

Indian



# *Folklife*

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

Serial No.22 July 2006



*Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India*

**Guest Editor: Kailash C. Baral**



## NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. The aim of the centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

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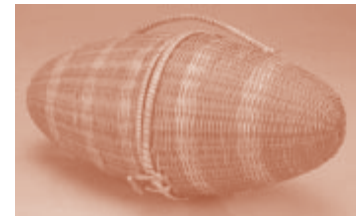
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## Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India

Kailash C. Baral



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If the end of nineteenth century underlines the distressing effects of industrial revolution and colonialism, the end of twentieth century witnesses the emergence of two paradoxical processes: (i) *globalization*: a process that cuts across the boundaries of nations, cultures and societies privileging a move towards larger integration of the world and facilitating interdependence moving towards a global culture; and (ii) *resistances to globalization*: in the form of a vehement articulation of the local for preservation of indigenous cultures and identities. Although the meetings of WTO, NAFTA and other world bodies are often disrupted by huge demonstrations these have little or no effect on the process of globalization. In economic terms, if globalization facilitates the flow of free-market capitalism along side free trade under the WTO regime, in political terms, it underscores the changing nature of the nation-state constraining the political sovereignty of subaltern nations. "Commodification and consumption that either universalises desires or particularises traditions" in cultural terms, makes the regime hegemonic, leaving an individual to fend for him/herself through inevitable mediation of multiple agencies and issues (Li 2001). However, there are aggressive advocates in both camps for and against globalization. The common charge against globalization is that it is an extension of Western capitalism; empowered by free market economy it perpetuates neo-colonialism. Under its sway, the powerful force it unleashes, it is argued, preservation of cultures and identities in their pristine/undiluted state

becomes impossible resulting, on the one hand, in alienation of identities and, on the other, in cultural chaos.

The present world has had undergone massive transformations from the time sea routes are discovered to America, Asia and Africa, followed by the hegemonic march of colonialism and the painful process of decolonization. Similarly our thinking and thoughts have passed through the Western project of modernity and enlightenment, postmodern and postcolonial discourses. Arguing against the adherents of globalization, Fredric Jameson (cited in Li 2001) discounts the merit of such a process by saying that people have been trading with each other from neolithic times and commodities have been moving from one part of the world to the other from time immemorial; there is nothing new in the process but what is damning is that it perpetuates Western hegemony in disguise as a logical prop for late capitalism. Noam Chomsky (Ibid) drives this point home with great polemical verve: it seems fairly clear that one reason for the sharp divide between today's first and third worlds is that much of the latter is subjected to "experiments" that rammed free market down their throats, whereas today's developed countries are able to resist such measures. Expressing his concerns R. Radhakrishnan (2004) maintains: Globality and globalization are the Darwinian manifesto of the survival of the fittest, the strong nations will survive "naturally", for it is in their destiny to survive, whereas weak nations will inevitably be weeded out because of their unsatisfactory performance as nation-states.

Beyond the economic and political debates, it is presumed that globalization is a challenge to cultures, in particular, to marginalized communities and their identities. Interestingly, when we look around us today we find what is specific and local acquires the object of global desire while the so-called global circulates freely, unhindered in the local market. In such a scenario where the local and the global seem to overlap, the discursive articulation of the difference of identities and social and cultural practices become more crucial (Baral and Kar 2004). In the context of the tribes of Northeast, it is feared that globalization may bring in large-scale commodification of their cultures and would erase their unique identities that are so far consolidated mostly on the premise of ethnic *difference*.

Conceptually, identity is primarily an unstable category. Paula M.L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia in the introduction to their edited volume *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (2000)

trace the historical development of the concept of identity. According to them, because of the instability and internal heterogeneity of identity categories, critics have delegitimated the concept by “revealing its ontological, epistemological, and political limitations” and underlined the fact that “as a basis for political action, [the concept of identity] is theoretically incoherent and politically pernicious.” Although the editors follow the postpositivist realist framework in their attempt to reclaim identity in which “experience” is the most important vector, my position is not to reclaim any identity *per se* but to look at identity politics in the Northeast India in the wake of globalization that contributes to the changes in its formation, reformation and deformation.

Although globalization dehistoricizes identities, it cannot certainly erase an identity totally except creating hybrid identities. Today, identities are under a period of rapid evolution in matters of rights, articulations and solidarity movements and so on in our country. Is it then feasible to preserve a pure, uncontaminated identity with a romantic notion of its uniqueness? As “Northeast” and “tribe”(s) are inescapable givens (these categories can be contested) any discussion on/about identity and culture in the context of the tribes of Northeast, in the wake of globalization, has to be negotiated through the trope of in-betweenness. The in-betweenness as a frame of reference has to take into account general assumptions often invoked around constructs such as “Northeast” and “tribe”(s) and specific examples of particularity in the context of a particular identity and culture.

Identities in Northeast are mostly constructed around ethno-nationalisms. The politics of identity therefore centralizes *difference* as the most important marker thereby recognizing cultural difference of which an identity is a producer as well as a product. The politics of difference holds good so far as there are no boundary crossings, but it becomes problematic and looks skewed when the boundary of exclusivity is blurred under let us say intense democratization of a society with increasing acceptance of the other or under globalization blurring all boundaries. It thus gestures toward an internal contradiction that while excluding the other it seeks to be recognized by it. Therefore, difference is not self-generative but always an other- contributed marker.

The contemporary critical-theoretical debate surrounding identity politics has been productive in that it is flexible and extendable, as new tropes continue to influence new political claims in drawing a difference say between the expression “tribe” and “indigenous people” in India, and between “Canadian-Indians” and “first nations” in Canada while asking questions regarding the relationship between identity and environment, identity and development etc. All these are different prongs of having new claims to territory, political control and other demands in consolidating the community’s bargaining power. Politically these new claims seem to be fine as

long as they work towards community solidarity and empower the community. For example, there have been talks on/about intellectual property right vis-a-vis folk knowledge/wealth, particularly, in the context of tribal societies in terms of textile designs, herbal medicines, and other indigenous products that will bring immense economic benefit to the people. But such moves either for economic integration or cultural exchanges are vitiated by ethnonationalism in most cases resulting in solidarity/ autonomy movements that underline the old notion of unique identity and exclusion and undermine integration and development.

Notwithstanding the claims and counterclaims, it is true that the concept of identity is in a period of rapid evolution. Changing technologies also have contributed to the problematic. Attempts to decode human genetics and possibly shape the genetic makeup of future persons (Wald 2000), to clone human beings, or to xeno-transplant animal organs, and so on, raise deep philosophical/ethical questions about the kind of thing a person is. We are now capable of changing our bodies through sex change or cosmetic surgeries with immediate consequences to ways of our understanding that dramatically change our identities. As more and more people are using disembodied communication technologies, the kinds of identities that matter seem to be shifting (Turkle 1995). Our identities are increasingly pathologized these days (Elliott 2003). In addition identities are increasingly getting hybridised. In such a scenario how does one understand identity formation and its articulation. In the context of Northeast in spite of claims of uniqueness of an identity, the identities have undergone tremendous evolution and have been hybridised with or without ethno-politics of exclusivity. However, it is necessary to understand their evolution as examined in the articles by T.Ao, Raju Barhakur, and Margaret Zama. These articles underline the transition and transformations that have shaped the Ao Naga, the Mizo and Arunachalee identities. If the transformations have occurred (allegedly under a coercive process) by the state power imposing alien institutions and practices and by the intrusion of cultural and religious forces from outside, semiotically, such forces have also contributed to the strengthening of an identity culturally. Within the generic representation of the Naga, the Mizo and Arunachalee identities it is important to note the internal heterogeneity within the generic as problematic as the conflict between ethnonationalism and the nation state. Therefore, identities in the Northeast can best be understood to have been placed between conflicts of self/other binary, in an in-betweenness that is simultaneously historicized and dehistoricized.

Moving from identity politics to culture, we need to ask how does one formulate—and is formulated—who, culturally, one is? Because culture enriches itself through mutations and is also an important identity marker. In Northeast it provides both a context and text for the politics of difference. The anthropological understanding

of culture is an ensemble of beliefs and practices that are subjected to a “pervasive technology of control” (Greenblatt 1995). In an interesting analysis connecting identity with culture under the contemporary free market economic regime, Radhakrishnan (2004) offers a perspective that “at the very heart of a despatializing postmodernity” all claims of free trade that is implicated in the disjuncture of home/not-home, inside/outside is no alternative but a return to nationalism. He goes on to add, we are all aware that in the age of late capitalism, culture itself is nothing but a commodity infiltrated irrevocably by exchange value. For him, “Culture becomes the embattled rhetoric of home, authenticity, and “one’s ownness” deployed strategically to resist the economic impulse toward “sameness.” We want to be part of the borderless economic continuum, but at the same time, let us be who we are; our cultural identities are not for sale or commercial influence. I agree with Radhakrishnan to the extent that identities and cultural products are valuable for preservation but such a position also seeks an answer to the question how does an identity negotiate with cultural change and changes in one’s social environment? If we are not given a choice to opt for what is good for us and renounce what is not how can an identity gain in authenticity. Hence our resistance should be strategic not political.

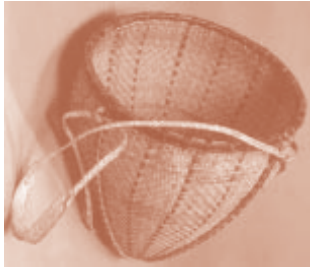
Beyond and besides identity, we need to examine what happens to cultural products such as indigenous music, textile designs, handicrafts, herbal medicines, dance forms and so on under globalization? Can indigenous cultural products remain what they are or will they respond to the market forces and bring in economic prosperity to the people under globalization? These are some of the issues we need to ponder over when we think about globalization and its impact on tribes of Northeast and their cultures. The two articles by Desmond Kharmawphlang et al and Anil Boro provide us with two different perspectives. Comparing and contrasting the two markets in Shillong – Bara Bazar and Police Bazar – Desmond and his colleagues have argued how globalization has been instrumental in job losses and traditional skills in exemplifying what happened to the tailors of Bara Bazar. Their concerns are pertinent how a consumerist economy with the support of media has affected the lower income groups in a society and how the marginalized is further marginalized. If in the loss of the tailor’s song of Bara Bazar, Desmond and his colleagues see the death of traditional trade, Anil Boro sees huge opportunities for traditional products in a period of globalization. The indigenous cultural products can be marketed and would bring in huge benefits for the tribes of Northeast India, he argues. However, he pleads for a government controlled monitoring body that would facilitate the trade and to refrain outsiders to get into the area for private benefit and personal greed. By arguing that both the folk and globalization function within the logic of reproducing the same again and again, Prasenjit Biswas does not see any contradiction and

underlines a generic possibility of mutuality. Looking at globalization vis-à-vis indigenous religion from the perspective of philosophical anthropology, Basil Pohlong locates a spirit of accommodation and mutuality between the two formations. He underlines the need for ethics in both spheres.

