleep outside the village gate for one night, and if he kills a cow or pig, he has to leave the village and stay out of the village for five days. Whoever destroyed someone else's property will be liable to compensate by payment of the equivalent loss or imposed fine. In some cases, it also leads to restoring the destroyed property to seven times the property value of the wrong doer, failing which he will be expelled from the village for seven years.

If a person breaks the marriage after making an arrangement, then the person who violates the marriage must pay a fine, or sometimes it depends on the nature of the other party.If a person disturbs the peaceful environment of others, the villagers impose a fine on him. In the case of slander, a fine was imposed on the offender, and even a warning was given to him. Thus, these punishments are used to handle the offender if they commit any crime. All these punishments are enforced to maintain stability and order in the village. Without these, the village people would be in chaos and confusion without caring for each other space. Moreover, the fines collected will be deposited into the village fund.

## MANAGEMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is one of the primary sources of livelihood for the villagers; therefore, much importance is given to agricultural activities. The *Phichii-u/ kemevo-u* plays a significant role in agricultural activities. Under the village *Phichii-u*, two people are responsible for agriculture: the *Tsaka-u* and the *Lidepfii* (*Tsaka-u* and *Lidepfii*; both are local terms indicating an older man and women in agriculture matters.). The *Tsaka-u* used to be the most aged person from the *Thepa* group. They believed that if the *Thevo* group sowed the seeds first, their crops would get spoiled, so they always allowed the *Thepa* group to be the *Tsaka-u*. The term *Tsaka-u* is an older man whose duty is to initiate the sowing of the seeds. It is a *Genna* for any person to sow until the *Tsaka-u* formally starts sowing the seeds. After he begins sowing seeds, he informs the people by standing on the *Dahou* that the sowing of seeds can be started. If anyone sows the seed before him, that person has to destroy his work and re-do it again; he would also have to confess in front of the people and ask God's blessing for their crops. However, such a case is rare because the village people respect or obey the *Genna* rules without fail.

The *Lidepfii* is an older woman, not necessarily the most senior, but from the *Thevomia* group, who used to inaugurate or initiate the reaping of the crops. When the harvest time has come, the first reaper or *Lidepfii* will perform certain *Gennas* and rituals to have a rich and plentiful harvest. It is a *Genna* to reap crops before *Lidepfii* initiates formal reaping, which is believed to bring misfortune to the concerned person.

## FUNCTIONING OF *KICHIIKI* (DORMITORY)

The most crucial traditional institution for learning in the tribal social organization is the *Kichiiki*, dormitory, or *Morung*. The *Morung* is an educational institution where young boys can learn what they need. The institution is the fundamental basis of the Naga cultural heritage. It is one of the oldest and most potent means of social control. As a unique institution, it serves as a social security agent with trained and disciplined personnel.[13] This institution is found in almost every tribe, and their social life is centred on it. The *Morung* is a self-governing autonomous institution

that imparts life-centred learning and value systems and exposes the young boys to their customary practices, traditional knowledge and governance.

The dormitories are built in the centre of the village or *Khel.* In the village, every *Khel* had a *Kichiiki* (*Kichiiki* is a local term that means Morung or dormitory), which played an essential role in earlier days. Life in the dormitory is based on certain traditions and customs that all members follow. It also acts as an educational institution where young boys learn what they should know. There is no particular leader to look after the *Kichiiki,* but the elders are responsible for teaching and advising the young generation. The juniors follow the commands of the seniors or elders and receive further education from them. From here, the young boys learn things like traditional laws/rules and practices, folk songs, folk dances, folklore, traditional ways of making a basket of various sizes, norms, ideals, religious beliefs, discipline, etc. Every member of the dormitory must keep everything secret about the dormitory. The main objective of *Kichiiki* is to defend the village, and they need to have well-organized, trained personnel.

There is also a place called *Tehu* (meaning a place for sitting by circularly making fire) in every *Khel.* The male member also sits in the *Tehu* at night, young and old, and discusses the issues happening in the village or their neighbouring villages; they also make plans for the days to come. As they used to make fire and stay at night, once a year, all the males, who could go to the jungle, would go to the jungle and collect firewood and bring it to the *tehu* place. This is another institution where young boys learn things.

