

**SOCIAL
CHANGE
IN
ARUNACHAL
PRADESH**

T. MIBANG

About the Book

The author has tried to present the fundamental features of the social, economic, religious and cultural life of the Adi Minyong people in a realistic and unbiased way; and the influence of various factors responsible for Socio-economic change, and the areas in which changes have taken place, and people's response to new dynamics and challenges. He even attempts to forecast the future of the people in years to come.

This work will be useful to academicians, social workers and of interest to common readers.

Rs. 300

About the Author

Dr. TAMO MIBANG (born 1st July 1955) did his Masters Degree from Gauhati University in 1977 and Ph. D. from Dibrugarh University in 1988. He has a brilliant academic career. Presently, he is a Reader in Arunachal University.

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SOCIAL CHANGE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

(The Minyongs)

1947—1981



By

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Foreword

The British bequeathed to India, a precarious legacy in the North-East, particularly in the present State of Arunachal Pradesh. Though administered under the authority of the Governor of Assam, the entire North-Eastern territories were practically cut-off from the mainstream of Indian socio-cultural milieu and no Indian administration existed over there. It was left to Indian people to develop and intergate the hundred and odd tribes and sub-tribes of the tribal world to Indian civilisation.

Dr. Tamo Mibang's research on Socio-cultural change among the Minyongs of Arunachal Pradesh shows, how the people of India, after waking to the gravity of the situation in the sixties, (being knocked by the Chinese dragon) took up the cause of all-round development and integration of the tribal people of the North-East, without a serious break with their own ageold heritage and yet integrate them with the fast changing Indian economy and society. Though Dr. Mibang's study is a micro-study of a tribe of Siang Valley, it provides a macro-level picture of Arunachal panorama. Dr. Mibang depicts on the traditional canvas, the modern picture of the leading Arunachal tribe of Minyongs who have undergone revolutionary change over the last four decades. An Adi people himself, Dr. Mibang writes with confidence, what he himself has seen and understood in the process of change.

Dibrugarh,

(Dr. M.L.Bose)
 Head,
 Deptt. of History
 Dibrugarh University.

Preface

(The Adis are the well-known tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. In literary terms Adi means people of the hills. In fact, Adi is a federal term consisting of such sub-tribes like Bori, Gallong, Minyongs, Padams, Pasis, Panggis, Karkos, Shimongs, Milangs and Ashings. Formerly they were known to the people of the plains as Abors, which means an independent, remote and unknown people.)

/ Siang District (now East Siang and West Siang Districts), is the land of the Adis. The total area of the land is 8195 sq. miles with a population of 93,496, out of the total population of 4,69,511 of Arunachal Pradesh (Census 1971). Among the Adis, Minyong is one of the leading sub-tribes having a proud history of their tradition, culture and religion. The Britishers called them as 'Meyong Abors'. The present total population of the Minyongs is approximately 30,000 souls.)

'In a report by the Deputy Commissioner of Luckhimpore dt. 8th October 1861, the Minyongs are placed in the hill tracts from the Dihong to the Galee sootee, an area of 200 sq. miles and their numbers at 14,000 souls; and the Padams are placed in the hills extending from the Sensere river to the Dihong, covering an area of 200 sq. miles and numbering about 10,000 souls.' (Alexander Mackenzie: *The North East Frontier of India*, p - 33). But it can be stated that, the Britishers never attempted to prepare a co-ordinated account of the different tribes of the frontier region. From 1881 onwards, monographs on the frontier tribes, began to be included in the Census of India Reports and by 1947, all but the tribes of the western hills and those who lived on the fringe of the border, were covered in these Reports.

However, the reports were incomplete. Particularly in respect of statistical data, books and accounts of these tribes written by those officers who visited hill areas, were equally

incorrect and incomplete as the authors were lacking proper understanding of the tribes, and in most cases, biased. Above all, the general policy of the British was to keep the frontier in stagnation and till the end of the British rule in India, the Government did not allow tribal life to be disturbed by any new idea or development of any kind. Not even the survey of, and enquiries into the topography of the territories were completed.

I have selected the topic 'the Minyongs Society' for the study, keeping in view certain important considerations:

- I). The Minyongs were a proud and independent race who fought tooth and nails against the Britishers and ultimately were subjugate in 1911 after the murder of Noel Williamson at Komsing. Yet they could preserve their indigenous institutions, faith and practices.
- II). Till now, they are a leading sub-tribe among the Adis inhabiting in the Central Zone of East and West Siang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- III). With the advance of time, they have also been developing new attitude, new ideas and institutions so as to make their society, richer and vigorous through the process of cultural assimilation.
- IV). Yet no important research work has been carried out on this proud race, by any scholar so far.

As a matter of fact, there are two kinds of processes going on in a social system, process that maintains or tends to maintain the traditional structure of the system, and processes that tend to modernise it. My study is concerned with the latter social change on intelligible process, in which we can discover significant alterations in the structure and functioning of determinate social dynamics. In basic sense, therefore, social change means change in social structure.)