Outside the domain of academic discourse, it is my experience and understanding that the simplicity of common life in the Northeast is often mired by the complexity of the politics of Northeast. Although many problems regarding Northeast simply frustrate us for their monotonous repetition, reiteration and having no-possible-solution-at-hand there are areas that are stimulating and productive from academic point of view. There are many changes that have embraced the common life in Northeast within a very short period of time. Therefore, there is a kind of cultural inertia that dominates the psychology of the people. A tribal from Northeast India struggles to find his/her moorings being caught in the conflicts between multiple structures of power and authority. If the Indian state with its avowed policy of democratization of the tribal polity and promotion of protective discrimination and economic empowerment through development makes efforts at integration of the people with the mainstream, the militants resist strongly such moves propagating separateness promising the people the possibility of a romanticised, sovereign tribal homeland and the Church, outside these two structures, brings in the messianic hope of salvation through concepts such as sin and expiation and organised from religious practice. The question that looms large and begs to be explored: can globalization with its promises of economic salvation override the political, cultural and religious salvation that this part of the country is questing for last fifty years or so?

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## Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective

Temsula Ao

TEMSULA AO is a poet, short story writer and folklorist. She is a professor in English at the North-Eastern Hill University. Currently she is the Dean of the School of Education and Humanities. Her latest story collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* published by Zuban and Penguin, India is highly appreciated and critically acclaimed.

**I**dentify is a word loaded with meanings, evocative of multiple interpretations and in today's context, implicated in a vociferous cry for assertion. The word means different things to different people at different times. It changes significance over the time-space continuum and either accrue or shed meanings all the time.

Assigning a common identity to the ethnic groups now collectively known as the Nagas, comprising of many different tribes, speaking many different languages and within a distinct linguistic group, many different dialects is problematic. For a Naga, identity is a many-layered concept. In order to understand the implications of identity in the wake of globalization in the Naga experience, the discussion will focus on some primary contexts of its conceptualization with certain specific examples from the Ao-Naga tribe.

### Existential

The existential identity of the Nagas is immersed in mythical lore—how they originated, the location of their origin and why they come to live at different places or inhabit the geographical area called Nagaland and outside the state in some places in the adjoining states. There is no concrete “historical” or material support for the myths of origin; however, these myths have been accepted by people as an inalienable principle of their tribal *history*. Each tribe with its distinct language, social customs and dress codes has continued to live as an identifiable ethnic entity within the group collectively known as the Nagas. The viability and continuance of this principle can be illustrated, for example, among the Ao-Naga tribe regarding the clan divisions and adherence to exogamy. According to their origin myth, three men and three women who belonged to three major clans emerged out of rocks at an ancient site called Lungterok. The myth goes on to say that the marriage among the six people took place with those from clans other than their own. The clan division as well as the practice of exogamous form of marriage among the Aos can be traced to the myth and is prevalent today. There are similar myths of origin in the lore of other Naga tribes, which have become

the accepted oral history of the tribes as well as the principle of social ordering among them.

### Locational

Within the tribe a Naga's identity is deeply rooted in the village of his birth and residence. Being a citizen of a particular village is the most important aspect of a Naga's existence because this *identity* is marked within a specified ethnic and linguistic space. The identity affiliated to a village draws attention to clan affinity, possession of ancestral and other properties in the form of land holdings, and underlines one's responsibility to the community in the form of participating in community rituals, celebrations, and in the governance of the village polity. A Naga who is banished from his ancestral village for political, social or criminal offenses is like a person without a country. There can be no greater humiliation for a Naga than this fate that strips him of this symbolic identity and he is thus disaffiliated from his origin and tradition. At an inter-village level the antiquity and the size of a village lend a certain aura of superiority to a citizen of such a village. For example, a villager from Changki, when addressing a gathering of village representatives of the Aos, begins his speech by introducing himself, as “I am Changki, the father of thirty villages.” By this he means that he can claim seniority over others by virtue of the antiquity of his village. In a culture that respects age, such an introduction immediately enhances the speaker's identity among his peers. On the whole, the combination of ethnicity and territory gives a Naga the most dynamic definition of his identity.

### Artefactual

Art and its various forms never existed in the Naga context for its own sake. Whatever art forms identified with or assigned to the “Naga” today has evolved from utility items. When houses, village gates, textiles, tattoos and other household items became personalized through extra ornamentation or addition of colours or symbols, the ordinary artefacts began to acquire new significance and became a new set of identifiers within a local context. In men's wear the most famous example among the Aos is the “Mangkotepsu” or “Tsongkotepsu” shawl, which traditionally could be worn only by men who had taken heads in warfare or given feasts of merit. Such shawls therefore would automatically be identified with persons of high status in society. Such identity markers abound in all the Naga tribes. Again, the structures and decorations or the lack therein on houses also evince status difference within a given community.

The notion of identity among the Nagas in relation to the three main contexts is indivisible from the community to which they belong. It is this sense of *belonging* within these parameters of any given group that validates their individual identities.

### Subsumption of Identities

When it comes to being identified, for example, as an Ao, the locational identity as a member of a particular village is blurred when it merges into the broader identity of the tribe or group. But at this stage, within the group called Ao, the clan divisions remain distinct cutting across village boundaries. The process of subsumption which begins at this stage continues its spiral ascent as it sweeps aside the local identities of being an Ao, Angami or Sema etc. when it culminates at the apex point of being identified as a Naga. While the tribal identity is not altogether erased, s/he has to assume a different persona of *belonging* to a greater whole where all the contextual parameters of her/his identity become irrelevant. However, even across tribal boundaries certain clan affinities have remained recognizable and are respected. So if an inter-tribal marriage is being contemplated, care is taken to avoid an *incestuous* marriage between couples belonging to the same clan.

The progress of an identity from this point towards a national one blurs all existing parameters and offers a Naga an amorphous identity based solely on a geographical affinity of residing within the boundaries of the sovereign state of India, which is coincidental. The definitions of this identity are derived from political and economic dependencies rather than any cultural, traditional or linguistic affinities. The Indian identity therefore becomes a total disclaimer of all that a Naga has conceived of himself to be through generations. His being a Naga, and a citizen of India has to be readjusted in that his existential moorings have to be reinvented in a new context. In the absence of commonalities there can be no assimilation and without assimilation there can be no hybridization. Of necessity it then becomes a question of subsumption of lesser by the stronger force. In the Naga context, the acceptance of the new identity is a matter of political expediency and in the process of accommodating this duality; the people are inexorably pulled towards the forces of globalization.

### Globalization

This purely economic theory being peddled to supposedly bring in unity and prosperity to the people will have to be assessed on the cost that it will extract from its adherents. The impact of globalization will be most felt in the area of indigenous cultural products because to meet global standards, the products will have to be modified, re-designed and at times even be distorted. The identities embodied in cultural products will thus be eliminated for greater marketability. For example, the famous Ao-Naga shawl called "Mangkotepsu" is a male attire but these days one sees that jackets made out of it have become unisex and are sold at tourist spots with its lore and history totally

ignored. Other handicrafts, dance forms are also being manipulated to 'fit' into the required mould. This process of de-identifying native cultures and their products for the sake of global recognition and economic expediency will inevitably lead to a hybridization of identities in cultural artefacts.

Hybridization implies the subsumption of original features that results in a *new* product. This inverse process of de-identification begins from the extrinsic domain of visible ethnic identifiers. But this cannot be dismissed as an isolated phenomenon because the extrinsic markers are an extension of the intrinsic identities. The loss of the visible distinctions in cultural products will eventually deplete much of the lore and history of the people so that a time will come when the *product* will account for writing a "de-humanized" history for the people.

The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity markers does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. Globalization in this sense will eventually reduce identity to anonymity.





## Winds of Change: *Arunachalee* in Tradition and Transition

Raju Barthakur

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**G**lobalization, a term in vogue since 1980s, is primarily a referent to the process of expansion of economy from a developed to a developing nation and the opening up of the markets

of hitherto insular economies of the world. While the attempt has been to create a "global village", ensuring a "mainstream presencing" of the "marginalized" groups, this process in the recent years, has however, resulted in making the silence of the "other" more deafening than ever. Questions pertaining to what would happen to ethnic and cultural identities suddenly become more relevant in the emerging scenario of global ethnoconvergence. Globalization has put the concept of identity in a vortex of *crisis*, as Kobena Mercer (1994) avers, "something fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty."

It is against such a backdrop that the question of tribal identity has gained prominence all over the world today. It is more so in India because of a considerable tribal population dotting across central and the Northeastern states.

Arunachal Pradesh alone, for instance, is home to around twenty-three major tribes and one hundred and six sub-tribes. Thus, being predominantly tribal, with unique customs and practices, the question of identity and upholding of the indigenous culture has become a real challenge against the s(co)urge of globalization.

Racially, the people of the state are of mongoloid, paleo-mongoloid and proto-mongoloid origins. Dr. Verrier Elwin (1955) refers to the people and the societal set up of the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) as one that "ascends for hundreds of years into the mist of tradition and mythology". The major tribes of the state include the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Hill Miris, Nyishis, Apa Tanis, Adis, Mishmis, Noctes, Singphos, and Khamptis and so on. Ancient lore, legends, and myths are transgenerated orally from generation to generation that underline the cultural identity of the people.

The linguistic and cultural diversity that prevail within the geopolitical entity and their harmonious co-existence is often perceived to be an "interesting philological puzzle" by ethnologists and anthropologists alike. This diversity is evident in the costumes, rituals, and religious practices of the people that differ from tribe to tribe even

though they reside within the same geographical area. The Monpas of the East and West Kameng districts, for instance, are the believers of the Lamaist Mahayana school of Buddhism. The typical Monpa dress includes a *chuba* or a "cloak" usually made of coarse woolen dyed in red. The Monpa man cuts his hair in a straight line just above the eyes and at the level of the nape behind his neck. Though closer to the Monpas in religious and cultural beliefs, a Sherdukpen male, on the other hand, is starkly discernible in his cropped hair and the unique skullcap – the *gurdam* he uses. This cap is made of yak hair with short tassel like projections jutting down from the sides. Despite being geographically proximate to each other, the Sherdukpen males wear the *sapo*, as against the *chuba* of the Monpas. The *sapo* diagonally covers the upper part of the body over which a full-sleeve jacket is usually worn. Further, a machete, commonly known, as *dao* in a scabbard is usually a part of the Sherdukpen attire.