Unlike other tribes, the Angamis do not have a dormitory for girls, which is a *Genna* for women to enter the *Kichiiki.* In these two places, girls are not allowed to go there. During March and April, as these two months are dry season, they are scared that their house will get burned while they are sleeping, and they also fear the number of male members would decrease, and only a few males would be there to protect the village. So, during these two months, the male member slept in *Tsekwhe* ( which is a name for a sitting place)

## VILLAGE GUARD

The village *Phichii-u* and the village elders are responsible for effectively defending the village from enemies. The village's great warriors had to be exhorted to remain vigilant. During the olden days, the villagers used to keep the village guard to watch and fight against the entry of enemies into the village. Moreover, the village guards are brave, strong, and great warriors, i.e. those who brought many heads of their enemies during war. In simple words, the village guards protect their village and people. Some people would guard the village by sitting at some top place to see if their enemies were approaching the village. They would shout or make noise to inform the people that the enemies were coming. Some people would guard the village even during the day because they feared that their enemies would come and kill the children while their parents went to the farm work, and some would guard the field to protect the women working there. Thus, the village guard keeps the village safe from enemies.The village gate was efficiently maintained and made impenetrable.

## MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT OR DISPUTES

Conflict or disputes occur in every society, and resolving such issues is one of the most critical aspects of governance at any level. "A variety of disputes are settled by oath among the Naga tribes. Some tribes, like the Angami, Ao, Tangkhul, etc., attach great importance to the oath. The Angamis do not, as a rule, swear lightly. An Angami oath has significant value and is accepted by the disputing parties as it involves many lives, i.e., of family or kindred. Interestingly, false oaths almost always cause death or grave misfortune, and the Angami will not risk his life unless he is sure that the cause he is swearing is truth".[14]

In Kigwema village, when conflict or dispute arises between two people or groups, the village head, *Phichii-u* and the village elders resolve the problem. In solving any matter in the village, the *Phichii-u* is never involved alone but always sits with the village elders, called the *Riina Phichii ko,* by meeting and making decisions according to customary laws and practices. The judgments passed by the village elders were respected

and accepted by the people; there was no court of appeal, as there was no higher or subordinate court. The decisions of the *Phichii-u* and village elders are final and binding for all the parties involved in the dispute. Any breach or disrespect shown to the verdict might lead to a further increase in the punishment.

The most challenging thing about oath-taking was the formulation of the oath. Getting both parties to agree to the words used was a big task. Nevertheless, once the oath was formulated, it was taken. Some common oaths are cited below:

i) Oath in local dialect; '
*A tsiediepukethako ha ketidziikechiiriiputha mozo. Ketidzii kechiiriipulirotei mu kijiineidonoulhoumiametoumethakenyii, kekakemhekeriekeruo'*
(I am now not speaking falsely; if I am lying between the sky and the earth, let me not live like others but be ruined entirely).

ii) If I lie and take this land or things, may my family and I may not live like others and descend into the earth and be seen no more

iii) This land belongs to me, but if it does not belong to me, if I take it, and if I am lying between the sky and the earth, let me not live like others but be ruined entirely.[15]

Oaths can be taken in different ways depending on the situation and how the promise would be. In case of conflict or war with other village people, the *Phichii-u* and the village elders would talk with the other village *Phichii-u* and village elders to solve the dispute between the parties. After settling the dispute, they would exchange wine and food they brought and drink and eat together. This is to ensure that they are no more enemies and would maintain peace with each other. There will be no more head hunting or hatred between the two villages. In the meeting, the *Phichii-u* of both villages would exchange their sword or *Dao* and decide to have a cordial relationship, and they maintain it accordingly.

## CONCLUSION

The Kigwema village demonstrates a unique interplay between traditional governance and modern administrative systems for Angami Nagas.

Despite introducing contemporary structures, the village continues to uphold and respect its customary laws, with the village headman and elders playing a pivotal role in social, political, and economic affairs. Their authority, deeply rooted in tradition, extends to crucial decisions such as festival observances and dispute resolution, highlighting the enduring relevance of customary practices. The persistence of these practices, particularly in enforcing customary laws and punishments, illustrates the strong cultural identity and communal cohesion in Kigwema. These traditions are not merely historical remnants but active frameworks that continue to regulate behaviour and maintain order within the community. The reverence for these laws signifies their integral role in shaping the moral and ethical landscape of the village, fostering both respect and fear of transgression. As Kigwema navigates the complexities of modern governance, it remains a compelling example of how indigenous systems of authority and law can coexist with contemporary political structures in tribal communities of northeast India. This study underscores the importance of understanding and preserving such traditional mechanisms, as they offer valuable insights into governance, conflict resolution, and community life in indigenous societies.