I have tried my best to understand the social problems of the Minyongs and to assess the trends of change. My approach to the subject is historio-analytical. Any realistic and unbiased analysis of the present situation of the Minyongs must inevitably contain some references to the failure, as

well as the successes of government policies, and includes some of the criticism of those responsible for the misfortunes of the people. Such criticism may be considered inappropriate on the part of the observer, yet no good purpose can be served by turning a blind eye to corrupt practices and resulting failures of policies, thereby distorting the picture of the true conditions of the people. It must also be admitted, that the people are holding their own — and have benefitted from the contact with modern civilisation. The Adis form the majority of the population and are largely representative of transition from a primitive society to, one in which modernisation has progressed much faster.

I hope this work will help the students of history, Social Sciences, Social workers, administrators and the general public, not only to understand the problems of their society, but to know themselves, because without knowing oneself, one cannot progress and help the society to grow.

For sources of data, I have mainly relied on Foreign Political Proceedings of the Government of India, 1824-1915; Lakhimpur Deputy Commissioner's collection of files relating to the Frontier Tracts and Tribes between 1874-1947; Proceedings of the Tribal Affairs Department; Governor's Secretariat, 1937-1947; Important Directives on Administration of NEFA 1954-1963; Statistical records, information and other relevant materials, Government of Arunachal Pradesh 1951 to 1981; Annual Report on the working of the various Departments of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1950-1980; M.L. Bose's Historical and Constitutional Documents of the North Eastern India (New Delhi 1979), and oral literature collected by way of interviews and conversations with some Minyong elders and leaders, possessing profound knowledge of the Minyong society.

The Secondary sources have been consulted from publications of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and other books and journals etc. Some of the important books on the Arunachal Pradesh and particular tribes and their institutions and culture, published in recent years from the Arunachal Administration. The Administration has published *A Philosophy for NEFA (1959)*, *The Myths of the North-East*

Frontier of India (1958), The Art of the North-East Frontier (1959), Democracy in NEFA (1965), all by Verrier Elwin; *Constitutional and Administrative Growth of the North-East Frontier Agency (1971)* by P.N. Luthra, *Arunachal Through the Ages (1978)* by J.N. Choudhry, *Games of NEFA (1959)* by Morison D Pugh; *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal (1973)* by L.N. Chakravorty and some books on important sub-tribes like *Aspects of Padam Minyong Culture (1960)* by Sochin Roy, *Mushup Abang (1964)* By B.S. Guha, *The Idu Mishmis (1961)* by T.K. M. Baruah. Of the published works Elwin's *Philosophy for NEFA*, Luthra's *Constitutional and Administrative Growth of the North East Frontier Agency*, *Important Directive for the Administration of NEFA (1967)* and Sochin Roy's *Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture* deserve special mention.

Besides Government of Arunachal Pradesh Publications, we have Elwin's *Hill People of North East India (1959)*, *India's North East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century (1955)*, *In Abor Jungles of North East India* by Alexander Hamilton, *The North East Frontier of India (1979)* by Alexander Mackenzie and *British Policy in North East Frontier Agency (1979)* by M.L. Bose.

For the sake of convenience, the work has been divided into six chapters. First chapter is introductory in which the land, people and their economic, religious and cultural life have been analysed.

In the Second chapter the indigenous institutions of the Minyongs, prior to 1947 and their importance in shaping the life of the people and the society have been elaborated.

The Third chapter highlights the influence of various factors responsible for change, such as planning, education, cultural factors, and science and technology etc.

The Fourth and Fifth chapters are descriptive, dealing with various areas in which social change has taken place.

In the Sixth chapter, change, challenge and response of the Minyongs have been summarized and even attempts are made to forecast the fortunes of the people in years ahead.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. M.L. Bose, Reader, Department of History, Dibrugarh University, Assam, under

whose illuminating guidance and affectionate encouragement and co-operation at every stage, this work has been completed. I am also thankful to Talom Rukbo, the only renowned writer and artiste among the Adis for his help in a variety of ways,

My thanks are also due to authorities and officials of institutions like Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati, Dibrugarh University Library, Gauhati University Library, Central Library, Itanagar, J.N. College Library, Pasighat, District Library, Pasighat and District Statistical Officer, Pasighat for their kind help and co-operation which I cannot return in words. I owe my thanks to my wife Rongili who has been my main brunt of co-operation and assistance throughout. I also thank Mr. K. Gogoi for typing out the manuscript.

Jawaharlal Nehru College,
Pasighat.