Speaking of the headgear, the Nyishis of the Lower Subansiri and the Papum Pare districts wear a wickerwork helmet surmounted by the red-dyed beak of the hornbill. It might also have the additional decoration of hornbill feathers. Usually a bun of plaited hair called *podum* with a brass skewer horizontally stuck through protrudes on the forehead. Similar examples can be drawn from other tribes inhabiting the state, all-adding to a single-knit identity of the *Arunachalee* while maintaining their cultural and traditional individuality.

Such cultural and traditional diversities, combined with geographical inaccessibility have rendered a sense of exotic charm to the notion of Arunachal and the *Arunachalee* himself. Historically speaking, the state remained virtually closed to any external influence with almost no appreciable industrial or infrastructural set up. Even now, there is a considerable prevalence of the primitive subsistence economy. This is primarily because of the administrative principle of exclusion adopted by the British government and followed by the succeeding Indian governments. The British rulers in India were sagacious enough to realize the need for special administrative provision for the areas under tribal domination in accordance with the spirit of their customs and religion. Thus, they formed these regions into special Non-Regulation Tracts to be administered by simpler methods directly by the Deputy Commissioner. In accordance with the special provision, the Inner Line Regulation was formulated in 1873, thus paving the way for the formation of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972 and later on a full-fledged state. As a result, the state has seen almost no investment in terms of economy and the urban centres came into existence in

most cases as the administrative head quarters of a district or subdivision with no locational advantage.

With the passage of time however this sense of isolation has become problematic, as the people have found it increasingly tough to reconcile to the disadvantages. The people of the state have started making vociferous demands for development and resented the peripheral treatment towards it by the rulers at the centre. And ironically, the demand for change has created a deep schism within the society, as there is a dilemma over the question of preserving indigenous identities, on one hand, and embracing change by aligning with the mainstream, on the other.

The spread of education in recent times has resulted in making the people aware of the need of preserving their unique identities while freeing themselves from the traditional and customary aloofness in a balanced way in order to usher in a healthy development. This quest for preservation of ethnic identity is manifested in the way various organizations of the state are leading a movement demanding expulsion and repatriation of the Chakma, Hajong, Tibetan and Bangladeshi refugees. At times, this *angst* finds a powerful expression against the non-Arunachalees too, particularly those from North India and Assam.

But it is the exotic charm that has resulted in opening the gates of the state to outsiders. And it has started reaping benefits too. The state abounds in scenic natural splendour – unexplored and pristine. This singular aspect has succeeded in arresting the appeal of the tourists to explore the unexplored. The boom in the tourism sector has widened the employment opportunities for the locals. With its rich bio-diversity and hotspots for adventure sports along with a regular hosting of such festivals as Buddha Mahotsava and Siang Festival have increased the inflow of tourists into the state. The exotic insularity, thus, in a way, has become a marketable product and Arunachal, a brand name. This is slowly morphing into a convergence of cultures that posits a potent challenge to the hitherto insular nature of the Arunachalee society. It is also symptomatic of the emerging problematic of preserving “the indigenous identity.”

A steady erosion of the traditional religious beliefs in favor of Christianity further compounds the problem of defining the indigenous identity. The onset of globalization has witnessed a series of attempts at proselytization of the Arunachalees thereby putting a question mark on the viability of the indigenous religious practices. The predominant Western view on the religion of the tribal “is more than a mixture of all the various idolatries and superstitions.” However, this perspective brazenly sidelines the devout practitioners of the Mahayana and Hinayana forms of Buddhism by the Monpas, the Sherdukpens and the Khamptis respectively along with the Noctes who follow the *Mahapurusa* form of Vaishnavism. Instead of practicing idolatries and superstitions, M.L. Bose (1997), while writing on the spirit of religion in the tribal world speaks about the “dualism of body and soul” that bears on the interpretation of the “material and spiritual aspects of the phenomenal world.”

The practice of *Donyi-poloism* by the Adis exemplifies this. Irrespective of this fact however a conspicuous lack of religious scriptures, regular systems of prayer and permanent places of worship too, is providing a boost to religious conversions. Christianity, propagated as something more organized and secure, weans away people from their traditional religious practices. The education imparted by Christian missionaries is also a force to reckon with, as people perceive it to be a gateway to success in life. Thus, there is a conscious attempt at inculcation of Western values and ideas with missionaries acting as pliant facilitators. These neo-converts have suddenly become more relaxed and too inhibited towards traditional songs, dances, festivals and rituals. Instead there seems to be a formation of an alternate identity that is marked by its calculated rejection of the tribal roots and the conscious adoption of a hybridized form of identity. In the process of embracing globalization, thus, in Arunachal Pradesh we find a gradual shift from the clan-based totemistic set up to a translocalized social stratum, a cohesive sphere of ethnic solidarity slowly giving way to a heterogenised cultural formation.

The impact of globalization is often group and region specific. Notwithstanding the fact that it is largely responsible for converging the world into a “global village” from a macroscopic view point, globalization is also responsible for creating intra-group schisms, especially within such closeted societies as we have in Arunachal Pradesh; the ramifications of which further obfuscates in forming and defining the sense of indigenous identity(ies). Thus, on one hand, while we find the educated local inhabitants of the state are apacing themselves with their more advanced counterparts in other parts of the globe, their educationally challenged and financially strained brethren, who are religiously tied to their generationally beheld traditions, for whom it is too late to embrace the newer challenges and lucrative opportunities. Thus globalization is turning out to be a force that is divisive in nature and in the face of which they are no more than mute spectators. It is true that in today’s world change is *only* permanent. But at the same time, we must ensure that the changes are proportional to the needs of the society, rather than embracing something blindly and aping others without caring for tradition, cultural values and society specific needs.

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## Globalization and the Mizo Story

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Any study on the society and the culture of the Mizo, cannot be completed without the mention of the year 1894, which was a turning point in their history. It was the year that two English Baptist missionaries of the Arthington Aborigines Mission, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, founded their way in to the then Lushai Hills, now Mizoram, to begin their missionary work with "this bloodthirsty race." They introduced literacy to the Mizo by giving them their alphabet. Lorrain puts it thus, "It therefore fell to our lot to reduce the language to writing in such a way that our system could be readily adopted by the people themselves. For this purpose we chose the simple Roman script..." (1973: V)

That this zealous effort on the part of the missionaries provoked a fast-forwarding of the socio-cultural history of the people in the region is no exaggeration. The initial fears of the white man soon vanished as they quickly established friendly ties with the locals. The conversion of a war-like animistic tribe from its pre-state and pre-literate culture into Christianity was surprisingly smooth though it was not without some initial resistance from its detractors. The resultant benefits of education and the exposure to some degree to the Western culture for what it was worth, took only a few decades to be strongly entrenched into the Mizo psyche.

The years that span 1894 to present day Mizoram add up to a little more than a century, yet the gains as well as the price paid within this brief period by the Mizo, for becoming *enlightened*, are now emerging as a highly explosive topic of study and debate within the state. When this aspect is taken in conjunction with a study of the impact of globalization on the culture of Mizoram, a number of interesting issues come to the fore.

Globalization is controversial because the term has different meanings for different people. Broadly speaking, it is the expansion and intensification of connections and movements, of people, goods, capital, ideas and culture, between/among countries. This has given rise to growing interdependence between people of all nations. While this may be beneficial to world economic development, the flip side also shows it to be the cause for an increasing inequality within and between nations, threatening employment, living standards and thwarting social progress, especially for the less privileged nations as

well as helping to dilute cultural identities. An attempt has been made here to examine whether any of this has posed a challenge to Mizo identity and culture.

The Mizo identity is indeed undergoing through an intense introspection. The nostalgia for a romanticized past, crowded by visions of a once brave and honourable people, who practised the code of "tlawmngaihna"<sup>1</sup> in letter and spirit, is strongly nurtured, while the present day notion of a progressive and enlightened Christian society is being brought under a scanner by the people themselves, and is not faring too well under its close scrutiny.

Politically, the dream of Greater Mizoram was first demanded at the first International Mizo Summit called at the behest of MNF supremo Laldenga in 1965, at Kawnpui, Manipur. This top-level conference demanded for the integration of all Mizo-inhabited territories under one administrative unit. Thirty leaders of various Mizo tribes attended it from India, Burma and the erstwhile East Pakistan. This idea still persists in a somewhat milder form and is deliberately nursed by all political parties in the state more for political mileage, it would seem, than out of any genuine conviction of its fruition. Even attempts to merge the people of Zo descent or "Zohnahthlak" under the common identity of "Mizo" appears to be an uphill task due to the long-standing linguistic as well as psychological divide between those hailing from Mizoram, Manipur and Myanmar respectively.

The perceived strength of the Mizo society of the past and present lies in it for being community-based since their history can be traced. While this tradition is still cherished and maintained, the demands to conform to rules arbitrarily framed by community leaders for the common good, has begun to clash more often in recent times with the culture of independent individualism that has taken roots into the society. This clash of interest has given rise to controversy at various levels. Even an apparently minor issue of selecting a name for oneself or one's offspring, has become a contentious issue in some quarters. The addition of a "westernized" name causes the so-called guardians of Mizo culture to raise their hackles and they start questioning the cultural roots and identity of the individual concerned, and this, it may be noted, is within a community that is blatantly influenced by Western culture in dress, mannerism, music and ideas.



An interesting development that has taken place in recent times with the advent of the cable TV is that the Mizo, who would never have openly admitted to watching or liking Hindi movies before, is now loathe to miss an episode of the Hindi serial *Kasauti Zindagi Kay* of the Star Plus channel, conveniently dubbed in the Mizo language by the local channels. Condemnation of this has appeared frequently in local dailies and jokes circulated to poke fun at the fans, but to no avail. One local daily even carries out a translated update of the serial for its readers. The organizers of the recent Peace Fest 2006 held on 20 April 2006 to celebrate two decades of peace in the State had to backtrack on their plans to invite Manoj Bohra, the popular "Prem" of the *Kasauti* serial, as the students' body, the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP),<sup>2</sup> threatened to take action. Their objection was that "Prem" and the serial itself, are a threat to Mizo culture and an unhealthy distraction for the student population.