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# GALOS OF AALO: A PROFILE

*ALOK KUMAR*

## INTRODUCTION

Galos are one of the beautiful and peaceful tribes of Arunachal Pradesh located mainly in the West Siang district. The traditional dresses of Galo tribe are made up of hand-woven cloth, mainly white in color which is considered as symbol of peace. Galo tribes- the Tibeto-Mongoloid descendents reside in peaceful coexistence with other Tani tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They worship goddess Mopin, as also a month-long pre-harvesting festival which is celebrated during month of April every year and is named as Mopin festival. During this festival period, people wear traditional white dress and greet each other with white paste made up of rice. They decorate the place of worship with bamboo fibers that resemble like white flowers. Their priests perform various rituals and worships on different occasions. They have their own language without script that is called Galo language. Until sixth decade of 20$^{th}$ century, education was very limited in this region.In 1966 Rama Krishna Mission opened an English medium CBSE School over there. During the initial days, all the top brass of Arunachal Government were products of this school only. Galo tribe is well known for their simple living, their simplified social system such as marriage system and other rituals.They speak Hindi with a sense of pride. They love Hindi songs and are fond of singing Bollywood songs at their festivals and functions. Although the state of Arunachal Pradesh shares a long boundary with China as well as their racial features resemble like Mongoloids, but Galo tribes feel proud to be Indian and have limited knowledge about China[1].

## GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Galo tribal group is scattered in almost all parts of Arunachal Pradesh among diverse ethnic groups. However, they are mainly concentrated around the township of Aalo, the district headquarters of West Siang. Aalo was erstwhile known as "Along". Along had been known for its huge army base because of its proximity with China border. Besides Aalo, they are mainly found in places like Lepa Rada, Lower Siang, Basar, Tirbin, Lirmoba, Dapriji, Dumporijo, Likhabali spread in adjoining districts as East Siang, Upper Subansiri etc.Now-a- days Galo people are settled in the capital city of Itanagar in considerable number.According to one estimate their population is approximately 1, 50, 000.

## SOCIETY

Galos are one of the dominant tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They speak Tani-Galo language which has proximity with Tibeto-Mongoloid language[2]. Some experts believe that their pronunciation resembles Japanese language. Therefore, it is much easier for them to learn Japanese language and get a job in Japan or Singapore.

Galos not only own pieces of lands where they do terrace farming, slash and burn, they claim ownership on mountains and portions of rivers. If somebody wants to access or harness some resources from the mountain or river, he or she must get permission from the owner of that particular part of the mountain or the river.However, spiritually they believe that mountains, forests, rivers, have their own specific god and each of these things are regulated by them. Due to this reason they never disturb peace and tranquility of the rivers or forests or mountains while harnessing resources from them. They never ransack the forest or do any kind of mischief while fishing or hunting. They only extract natural resources as per their requirement, otherwise it is feared that the goddess may be unhappy, and someone has to bear the wrath.

## AGRICULTURE

The economy is mainly agrarian as most people are involved in agriculture and allied services. They practice both shifting cultivation as well as settled

cultivation. Shifting cultivation is known as slash and burn practiced in forest areas whereas settled cultivation that is terrace cultivation is practiced on hill slopes. A local variety of paddy is the main crop cultivated by this tribe. This variety of paddy is harvested twice which is its uniqueness. In first harvest, people pluck out the bunch of paddy ears (grain bearing tips) with hands and in second harvesting they cut the stem of paddy plants with sieves.

They never use fertilizers or pesticides in their farms. In fact, if they use fertilizers or pesticides, it will be washed by the perpetual rain and will be swapped away by the rainwater to another farm or to the river quickly. Therefore, using fertilizers or pesticides is of no use for the farmers. In some regions they bring water from rivers through narrow canals for irrigation in paddy fields. This source of water cannot be stopped, and water keeps flowing from one paddy field to another paddy field (from high land to lower land) round the clock. Because of this reason also they never use fertilizers and pesticides. As a result, all agricultural products of the state are purely organic.

Apart from paddy they also do horticulture. Oranges and pineapple of Aalo have a magnificent taste. There are some specific regions where pineapple grows which is very good in taste. Now-a-days people have started growing kiwis. They also grow bananas, jackfruits, peaches, pears and guava. Among cereals they grow maize in addition to paddy. They also grow several vegetables, but they mainly depend on forest extracts for green leafy eatables. One such very popular leafy herb is called Oik which they eat with rice after simply boiling in salted water. Sometimes people boil Oik with small fish or small chunks of meat. They source Bamboo shoots from the forest as one of an important ingredient of food preparation. Bamboo shoots are brought from the forest in the rainy season when they grow in abundance. They clean them, process them and let them ferment for some time. They keep fermented shoot's paste in jars for longer periods and mix them in food preparations as taste enhancers.

## HOUSES

Galos make their houses on an elevated bamboo structure. The roofs are

woven with palm leaves which they call *Toko*. They make a very beautiful pattern with the palm leaves. The houses are made on elevated platforms to avoid the entry of insects and reptiles. They also make their granary on similar elevated platforms to avoid entry of rodents. The granaries are built in one corner of the village to save them from incidence of fire. These granaries are built on elevated platforms of bamboos or other wood, sometimes wrapped with metal sheets to stop rodents climbing up and destroying grains. However, now-a-days affluent people and those in government jobs make modern houses even in remote areas. Their lifestyle is very simple, and they are exempted from income tax.Therefore, they have ample scope to save money. Due to this reason people are prospering day by day. One cannot find mobile or TV network in some regions, but one can easily find a modern resort with packets of noodles and canes of expensive beers and wines over there.

## CULTURE

They sacrifice Mithun (Bos frontalis) on every big occasion such as *Mopin* or marriage ceremony or any other ritual of social significance. They believe that the soul goes directly to the next world. Therefore, before any animal sacrifice they make a special structure of bamboo which indicates direction of the departure route of the soul. It is decided and directed by the priest or shaman.

## MARRIAGE

The marriage system is very simple. When a boy and a girl start liking each other, they start living together. After some time, may be some months or years, the two families meet at a place preferably at boy's house and their marriage is made official in a ceremonial manner followed by a feast. The bride slaughters a hen, and some wings of the hen are attached to the hair of the bride, this is how marriage gets completed. A completely white feathered hen is chosen for this purpose. After slaughtering the hen, the *Nebo* (priest) performs some rituals looking onto the liver of the hen and blesses the bride for happy life in her new abode. Both the parties either from boy side or girl side enjoy the dine and drink whole night. Traditionally only jewellery made up of natural beads and some brass

potteries were given to the bride as marriage gift. However, due to globalization and introduction of modern culture many new things have been introduced such as gold and other household equipment. There is system of divorce in their society. However, men and women are free to get separated and choose new life partners after observing some rituals.

All persons of father's generation are treated as father called as *Abo*. They respect their elders according to their generation like a person of one's father's generation is father (*Abo*) for all the offsprings of next generation. Likewise, all the women of mother's generation are called *Aniye*. Similarly for every relation they have specific names such as daughter-in-law is called *Nyamte* and so on[3]. Members of Galo community can tell name of their ancestors up to 20 generation back[4].

## WORSHIP OF DEITIES

Galos are traditionally animistic in their beliefs; a belief in supremacy of Nature such as plants, animals, rocks, and thunder, spirits. They have their own customs based on their indigenous beliefs and practices since time immemorial.During all kinds of celebrations, men and women wear white traditional attires, and they perform *Popir* dance to the tune of the *Popir* song, which is a type of dance performed at the time of *Mopin*. All men and women including children dine traditional food and drink *Poca* together and make merry[5].*Poca* is a locally made beer that is prepared by the women members of the society. A lot of skill is required to make a perfect *Poca*. Mostly skilled elderly women do it. It starts with roasting the rice to the extent the husk is burnt and then they let the rice mature in earthen pots for some time. This mixture is then put into a funnel made up of palm leaves supported by a bamboo structure. Boiled water is sprinkled over the rice and percolated liquor is collected in pots kept below the funnel. They maintain hygiene during preparation.Unlike other wines and beer, *Poca* has a sweet taste. People believe that it has a medicinal value and is used many times to get rid of some ailment. They recommend drinking *Poca* apart from amusements. *Poca* is part and parcel of every walk of life. They make it and drink it on all occasions[6].