More interesting perhaps is the mutation that continues to take place in the practices of the Church community in Mizoram. While religious revivals coming in waves, so to say, is not unique to the Mizo experience — the four major revival movements in Mizoram having taken place in 1906, 1913-14, 1919-23 and 1930-37 respectively (Kipgen 1997: 219-242) — yet it is interesting to note how the television evangelization of the West, courtesy cable TV, has had its impact on this Christian state in recent years. The year 2002-03 saw the community gravitating en masse, regardless of denominations, to line up at church services and crusades, to be "slain in the spirit" or otherwise to receive "anointing of the spirit", locally termed "khawihthluk", similar to the manner of the Benny Hinn ministry. "Praise and Worship" sessions modeled after the Billy Graham ministry, is also fast gaining popularity and the music videos produced make brisk business especially amongst the Christian youth organizations.

Simultaneously, juxtaposing this is the determined efforts of certain sections to indigenize and acculturate religious practices today. The early efforts of the first Mizo Christians in doing so is seen in the case of the use of the traditional drum to accompany singing and dancing, banned earlier, but introduced during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Revival (Kipgen 1997:270). Not satisfied just with this and the translated hymns in western tunes that predominated, original compositions of devotional songs sung to popular traditional tunes called "Lengkhawm zai" came to the fore. Of late, attempts have been made by groups of people to introduce dance steps in church and religious meets, similar to the traditional "chheihlam." Strong objections have been raised in some quarters who see it as unchristian for it harks back to the pre-Christian hedonistic days of festival celebration that were inevitably accompanied by "zu", the traditional rice beer. On the other hand, such attempts may be interpreted as symptoms of the desire to return to one's own roots even in forms of worship, which is common to many other cultures as well.

This emphasis on one's tradition and culture also acquires another dimension besides the genuine fear of loss or dilution of one's roots. It gives birth to the emergence of

power-elites or groups with "vested interest in resurgence and revivalism... Interest in culture becomes often vicarious, gratuitous, a part of the search for the new dynamics of acquiring and sustaining political power and status."<sup>5</sup> It is true that overemphasis on ethnicity has also "encouraged cultural myopia and ethnocentrism" which soon leads to a drying up of resources (Mahapatra 1983:29).

In Mizo context, the clarion call by the YMA<sup>6</sup> regarding the dress code, behaviour, disapproval of marriage outside the community, expressions of concern and fear over assimilation and hybrid-identities and so on, have not quite succeeded in stemming the flow of change and transformation. This has been facilitated by exposure to movement of peoples, inter-state travels, the internet and yes, the IT revolution too, which is beginning to have its impact on governance and higher education amongst other things.

Even traditional dance-forms and indigenous handloom designs have not escaped this transition. To cite an example, the popular "Cheraw" or bamboo-dance has mutated through the years to introduce more intricate steps, and the traditional "puanchei" and "kawrchei" enhanced and upgraded so to say, for the purpose of appearing as attractive and colourful, if not more so, than other cultural groups from other states. So sometimes, changes are caused by reasons as innocuous as the desire to "keep up with the Joneses." Again, traditional ethnic handloom designs of the Mizo *puan* (wrap-around woven cloth) and shawls have undergone their share of changes and borrowings from outside their region, to respond to market demands.

The need for co-existence and space sharing are to be taken up with a more serious note by cultures of the northeast without compromising on traditional values or endangering territorial boundaries. After all, culture and tradition are alike in that they are both created by human beings and human experience. They are subject to change with the passing of time, though this could well be a subject for further debate.

## Endnotes

1. An idealistic code that seeks to render all help possible to those in need, even to the extent of laying down one's life, without expecting any returns. The Mizo believes that this is a tradition unique to them.
2. The Young Lushai (later Mizo) Association founded in 1935, now a powerful non-governmental organization that has firmly staked its claim as a representative of the true Mizo identity based on its unique code of "tlawmngaihna."

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## Globalization: The Khasi Perspective

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People's living conditions change throughout history. Society changes in different directions because of variations in local resources and local conditions. Today, with the advent of new information technology, industrial production and liberalized world trade, the changes happening around us are having a multidimensional effect. These changes and their consequences are the visible manifestations of globalization and it is hard to find a single place, which remain untouched by them.

The concept of globalization is not something new. We can find its root dating from the colonial period. When we talk about globalization, we normally refer to a more advanced stage of the process of development of the world economy. It is about the exploitation of the market on a global scale. The impact of the globalization process is more accurately seen in terms of an emergence of global-local nexus, which has been made possible through the establishment of worldwide information technology and communication networks.<sup>1</sup>

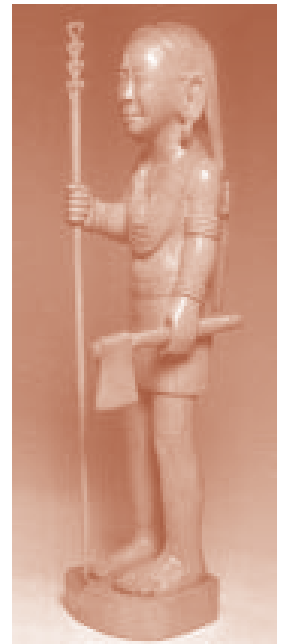
The Indian and particularly the Northeastern examples provide illuminating perspectives of the dynamics of globalization. Prior to India's independence, the driving developmental discourse was extensive literacy missions, education and healthcare and an implied adoption of cosmopolitan attitudes that would help facilitate an integration of all Indians into a single national community swearing allegiance to one sovereign state and governed by one constitution. While it is true that Gandhi advocated an ideology of homespun reliance, the general mood of the leaders of the new Indian republic was rapid industrialization and a moving away from the traditional socio-economic mould. The consequences of the post-colonial idealism was *also* felt in North East India with a set of some very significant markers that were exploited to gain political advantage through ethnic assertiveness, cultural indigenization and regionalism. The powerful Seng Khasi and Hill State movements spawned in Shillong are the spin-offs of this idealism.<sup>2</sup>

Keyed to developmental concerns, folklorists have been closely following the intersections of the economic-technical forces with folk culture on the global

information super-highway and we have adopted what we would like to call, for now, the "market-model" to test our observations in respect of globalization in the Khasi context.

We conducted a study of the two established markets of Shillong, the Lewduh or Bara Bazaar and Police Bazaar. These two markets are situated barely a kilometer from each other and while the first, i.e. Bara Bazaar, has an antiquated origin, Police Bazaar developed only in the last decade of the nineteenth century. While Lewduh or Bara Bazaar is directly under the control of the *Syiem* or traditional chief who has a ceremonial house on its premises wherein annual rituals are performed, Police Bazaar is managed by the Shillong Municipality and the Department of Urban Affairs of the Government of Meghalaya. The lanes and by-lanes of Bara Bazaar are clogged with rude foot traffic, open stalls and mobile vendors fighting for space and attention. The gutters overflow in some sections and the steps, when they are there, are perilous. Agricultural products from far flung and nearby villages are brought in by transportation of all kinds and stout porters are engaged to carry them to the vending stalls. Meat, fish and bulks of grocery are bargained over with exchanges resembling abuses. The various dialects of the Khasi language are heard along with Hindi, Nepali, Rajasthani and Sylheti. Bamboo baskets, fishing equipments and implements for agricultural operations are sold in bulk. Here, traditional measure systems co-exist with the metric system and counting is done on fingers, paper scraps and Chinese calculators. Strategically tucked in some corners, one finds eating joints, packed to overflowing customers, selling the traditional cholesterol-loaded *jadoh* and the assorted meat delicacies. Hooch shops run by Khasis and Nepalis are found to do brisk business alongside the more intrepid Tibetans who sell Indian-made foreign liquor.

Police Bazaar, on the other hand, is the romping ground of the hip and the happening and boasts of discotheques, bars and fancy eating-places. The streets are well-lit and cosmetic works on roads and structures go on through out the year. Beautification projects are periodically launched. During festivals, public performances are staged at Khyndai Lad, (literally, where nine roads converge), in the very heart of Police Bazaar. A huge fountain set amidst a circular lawn dominates this superbly illuminated site.



Market places create their own texts and are veritable theatres of contact and action. In Khasi folklore, traditional markets are significant mythic sites marking harmony and discord among the community of both humans as well as beasts. There are many legends, which are actually market-lore, that articulate the formation and disintegration of many *Hima* or Khasi traditional states.<sup>3</sup> Even today, markets are the places for maintaining human contact and cultural exchanges. They continue to generate new traditions. One ostentatious change is the disappearance of the tailoring songs from Bara Bazar. The tailors of Bara Bazaar are renowned singers and whistlers as they work on their sewing machines. This tradition has stopped although a handful of tailors still tenaciously cling to their old machines, in the tailoring quarters of the market. One gnarled tailor rued: "Times are really hard. We are not tailors any more; we are menders and repairers. We repair old clothes. The few clients that we have are people from the villages. The heavy influx of readymade garments has ruined our trade. Nowadays, we barely make seventy rupees a day."

It is not difficult to comprehend the reason for this – less than a kilometer away is Police Bazaar, the commercial center where expensive and branded garments are sold largely. It is the place for dress material, cosmetics, expensive food items and goods associated with the affluent and the trendy. Shops offer a wide range of international branded products and if one's resources match the price tags, one can indulge in a Gianni Versace pair of shoes, don a Nike sports jacket or strut around in a pair of Pepe jeans. PB, as Police Bazaar is fashionably called, is a shopper's stop for the affluent people of Meghalaya and Northeast India.

The profusion of branded outlets dealing in and selling branded products such as Adidas, Reebok, Nike is impressive. The media, through cable TV and the Internet, have created a phenomenal market for branded accessories ranging from underwear to wristbands, water bottles to travel bags, and cosmetics to apparel cleverly classified as climate light and climate cool. The new order entrepreneurs are brimming with confidence and aver that five years down the line, people will be wearing only such types of garments. Globalization has thus made the world a smaller place where people from various corners of the globe can voice a common fashion statement.

During our study, we noted the presence of what we call the "sweat shops" not far from the glitzy establishments. In these horribly confined spaces provided by lean-tos, conveniently concealed by facades of buildings, tailors toil to make and stitch adjustments. It is a fact that physically the people of Northeast India are smaller in comparison to people of other parts of the globe. So it is very obvious that when one buys readymade apparel, one still need to have fittings and adjustments made. It would not be greatly surprising to find one or two of the Bara Bazaar tailors working there, having abandoned their freewheeling independence to slave in these dingy surroundings.

Earlier, we had mentioned that the engine of globalization is being fuelled by the media and the electronic image and a direct spin-off of this is the mission of establishing

newer cultural values and meanings through the hegemonic communication forms of satellite TV, film, print media and music industries which are decidedly spreading and homogenizing American post-modern culture. This system, defined by the three considerations of race, gender and income, creates a set of cultural ideologies that are consumer-oriented and these are marketed, distributed, sold to and consumed by the Third World, Soviet and European audiences.<sup>4</sup> Globalization has thus made the world a smaller place where people from various corners of the globe can voice a common fashion statement.