Galos follow an indigenous form of religion that is called *Doney-Polo.*

Where *Doney* indicates Sun and *Polo* indicates the Moon. Sun is worshiped as the ultimate source of energy for all living bodies on the earth, whereas Moon is worshiped as symbol of peace, calmness and prosperity. It is believed that all the supreme power lies in these two powerful celestial bodies[7].

Galo society is not untouched byurbanisation, modern education and globalisation which has brought many changes in their traditional cultural practices. The old cultural traits are vanishing rapidly as majority of the Galo are getting converted to Christianity because of multiple reasons.

## EDUCATION

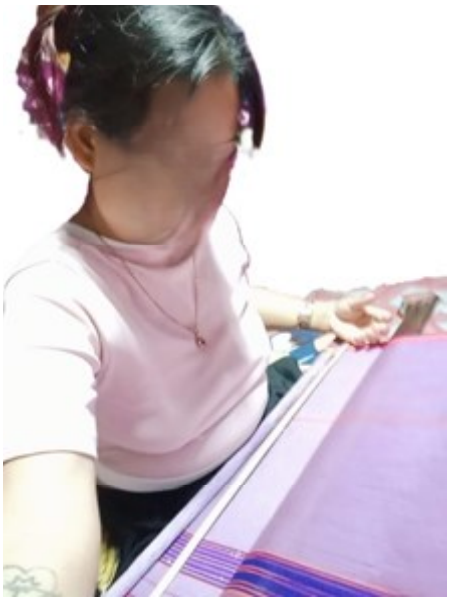
The Ram Krishna Mission school which provides mainly non-residential English medium education to the local students has played significant role in imparting quality education in the region. This school is CBSE affiliated and provides education from KG to 12$^{th}$ standard. This school is located on the outskirts of Aalo amid lush green vegetation stud mountains. Today about 1, 400 boys and girls are taking education from this school. There is a hostel for tribal students for 1$^{st}$ to 4$^{th}$ standard which serves nearly 750 students. This school also runs a Charitable Hospital and Mobile Medical Units to serve the local community[8].

## ETHNIC WEAR

*Gale*- a wrap is usually wrapped around waist by Galo ladies covering lower part of their body. A Galo woman can be seen weaving traditional *Gale* in the photographs below.

## HUNTING AND FOOD GATHERING

They are good at hunting and food gathering from the forests. There is a famous saying that they can eat everything that moves or flies. However, there is no history or evidence of head hunting of human beings or cannibalism among them. Their preferred catch from forests are rats, small animals, reptiles and in some cases insects and worms also. They catch fishes from rivers as well. They source fruits like jack fruit, pears, oranges, pineapples, bamboo shoots, some roots from the forests. The famous leaves



of Oikis are also extracted from the forest.

## TEA CULTIVATION

Tea is a commercial crop that is grown by the Galo people. Cultivation of tea is done at commercial level by the two main tea gardens.

1. Siro Riju Tea Estate, the V*alley of Tea* located at Yomcha sub-division of West Siang district is the largest tea garden in the region. Now-a-days it is has become a major tourist attraction of this region. The garden has a tea processing unit, a private helipad, fishery lakes, poultry farm, a small sawmill, a standard guest house and barracks to accommodate workers.
2. Boken Tea Garden is located in Bene Village of Aalo, West Sian. This is comparatively a small garden but also has tea processing unit and a food processing unit. Boken Orthodox Tea and Green Tea are very popular in this region.

## CONCLUSION

With the impact of modernization and globalization the Galo tribe is about to lose its traditional cultural identity. According to one estimate nearly 75 percent of the population are converted into Christianity. The rate of conversion is increasing day by day. Although people are prospering gradually with the new avenues of employment such as Universities, colleges, food processing units etc. in the region rapidly, but the gap between the poor and rich is also increasing.

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**Prof. K. WARIKOO**
*Editor and Secretary General*
Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation
B-6/86, Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi - 110029 (India)
Tel. : 0091-11-41651969
E-mail: **kwarikoo@gmail.com**
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Tele : 0091-11-41651969
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