We made a survey of one international and four Indian magazines (*Time*, *The Week*, *India Today*, *Outlook*) going back through a year's issues and found that there are almost as many, (if not more), advertisements than there are stories, and these glossy and often seductive advertisements become sites for consumption lust and if income permits, to be indulged in. Fashion advertisements occasionally become erotic discourses and the same treatment is extended to cars, motorcycles, alcoholic beverages, food, cell phones, watches and other gadgets. Advertising strategies and advertising subjects "become living display units of the postmodern man."<sup>5</sup> Fashion houses use supermodels and movie stars as brand ambassadors and astounding sums of money are being spent to create awareness about these globally marketed products. While fashion is a reliable reflector of change, it is also the marker of a continuity of control exerted by the affluent and the powerful. The discourse of power is created by no less than one of the multinational fashion houses in the coinage of the term "power-dressing," and while this may be deceptive or even imaginary, it forcefully enacts the cultural image of the successful individual who wields power in a world which is there for the taking, (thus extending the metaphors of the primal horde myth).

Globalization in the Khasi context, therefore, has provided glimpses of a global market that does not affirm the sharing of resources or humanness but of accentuating the cultural differences and marginality. While westernization of some of the urban elites here has resulted in their integration with globalization, most of our people, the marginalized poor have been effectively left out.

In the dichotomy between tradition and change, the irony clearly resonates in the lost song of the tailors in Bara Bazar. There a tradition is lost. We cannot retrieve and preserve that song any more except being deafened by the blare of Globalization!

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Saxena, Ranjana — "Globalization and culture" Culture Studies (Themes and Perspectives); 2003 ed. Chandan Kumar Sharma, page 85.

<sup>2</sup> (see Kharmawphlang, D L : *Why Folklore? Image Creation and Perception*, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> (see Kharmawphlang, DL: *Notes from Ri Bhoi*, pp21 Manuscript,1997)

<sup>4</sup> Barthes Roland, 1975 *The Pleasure of the Text*, New York: Hill and Wang.

<sup>5</sup> Lefebvre, Henri1984: *Everyday Life in the Modern World*

## Globalization and Local Cultures: The Tribes of North East India

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Where do the less developed [and scheduled as 'tribals'] local communities of Northeast India stand in the Globalized world? What is their status and position in it? Is the tribal world of this remote corner of the Indian sub-continent aware of the fast changing global economic and technological scene and consequent socio cultural tensions and crises today? Are the people themselves aware of the processes and impacts of globalization? If they are, are they willing to take part in the process? These and myriad other questions come to our mind when we ponder over the issue of globalization in the context of Northeast India.

By globalization we simply mean that the world has become more and more easily accessible and open to any one of us. This process has made the modern nations and communities increasingly more interdependent, susceptible to the market forces and flexible to the changing currents. Almost every one of us is aware that there is no escape however strong our resistance might be, from the all too powerful clutch of globalization. For some people it has become a craze; for others it is just fashion. But, for the unaware multitude of Indian masses it is just a distant dream or rather just a magic word. For another group it is a new world of avenue opening up through the IT boom and for some others it is an alternative route for progress and development through liberalized trade and corporate finance. Any way, it enhances the levels and volumes of global interaction [Lewis:2002:334].

The phenomenon of Globalization is looked upon by many as a new form of encroachment on the local or regional territories. It is never free from its own perils and fissures. That is why the critics of Globalization outright castigate it as an evil and the enemy of human progress and democracy. We need to look at globalization from the point of view of its impact on local indigenous cultures. According to Lehman, Globalization has two-fold ways of interaction with local culture: i) Homogenization and ii) Cosmopolitanism. Globalization either eliminates local elements or incorporates them without acknowledging it. Secondly, it may incorporate and celebrate local elements. Here a situation arises where the global and the local overlap and the discursive articulation of difference between the

self and the other becomes problematic. As we come to the tribes of Northeast, globalization has already made an inroad into the life and culture of its people. The globalized market economy as well as the entertainment industry has already encroached upon the traditional culture and the life style of the people of the region. Hence some people have expressed the fear that large scale commodification of their cultures would erase their unique identities. Authors like Appadurai [1990] and Featherstone [1996] however contend that globalization cannot be simply measured from the set binaries of globalism and localism. It has deepened the problematic of the linguistic terms like global and local, indigenous and heterogeneous, universal and particular. There are two views that glean from the whole debate on Globalization: that it is a force that will erase unique identities and traditions and that it is an opportunity for unhindered trade and commerce, and economic empowerment. I would like to look at both aspects in the context of a few communities of Assam.

The question of identity and its uniqueness in the present context are tricky. Those who vouch for unique identity and cultural purity forget that identity like any other practice in a society is an evolving concept except that in a symbolic form it connotes the ethnic, linguistic and cultural markers and differences. Although mutations are facts of life, all that is called essential and unique in defining an identity is because of exclusion from/of the other, not as something such self-evidential. Under a globalized cultural space, the larger question is, can unique identities remain pure and uncontaminated? To speak the truth, that is not possible because each community keeps on learning from other communities and thus the process of acculturation continues. Keeping in mind the utilitarian value, a community adopts new ideas and practices. While a culture makes some readjustment in adopting the new, similarly the new is reshaped to be appropriated by a host culture. It is also true identities already, always hybridized. Once any community opens its door to the forces of globalization, its cultural assets and products are bound to be pushed for large-scale commodification and loss of their unique



identities. We should take up the challenge and see to it that instead of clamouring for unique identities, which are not out there turning the advantages of globalization to our benefit.

Keeping in view the opportunities globalization offer, we have to examine in perspective what happens to some of the cultural products of the tribes of Northeast. To be an effective player in the global market under an industrial and technological regime the smaller communities need to put their acts together and should have adequate resources and safeguards. The ethnic textiles do have an opportunity to be globally marketed along with other products such as food items, indigenous herbal products, beverages, dance and music. The Bodo and Mishing weavers with their expertise in the textile products can link up with the world market but they can not do that simply because they lack the resources. It is interesting and ironical that big players have already arrived on the scene as ethnic textile products and designs become widely popular. The fashion designers with some knack for ethnic designs and forms have taken some interest in the ethnic textiles of these local communities. This intervention from outside has put the preservation of tradition under tremendous stress, for such an intervention from the world of fashion technology will definitely transform the traditional designs, colours and forms and also their use. However, there is another side of the story. The weavers for decades without any support from the Government and without a viable market for their products have suddenly wakened up to a new opportunity. It is true that the colourful traditional textile of the ethnic communities need further exposure whereby the weavers and the entrepreneurs will benefit economically. But the inroads of modernization and sense of aesthetics and utilitarianism in fashion as applied to the ethnic dresses of the local ethnic groups in the absence of adequate protection, it is feared, will be hijacked from the community itself.

The ethnic textile products, for example, Bodo dokhona made of the finest pat silk and muga silk and the best Mishing mekhela and ribi gacheng and galok have become a craze in the market. The Assamese variety of the muga and pat silk clothes has also become a commercial success story. In case these products are not patented the producers of the material at the local level will lose their commercial potentiality. So only recently there is an alarming talk of patenting the textile items those are locally produced in the name of geographical indicators. This kind of question arises only where the local products feel threatened in the competitive market and there is no institutional control and monitoring. When a team of our University teachers and Researchers visited the interior tribal villages and talked to the community leaders and the practitioners of the traditional arts and crafts, they found them to be ignorant of such dangers of their products being hijacked. When they came to know about the necessity to protect the rights over their traditional products, they agreed that such an initiative must be taken.

Another area where the local ethnic communities can thrive in the market oriented global space is their ethnic food, recipe and beverages. If the Government of India opens its door to the East, that is for the countries of Far East and South East Asia [as it is on the anvil now], the local ethnic communities of Assam and Northeast can profit a lot in trading their handicrafts, industrial and agricultural products as they have not benefited much, as people say, from Tea and Oil. There are local products and folklore items in which the specific ethnic groups or localities specialize and the people of Far Eastern countries use these items for having a strong cultural affinity with these people. It is not a question of products alone but products finding the right type of markets.

Like the textiles, food products and beverages, the ethnic groups' produce can be patented and launched for the Far Eastern and global market. This is an area where the Autonomous Councils and District Councils and NGOs can work in tandem for the benefit of the community and employ thousands of local educated youths. The exotic folk culture with ethnic diversity of the region can draw the buyers from all over the world. Eco-tourism and package tours to ethnic places can immensely help this. But the lack of infrastructure for the tourism industry is still a major draw back. The Autonomous Councils of the Bodo [BTC] and the Mishing or any other local autonomous body for that matter can play the pioneering role in this. If the colourful folk dances and performing traditions need to be showcased in the global context the autonomous bodies and the departments of the Government must take the initiative. Preservation of cultural heritage of the smaller communities is an important aspect which we must not lose sight of. The ethnic communities and their cultural heritage have a distinct uniqueness and they should be empowered to negotiate for their rights over the folk products in any transaction.

If for example the folk music and dance forms of a tribal community of the Northeast go global, will they be able to preserve their cultural character? Popular music, says Lewis, "has a chameleon core which prevents it from being fixed and standardized. Rap music which began as the specific articulations of poor black youths in the West Indies and New York South Bronx, became authenticated as an international black music — not bordered by what might constitute official American cultural export, but as a transnational art form which crosses and recrosses what has been called the Black Atlantic" (Lewis:2002:353). In the Indian context, Bhangra based Punjabi pop songs have assumed almost an international character. Like the Punjabi pop, modern Bihu songs have emerged as a very popular art form throughout Northeast India and in the rest of the country. The modern day Bihu songs and dances, apart from the colorful ethnic dances of the region like Bagrumba, and Bardwisikla of the Bodos, Gumrag or Mishing Bihu of the Mishings, have become very popular these days. Thanks to the revolution in entertainment industry, the Bihu VCDs and cassettes make a good business today.

But the rapidity with which the songs and dances have changed and modernized to cater to the market forces is really a matter of concern for the purists. Like Indi-pop and modern day Bhangra songs, a new genre of urban folk songs have come up to entertain a younger generation who want to go global even if they settle in a remote semi-urban center of Northeast. The new generation wants an Assamese or Northeast Bob Dylan, Michael Jackson, Bruce Jackson or Madonna to entertain them. The modern songs produced by the entertainment industry have led us to the creolized world of music where the music we listen to is neither a Bodo music nor a Mishing music and not even an Assamese music, but a pure hybrid of many influences and borrowings popularly known as fusion music. This is the direct and indirect result of the impact of media and globalization. This is more prominent in the other Northeast states like Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland where the modern music is completely westernized and the bands are almost inseparable part of the urban life. These bands, like the modern urban hubs and mega shops with ethnic

and exotic dresses and recipes are attracting big urban crowds.

The impact of globalization is such that the people of the urban centers and metros can have an easy access to Chinese, Egyptian or African ethnic and international food and music. Why not the willing customers all over the world can have a taste of the ethnic dresses, food and recipe from the ethnic communities of Northeast sitting in Tokyo, Bangkok, Peichng, London or New York? But have we been able to make our products or potential products globally available? This brings to my mind the efforts of many local entrepreneurs in Guahati who sell Assamese traditional food and recipes. A team of our Research scholars who surveyed their progress found that the responses of the buyers are quite satisfactory. If such ventures fail, we must humbly submit that even if we have global connectivity, and opened our doors for globalization, we have not been able to reap the advantages of globalization; rather we become passive consumers of the products of globalization and live in the false pride that we live and think global.

## Globalization of Folk as a Genre in Northeast India

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The idea of the global is often conceived in terms of an appearance of the “simulacral” that presents the interior of a culture as “decontextualized” or “deterritorialized.” Instead of arguing that there is an ongoing dialectic or bind between the local and the global, I prefer to take a semeiotic stance; that is, how the material symbols and codes of stories and narratives get represented in the discourses emerging from within the life-world of the community. Such representations within the domain of folk literature, I would emphasize, could be looked at how genres are co-constituted and how they are designated a place within the site of an ongoing repertoire of construction of meanings. In order to accomplish this task, the paper is divided into four sections: section one delves into the nature of Global in the Folk; section two deals with the Representational artifacts; section three provides an analytical scaffolding of the genres in folk and delves into the simulacral content of Folk and section four concludes by way of prognosticating the interrelationship between identity

and folk genres in a moment of the Global.

The notion of simulacra as explicated by Baudrillard and Jameson is of

much relevance here. According to Jean Baudrillard, a simulacrum means a substitution, a precession of the signs of the real for the real. Such signs are meant to encounter the *real* through its representational and relational connection between the Subject and the object (1998:166-184). Fredric Jameson has added a further twist to this by defining simulacra as a copy of the copy for which no original has ever existed. In other word, it is a temporalization of the material and the spatial, which he calls “conversion of space into time” in order to strike only a resemblance with the real (1994). This also means a symbolic constitution of the human Subject, which no longer exists in space, but exists only in a temporal space that is configured by a temporally constituted subjectivity. In the case of folk genres that are supposed to be transmitted within a system of beliefs and practices not only bind a society together but also act as the identifying marker of that society. The representational and temporal dimension of folk can go as signs of



the real and can substitute the real. The cultural identity is constituted by such signs that substitute the world of living by some representation and that readily lends itself to all kinds of simulacral practices such as an advertisement in the media or surrounding the ordinary with the imaginary. The only thing that it distances itself from, is its very conditions of coming into being as it alters them beyond recognition (Deleuze 1994: 293).

### The Semeiotic Stance of the Global

In the case of Northeast India, the practice of temporalization assumes the form of "assertibility conditions" of the folk. These conditions are both performative as well as pragmatic based upon some kind of semantic grounding in a discourse, which is constituted by a play of material and power relations. Such discursive construction of "assertibility conditions" structures the artistic and cultural freedom to express oneself from within one's folk tradition. Contemporary writings on folk life in the form of tales to signify past assume those assertibility conditions that constitute and facilitate the purpose of rationalization. Such rationalizations occur through repetition and reiteration of the folk motifs and the symbolic nexus that they form within the social world. In a collection of Folk tales, entitled as *Narratives of Northeast India* (2002), the tales are divided into themes such as "origin tales", "tricksters and numbskulls" and "demons, ghosts and the supernatural." Such a thematic arrangement construes a web of both idealized and mundane notions of life in folk imagination. The way it affects the portrayal of the world for reasons that are given to justify some *form* of belief such that it acts as a cultural capital, which rationalizes the world. "The Origins of Headhunting", a Naga Folktale goes like this:

Once upon a time (...) there was only one tree on earth. The tree bore many fruits and all kinds of bird perched on its branches to eat the fruits.

One day, a bird accidentally dropped one of the fruits to the ground and a lizard ate it up. When the bird searched for the fallen fruit, it was informed that a lizard and an ant had eaten it up. Since both the lizard and the ant denied eating the fruit, it was arranged that the case would be decided by a ceremony of oath-taking.

After the ceremony, it became evident that the lizard was guilty. At this, the entire colony of ants chopped off the head of the lizard and it was taken in a big procession as a *sign of victory*. This *spectacle* was witnessed by human beings. It was in *simulation* of this incident that the practice of headhunting was adopted by and came to stay amongst the Ao Nagas (2002:34).

In rendering the story in written form, it is remarkable; Sashiungla Ao uses concepts of "sign", "spectacle" and "simulation" as a trinary that assume a metalinguistic application thereby developing a logic for explaining "headhunting." How else does one understand the way

the mind works in explaining a practice such as headhunting? Here, something from the natural world provides an analogy and serves as an example for human beings to follow, and constitutes the very basis of belief that explains the reason behind such a practice. Simulation increases the strength of that belief. This is how the psychology of folk belief is consolidated from observation of nature to regularity of practice by way of transforming events of nature into explanations or reasons of truth in certain cultural and traditional practices. This is how acts of belief could be put to explanatory contexts. Within the substitutional practices of the global such simulation yields to any form of equivalence: Headhunting could be made equivalent to war, to primitivism or to insurgency. The situation could be understood in terms of dissimulating the character of the sign:

To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: "Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littre). Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary" (Baudrillard 1998:167).

Such a feigning of the real is possibly the only way to recover the Folk. This recovery assumes the form of a folk processing of contents of belief that occupy a place in imagination by way of turning it into an artifact of cultural reproduction of an identity.

### Representations as artefacts of Identity

Representation acts as a norm that binds acts of making visible a performing self within the genre of the folk. A folk narrative performs within a representational artifact. The representational artifact is often situated in cultural practice and belief. The Mizo God Pathien in representational terms "resides above the clouds in heaven" and He is the "provider of rain and daily needs of man" (Sujata Miri 2005:30). Such a representation results in performances like enacting oneself as daughter of nature such as in the Mizo tale of "Ramenhawii." The story goes like this:

There was a beautiful girl called Ramenhawii who was famous for her very long hair. All the young men in the village desired her but none could win her favour. One day she was washing her hair in the river, a fish swallowed her hair. A strand of the hair found its way to the plate of the king of the valley as he was being served dinner by the palace cook. Filled with curiosity at the sight of the beautiful hair the king ordered his guards to look for the owner of the hair as he wished to make her his queen. After a long search, the guards at last found the place where the girl lived but they were unable to approach her as she lived protected by barricades around her.

"Oh! Please tell us at least your name" implored the king's guards.

She replied:

'No name, no name have I, I live on pure water, I live on pure vegetables (Ibid: 51).'

What the story tells us is how Ramenhawii performs a notion of a self that is different from the notion of the *self* prevalent in the society by identifying herself with pure water and pure air. In a sense, she assumes the form of the sensible as opposed to corporeal. This is a representational substitution of the real by the imaginary and the self of Ramenhawii by way of decentring makes it an artefact of representation. This artifact does not confirm to any prevalent social norm as she does not agree to the King's proposal, but merely shows up as a dream-object which she confirms by way of enacting a different definition of self, i.e., "no name" to refer to herself and yet "living" on nature. Such artefacts evolve from the imaginary to become the symbolic when the self is enacted artefactually in a narrative. Mona Zote in her poem, "What Poetry Means to Ernestina in Peril", writes:

*(...) and pious women know the sexual ecstasy of dance and peace is kept by short men with a Bible and five big knuckles on their righteous hands.*

*Religion has made drunks of us all. The old goat bleats.*

*We are killing ourselves. I like an incestuous land. Stars, be silent*

*Let Esterina speak* (Geeti Sen et al, ed.2006:67).

There is a different enactment of the self in religious performances as well as in incest. The self is retrieved in the symbolic silence of the star when the heroine Esterina is in peril. Esterina is identifiable in the lived world of Mizoram within the social and cultural space. The self of Esterina is enacted in peril at the disjuncture of religion and incest or of the sacred and the profane. The binary of silence and speech and religion and incest, both modes of enactment transforms the simplified performative self of Ramehawii into the global Esterina within the representational artifacts. The global comes in through such transformed narratives of representation.

### **Folk as a Genre of the Global**

United Nations resolution to conserve folk, based on recognition of "intangible heritage," as a subject for protection, is one of the most significant recent developments of international cultural heritage law. However, identifying its character has been a major challenge. Understanding the significance of transmission of information (e.g., how a carpet is hand-woven) and the skill of the producer of this heritage is central to its definition (1998). The human (social and economic) context of the production of intangible heritage requires safeguarding as much as the tangible product itself and must be considered in evaluating existing or future protective measures. This perspective addresses the enormous economic and cultural impact of

globalization which is mostly perceived as a threat to the continued existence of this heritage itself but which also has the potential to aid its preservation. This means allowing the continuation of production of those culturally valued symbols of an ethnic or cultural identity by way of preserving the social context. The task however is complex. To cite an example from Northeast India, one can look at some interesting folk narratives of loss and recovery. The loss of the script due to flood in the course of changing of the course of a river is a legend that Khasis construe to justify oral culture. In a very poignant tale of loss, the competition between two river goddesses Umngot (Myngnod) and Umiam to reach the plains of Sylhet is discussed. Umngot takes a short cut through rocky hills. Meanwhile Umiam flows down peacefully into the plains. Umiam digs through the rocky surfaces and being slow and steady wins the race. Looking at Umiam glistening like a silver necklace, the river goddess Umngot splits herself in shame into five: Ka Umtong, Ka Torasa, Ka Pasbira, Ka Kajani and Ka Dwara (Sujat Miri 2005:20). All these are lost rivers signifying that rivers need conservation. With the increasing commercialization of forests and rocks, how can these rivers be conserved and if these are not conserved, how can folk culture be conserved?

Following the law of conservation, folk tales need to be preserved for regenerating/reproducing a tradition or traditions in a culture. As a genre, the folklore follows the norm of conservation and proposes an appropriate way of conservation of cultural resources and heritage. If the Folk itself disappear due to forgetting and due to a gradual undermining of heritage sites what happens then to conservation is a serious question that needs to be addressed. Can the intrinsic link between folk genres and sites of their enactment be retrieved and considered for conservation? The situation could be best understood from Ayinla Shilu Ao's observation of changes taken place in Naga society:

The Nagas of my grandparents' generation have seen changes in their lifetime that they could not have even begun to imagine. Women who cut with bamboo knives the umbilical cords of babies they had just given birth to have seen those children grow up to become doctors. Some of their husbands went to France during the First World War. One brought back a spiked Prussian helmet to decorate with horns and hair as he must have seen being done, or perhaps even done himself, to a human skull. Another boiled his army issue leather boots as they used to do to buffalo hide back home. He ate it and died, poisoned by the tannin in the leather. The next world war brought to their own villages Americans, British and Japanese soldiers. When I was a child one could still see army helmets being used as feeding troughs for pigs in the villages. American troop carriers that are locally called "Dodges" are still being driven in Nagaland. Now Nagas who did not even own mirrors see images from across the world on television screens (Geeti Sen et al, ed. 2005:112).

The use of army artefacts habitually as artefacts simultaneously shows ignorance about the modern ways as well as continuation of artefactual practices through objects that do not belong per se to the society, but symbolizes as the left over of the modern communities. The indigenous and ingenuous use of artefacts taken from other cultures show a mismatch with one's own tradition. In this context, the representation of Nagas in the media produces a mismatch with how they see themselves. Therefore, seeing themselves in the media must surprise them only to underline an identity between how a community sees itself and how the world sees it. The conservation of indigenous ways of life and their own self-image by themselves do not readily find equivalence in the way they are represented.

The situation could be interpreted by way of understanding the cultural transition that has taken place in Northeast. In a traditional matrilineal society like the Khasis, the role of *Khatduh* or the youngest daughter of the family, who is traditionally supposed to inherit the property, is now merely its custodian. This is a big change that has taken place in that there is a move from an inherent right to a mere legal privilege. With the emergence of privatization of property, fragmentation of community land and idea of individual ownership, the matrilineal society of the Khasis has become merely symbolic of Khasi identity, while in practice it is tending to be more and more patriarchal in terms of power and authority. Such a transformation of the society has resulted in the transformation or rather deformation of the folk genre into a symbolic apparatus of production of a sense of identity, while the society itself is moving towards the global circulation of capital and wealth.

#### By Way of Conclusion

Moji Riba, a young filmmaker and cultural activist of Arunachal Pradesh could be a reference to conclude this piece. He cites a piece of poem to discuss changes in the context of Arunachal Pradesh (Ibid:113).

The rainbow is a ladder by which a god climbs from earth to meet his wife in the land of the moon.

The earth and sky are lovers and all living beings are born from the union of them.

Lightning is a star-maiden running across the sky.

Riba says, "The poetic vibrancy of the images like these, forming an intricate part of the folklore and myths in abundance in Arunachal Pradesh, hides much of the transformations occurring at the very core of traditional society today" (Ibid). One tends to generalize that such is the way in which folklore is appropriated within the global in the form of "hiding" and probably better as a form of cultural capital that is hidden within the transformations brought in by globalization. My own position is that such hidden resources reappear as simulacra in the cultural logic of late Capital in the form of substitution of the real by the *sign*. The signified that remains hidden within the new meanings of artefacts, as Riba maintains, acts as the source of hiding the change.

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## Philosophical Anthropology and Globalization: A Reflection on *ka thymmei u hynniew trep ki saw Dorbar Blei*

Basil pohlong

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As a practice, story telling has been a means of handing down to the younger generation certain cultural values, practices and beliefs among many tribal societies of Northeast India. Oral narratives can be in the form of prose, poetic prose or in the form of verse that are generally chanted or performed by singing. Each narrative in whatever form it is rendered, always has a sense of novelty. In addition, it has a spirit that the narrator has to bring into or is supposed to bring into the rendering, for it provides its *raison d'être* or explanatory context. The explanatory contexts provide the logical, moral and causal connections between the world in which these narratives are created and what they “narrate” about that world. Stories whether in the form of ballads or in prose, as important sources of knowledge, are always accessible to a community of storytellers and listeners. Through these telling myths, legends, proverbs and other intangible cultural products get distributed. The stories constitute an archive of teaching-learning material and are used for educational purposes in preliterate and oral societies. In Khasi society, as Esther Syiem argues, “folktale is the repository of cultural values that inform the present and invests it with a living sense of tradition” (2005:29). Some variations in the tales may emerge especially when the same tale is told by different people or in different places, yet the content of it remains the same. The folk tradition among the Khasis is still a living tradition. It comes back to the cultural participants in different forms even though the society has undergone through phenomenal changes. In a globalized world where boundaries and identity markers are getting blurred what happens to this living tradition is the concern of the present paper. In contextualizing my concerns I would like to examine Jespil Syiem’s written rendering of *Ka Thymmei U Hynniew Trep Ki saw Dorbar Blei*, a folk ballad on the origin of Hynniew Trep, the four Divine Durbars. The ballad is a collection from various sources and versions including the presentations of some elders from memory and then composed into an integrated whole. In spite of the composer’s subjective incursions and explanatory notes to suit to contemporary beliefs and practices, the work contains the traditional belief system, wisdom, perception and philosophy of life of the Khasis. The text indeed is an important source of understanding Khasi Culture and Religion.

The question pertinent to ask here is, what role does religion play in a globalized world? If economies of the world get integrated and technologies reduce our physical distances, can such integration happen in matters of faith? In spite of the fear that globalization will erase most of our cultural practices, I am of the opinion that it cannot erase what is inherent to a culture, for example, our belief systems. Technology may bring in comfort and luxury to our existential needs but it cannot totally erase faith, as we need it whatever may our existential situation be.

In Northeast India the tribal societies have experienced radical transformations during a short period of time. From the preliterate to a modern society, from an animistic belief system to Christianity (though a few still practise the traditional religion), from community-oriented social practices to self-centered individualism, or in other words from premodern to modern to postmodern or global conditions, the societies have undergone radical transformations. After the inertia that catches you in a hurry having no time to sit and stare, time has come to look into the past and reexamine some of the cultural notions that still provide the cultural mooring and consolidate the concept of identity from an interiority that has always been part of our consciousness and somehow guides us in our daily activities. This internal impulse of being a Khasi or a Mizo is more important than the external trappings always considered important. The external markers of identity have been central to colonial anthropologists and ethnographers. Philosophical anthropology looks at the internal impulses of our cultural and racial character. It is in this context, I would like to argue that what makes the Khasis what they are, and their worldview that is embodied in the folk traditions not in the external trappings of difference.

I take up here for discussion Jespil Syiem’s *Ka Thymmei U Hynniew Trep Ki saw Dorbar Blei*. The first part of this text narrates about God and His creation including human beings and how they come to inhabit this world called the *Ka Pyrthei*. This is followed by the coming of the Hynniew Trep to “Rule” this world under the supervision of God. Since righteousness prevailed, everything was in the state of peace and order. This was the era of *Aiom Ksiar* (Golden Era). But *ka Pap* (evil) entered into the world, as *Ka Hok* (righteousness) relinquished the world. Such a situation resulted in the suffering and misery of all creatures including man, as God snapped His relationship with the world. This was followed by some acts of repentance. Eventually man as the main protagonist managed to re-establish the relationship with God. This relationship was attained through two factors, viz. *ka Niam* (Reason) and *ka Jutang*

(Covenant). Not only that man reestablished his relation with God but also established his religion upon these two foundational principles. Reason provided a justification for affiliating with and coming under God's protection and covenant reestablished God's supremacy and by this arrangement He looked after mankind and blessed them. The last part tells us about the waiting for *U Ta* (That One) who would redeem mankind forever. It is through *U Ta*, it was believed, that Khasi Religion would be fulfilled. Various aspects of this religion or faith are reflected in U Jespil Syiem's poem:

Hynniew Rishot ka Niam kin ieng Rasong,  
(The Seven Pillars of Religion will stand)  
O ba kim Sep ka Sngi  
(The sun will never set)  
Hynniew Rishot lada ki ieng  
(The Seven Pillars if they stand)  
Pura janai ka niam khasi  
(Khasi religion will be completely fulfilled)  
H'U Ta u Syiem Longdoh-Longpun  
(Through that One – the incarnated One)  
I'Uba U Blei un phah na Bneng  
(Whom God will send from Heaven).

In these lines, Syiem alludes to the mythic seven pillars of religion. These pillars symbolically connote the continuity of religion till the redeemer arrives as the chosen representative of God. He further adds:

O wat la u Hynniew u pap-u-sang hi jhor,  
(Even if the Hynniew trep have fallen into sin)  
Katba dang ieng ka Niam lem bad Rishot  
(As long as Religion and its Pillars stand)  
O, bad kim tlot-synjor,  
(Do not deteriorate)  
Mei-'ngi kan nym bisit-bitar  
(Mother "sun" will not get angry)  
Kan nym kynmaw ka krem 'Lamet,  
(She will not remember ka krem "Lamet")  
Kam sngewtympang ka krem 'Latang!  
(She will not like ka krem Latang)  
Hangne kan sah ban pynshai-kdar  
(Here she'll stay to give us light)

The concept of sin or transgression of God's law results in suffering. The heavenly bodies like the Sun will continue to give light till the Khasis recognize God's will.

'O, Lada u Hynniew u bat,  
(If the Hynniews observe)  
U im u leh katkum ka Niam  
(Lives and works according to Religion)  
Un iaisynshar-khaddar junom:  
(He will reign forever)  
Ia u ym don ba lah jynrat  
(No one will even overthrow him)

....

Ba khlem ka niam ym don Longbriew  
(Without ka Niam there is no humanity)  
Ba khlem Longbriew phin ia long-mrad  
(Without humanity you are like animals).

So as long as the Khasi adheres to his religion his relationship with God will not suffer and he will continue to maintain his status as a "ruler" who would follow the path of righteousness.

From these lines it is clear that the Khasi worldview underlines righteousness as an instrument for existence and also for peace and harmony in this world. It is the principle of religion that defines and determines the nature and character of a human being, for God assigns him with certain rights and privileges. If man turns away from God as a result of sin he has to face pain, suffering, turmoil, despair, trouble etc. In the words of Hamlet Bareh, "the virtues have faded while vice is becoming supreme by casting gloom in the society. Man laments the departure of peace, the established rule of God.... An inner man is deprived of conscience while an outer loses his manly charm" (1969:63).

Culture without religion for the Khasis is disastrous. Religion therefore becomes a means for good life. Humanity can flourish only where religion plays a vital role. It is religion that promotes morality in the form of earning righteousness (*Kamai ia ka Hok*), knowing one's maternal and paternal relatives in the Khasi context (*Tip Kur Tip Kha*) and also knowing other human beings and God (*Tip Briew tip Blei*). These principles can be considered as the core of Khasi Ethics and Religion. They become the moral norm for each Khasi to be followed in his personal and social life. Thus the Khasi society views itself as an ethical community following W.H. Halverson that every religious group as a matter of fact is constituted as an ethical community (1868). This concept is further strengthened by what Alasdair MacIntyre says that religion is always an expression of the moral unity of a society (1984).

In the context of Khasi Society religion is not to be understood as a set of dogmas or institutions, but it refers to the way of life of the people, where morality acts as a guiding principle. I have argued in my work *Culture and Religion: A Conceptual Study* (2004) that religion is one of the most important elements of culture, which gives meaning to various practices or activities. However, culture as such is a very broad concept that includes not just religion, many other aspects of our existential reality. But what is significant is that religion by giving shape to our worldview also connects to our other cultural practices and activities or constitutes the very core of our existence.

What Jespil's work tells us is that a society no matter how strong or developed it is, cannot flourish or progress without taking morality into account. A society or culture may have developed naturally or scientifically but it cannot abandon faith. Faith actually is not dogma but reasserts the dignity of man in a network of relationships with animate and inanimate equally thereby by contradicting the secular view that religion has nothing to do with the society. Science has been able to explain many things following cause and effect paradigm but there are issues it cannot explain. For example, the subjective intentions of a person cannot be explained in term of cause and effect (Davidson: 2001). I would say that beyond the world of facts there is a world of value that lies beyond the scaffolding of scientific enquiry.

Philosophically, the question that needs validation is what is the use of following the rules or why should I follow them? Even if moral law is intrinsic in my nature, how far can it affect the conduct or my life? Kant's ethical

theory necessitates the existence of God and there upon develops the concept of immortality of the soul as a moral postulate without which the whole theory would have failed. If one is not rewarded or punished in this life would be awarded or punished in after life. To be rewarded in life one has to practice "Kamai ia ka Hok" or righteousness in thought and deed. But the aim of morality is not to be followed here and now rather it is eschatological. Eschatology simply means what Talal Asad has called a project of integration of the future with the past (2003) that amounts to re-mixing of the faith and pragmatic aspects of reason. Supported by reason and rooted in the righteous life Khasi religion has universal application as it does not think religion as a kind a political weapon but a socio-cultural instrument for a fuller development of the human person.

Khasi religion also keeps the speculation alive that the chosen One or *U Ta* will come from heaven to redeem them. This aspiration underlines the messianic hope not only of a redeemer to be incarnated but of changes that need to be adopted with changing times for the betterment of the individual and the society, for reconfirming and revalidating the values of traditional wisdom in the contemporary context. Therefore religious impulse removed from its ritual and other forms is a means of reinventing oneself in a moral order. That *U Ta* will not come to abolish the old religion but shall restore it and make it complete. Religion here is considered as a practical system of belief that organizes human life individually and communally. Barnes Mawrie says that Khasi religion is holistic because it consists of "Ka Niam Im" (Religion for the living), and "Ka Niam iap" (Religion for the dead). The religion of the living is based on the ethic of right living and conduct thereby providing the society an ethico-religious framework to transact the daily business of life. That is why for the Khasis ethical norms are synonymous with religious norms.

It is quite obvious therefore to say that the Khasis have always strived for an ethical life, as a kind of commandment of God. There is a problem in Jespil's overemphasis on a Christian worldview that negates the broad, universal impulse of Khasi traditional religious worldview thereby circumscribing or subordinating individual effort for growth and progress. Further morality should not be considered as of transcendental origin only. Religion need to be culturally validated within which personal perceptions of rules and norms may be accommodated within the community's view and if need be might go against it. Similarly, an aggressive form of individualism should not go against the broader goal of humanism. If religion circumscribes the meaning of humanism, individualism sometimes underscores it. Religion and cultural practices, which are subject to mutations because of internal and external factors, need to keep on readjusting with each other for making a society progressive.

I would conclude by saying that *U Ta* is a kind of messianic concept. The *U Ta* therefore should not necessarily be identified with the Hebrew or Christian concept of Messiah or Redeemer. Rather it can be understood as a concept of native messiah, which is culturally circumscribed. If the messiah can bring

salvation to the Christian or Jews, the Messiah can, no doubt, bring salvation to the culture as a whole. It is not always that the Messiah will free us from the bondage of sin only. A culture or society suffers from all sorts of evil, pain, exploitation, abuse etc. due to reasons that may be found in environmental pollution, deforestation, immorality, wickedness and so on. In spite of the fact that religions have become a way of life of the people, yet, no solution has emerged from the narrower and institutional practice of religion. Killings, exploitations and other forms of evil still exist. Nature is exploited to its limits. In short the culture itself suffers from all sorts of evils. To come to a solution, there is a need for a "redeemer" or a Messiah not as Christianity understands it, but a Messiah who would save the culture from all sorts of evil and cruelty done by people to fellow human beings. The *U Ta* therefore signifies liberation of a society from all sorts of inhumanities, immoralities and destructions. How can I live or perform my duties properly where my dwelling place has been polluted, the air I breath, the water I drink are also poisoned? Similarly how can I express myself where my right has been denied or my goal has been taken away from my reach?

Therefore we need to follow a morality rooted in the traditional humanistic spirit of the religion that has been a product of culture with a sense of achieved participation on the part of the individuals for making this world worth for living.

Jespil Syiem could be credited with narrative reproduction of the vision of *U Ta*, who is a native and culturally rooted messiah. Therefore, if messianic spirit has been there within Khasi culture based on a prior morality, it is possible to have a domain of faith and religion. Given this context of imagination, a non-transcendental and practical idea of ethics that emerges from the Khasi context can serve as the source of re-evaluation of the so called global/local dichotomy. It could be re-evaluated from the point of view of liberation that is a part of the agenda of globalization. That liberation necessarily has a cultural ontology, in this case, a religion based on the priority of morality results in a situation of two dimensional appropriations of the global: liberation as well as right living in one's own context of history and culture that integrates future with the past.

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The theme of August 2006 issue of *Indian Folklife* is  
**Post-field Positionings**

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"Fieldwork" has long been viewed as the *sine qua non* of the discipline of cultural anthropology, a rite of passage for its students who anticipate moving into their professional identities as full-fledged anthropologists after returning from "the field." In such usage these terms are meant to conjure fieldwork as a relational and temporal entity rather more than a geologic or geographic one: *fieldwork* is a period of intensive, direct engagement with people whose lives bear meaningfully on the particular arena of social and cultural life the scholar has chosen to designate, for the purposes of a particular scholarly project, as his or her "field." In such usage *the field* is a highly malleable and conceptual entity, created anew each time a scholar delineates its contours for the purposes of a given study.

And yet certain assumptions about both "the field" and "fieldwork" remain relatively fixed. In the first half of the twentieth century when anthropology was young, for example, a link was assumed between the ethnographic field and those geologic formations known as fields; images of khaki-clad anthropologists tromping into the bush come to mind. Cultural anthropologists, who study contemporary human culture wherever it lives, have subsequently worked hard to dispel these associations. However the idea persists that the ethnographic field is necessarily tied to a landed place (a geographic area effectively predetermined, if not by lakes or land masses, then by nation-states and their borders) that exists prior to the scholar's project. Instead we must recognize that in current scholarly practice, it is we who delineate the fields in which we then track the changing topography of social worlds.

And this "we" too has expanded. Anthropologists are no longer alone in using the methods of intensive fieldwork: scholars from a wide range of social science disciplines now view social and cultural life as a field of affairs that deserves direct study, including linguists, historians, psychologists, sociologists, and folklorists as well as scholars of theater and gender studies.

What then is the model of fieldwork we want to employ in our current scholarship? Should we be content to bound the effects of fieldwork off as a discrete entity in time, "the fieldwork period," if already we recognize that the field no longer remains bounded in space? What can the experiences of a group of scholars willing to reflect honestly on the ongoing effects of fieldwork on their personal and professional lives teach us about the nature of intense cultural and cross-cultural encounters?

In embarking on the collaborative, reflective project I here call "Post-field Positionings," there are several interventions I want to make in generally-held notions about the field and fieldwork. The first is to suggest that even when we focus our interests, as we do in this newsletter for example, on cultural phenomena that bear the imprint of a particular place – the referent "India" in the phrase "Indian Folklife" being a fine case in point – we already recognize culture as living in and among people, without insisting that those people remain tethered to any geographic, geologic, or nationalistic physical terrain. Indeed our work concerns psychic, social and practical formations of human activity. Such activity moves, carried by people, and circulates in often unpredictable ways.

The second set of interventions builds on this first premise. I have solicited researchers' reflections on the realities of how the give-and-take inaugurated in the field between ourselves and the subjects of our research live on, beyond the canonical fieldwork period, to affect our lives post-field. The post-field phase of our scholarly endeavors is generally longer than the fieldwork period itself. Yet to date, the post-field effects of fieldwork have garnered very little scholarly attention. The topic is difficult to write about; it demands baring one's whole self. The generally anecdotal passages that have been published in several collections of reflective essays on anthropological fieldwork, while welcome, still treat periods of fieldwork itself as their primary objects of contemplation (e.g. Brettell 1993; Golde 1970; Kulick & Wilson 1995; Lewin & Leap 1996).

Breaking this mold, I asked the six contributors who have agreed to write for this issue of the newsletter instead to make the sequelae of fieldwork in their lives the focus of their attention in these essays. Learning to take seriously the effects of our lives on others, and vice versa, will, I trust, benefit us all. Given the broad range of their experiences and the subjects they studied – all of which do concern in various ways Indian folklife — these scholars' reflections on their post-field relations and relational identities promise a rich entree to a new arena of scholarship.

Contributors to the project hail from a range of disciplinary homes including Religious Studies, Theater Studies, South Asian Languages & Civilizations, and Anthropology. They represent an equally wide range of personal identifications with Indian culture, from Native-Born-Indian to Indian-American to Foreigner-Interested-in-India. Post-field, some have chosen to live in India permanently; others to visit regularly; and others to keep a carefully negotiated distance. Such processes of post-field positioning, it seems, are as dialogic as the best periods of fieldwork, and ongoing. For not only does experience tend to exceed anything we might make of it, it also resists

containment in pre-selected beginnings, middles and ends. If indeed our interactions in the field were as intimate and interactive as we now realize they must be for any real transformations of knowledge-through-experience to occur, and again if these transformations continue to be the ground to which we return again and again in memory and meditation to fashion the magical stuff of our best works, then the field extends into the lives we continue to live as professional scholars of cultural life.

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