(TAMO MIBANG)

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Introduction

THE LAND

Minyong is one of the prominent sub-tribes of the Adis inhabiting in East Siang and West Siang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Minyong land is lying approximately between 27°43, and 29°20, North Latitude and 94°42, and 95°35, East Latitude.¹ The country occupies a vast stretch of hills of Eastern Himalayan range which covers an area approximately 200 sq. miles,² bounded by snow-covered Takek Adi in the North, Yamne river in the East (Padam Land), Siyom river and Gallong land in the West, as far as Jonai in Assam in the South. Varying very much in character, it reveals between North and South extremes of cold and heat, vast stretches of dense jungles, deep barren valleys, patches of alluvial plain and many ranges, the lower raising five hundred feet, while the higher ones, from base to summit, exceed five thousand feet.³

C. Dunbar has given a fine description of the Adi territory in the following words:

It would be difficult to find more tremendous inhabited country than the home of the Abors and their neighbours. A close succession of thickly wooded mountains, their sides as steep as the roof or the walls of a house, rise higher and higher northwards to the main snowy range. Upto the furthest limits of the Indian monsoon, these highlands are drenched under very nearly the most torrential rainfall in world...one of the greatest rivers in Asia thunders in its deepest

gorges on the long journey from Tibet, through a labyrinth of mountains echoing with streams, down to the wide expanse of the Assam Valley and out into the Bay of Bengal. The razor-edged foot-hills are covered with dense sub-tropical forest, where orchids grow on the branches above, and the thick undergrowth is infested with leeches.....Midway between the foot-hills and main snowy range, there is a narrow zone of open valleys, where flourishing villages are set amidst their fields. This is the heart of the tribal country. It is beyond the influence of Assam with its Indian Western forms of civilisation and it is too far south to be affected by the religious ideas and customs of Tibet.⁴

The northernmost Minyong village is Pangkang and the easternmost, Komsing, Riu and Debing-Depi are the southernmost. The principal villages are Riga, Pangkang, Dosing, Parong, Riu, Komsing, Rumgong, Jomo, Mopung, Molom, Jomlo, Kaying, Kerang, Tumbin, Pangin, Kebang, Rottung, Renging, Mirem, Ledum, Rani, Ruksin, Rayang and Mikong, Yagrung and Taki Lalung.⁵

About 19,141 souls are inhabiting in the area preserving their indigenous faith and culture.⁶ As Dr. Verrier Elwin has rightly described the Adi land as, "one of the most fascinating and exciting parts of North-Eastern Frontier Agency; the scenery, when it is not hidden by cloud and rain, is superb; the people are charming, hospitable and filled with a zest for life; tribal institutions still retain their vitality. It is a country of song and dance, of hard eager work, of fine spinning and weaving, where the "rich and varied tapestry" of North-East Frontier Agency is displayed.⁷

The country on the west of the Dihang is low lying. Occasional indication of jhum cultivation and wet-rice cultivation and few villages, whereas the area lying between the Siang and the Siyom (Yomga) has great snow ranges from 10,000 to 25,000 ft. in height. On the east of the Siang there are subsidiary ranges running east and west throwing spurs in a southerly direction.⁸ Beyond Renging, the valley of the Dihang is more open. The foot-hill area of the country

is flat, and overgrown with an almost impenetrable jungle forest in which bamboos and plantains grow side by side with entangling thorns and poisonous creepers. The area around Pasighat and upto Ruksin, Debing-Depi is as plain as the 'Valley of the Great Brahmaputra' and is famous for wetrice cultivations.)

The entire part of the northern region is an intricate labyrinth of precipitous, rocky and high hills and mountains, towering high on both sides of the rivers and streams. There is luxuriant, though not very thick, growth of forests on these hills. Constant cutting of trees for jhum cultivation does not allow the forest to grow very thickly. Soil erosion and land-slides are some of the characteristic features of the country, leading to floods, blocking of tracks and endangering human and animal lives. The whole area is ecologically homogeneous with negligible deference.⁹

There are numerous rivers and streams in this region. The Siang known as Tsangpo in Tibet, and Dihang in Assam (now as Siang-Brahmaputra) is the main river. It originates from Manasarowar lake in Tibet and enters the Minyong territory at the North-Western corner near 'Janbo' village of Yingkiong circle and flows through the North-Eastern corner to the South-Eastern of the Territory, and is one of the longest rivers of the world traversing a distance of 2,900 km. through Tibet, India and Bangladesh.¹⁰ All through the area, this river is fed by a number of tributaries, such as Yambung, Bambang. Simang is another important river which flows through Yogong, Sine, Lising. Mesing and Dosing and ultimately joins mighty Siang in the southern tip of Boleng town. Next to Siang, is the Siyom river which is called as 'Yomga' by the Gallongs. It rises in Pari mountains in the North-West corner and flows through the Bori country and then takes a turn south. A few miles down, the river again turns towards the east near Along town, the Headquarters of West Siang district, and finally meets Siang near Pangin which is known as *Ane-Yomme Odum* or the confluence of the Siang and the Siyom. According to Minyong legend, in the formative stage, when both the rivers met at this confluence they came into clash. Mighty Siang claimed herself as the

first born daughter of the creator adorned with valuable beads in her neck. She directed Siyom to flow beneath the earth and herself flowed normal course. At the confluence Siyom lost her originality and merged with Siang. Sirit is an important river which originates from Molom and touches all the Yomga Minyong area — Jomo, Rumgong, Mopung, Mori,, Lorging, and finally merges with Siyom at Patum. Though there are plenty of rivers and streams in the region, lakes are hardly found except the Diyung Siyeng of Riga.

The terrain in Arunachal is very unstable, as it is generally true of the entire Himalayan range. Landslides are frequent. Many early explorers, administrators, and road workers were known to have lost their lives, having been carried away and buried under mounds of loosened earth. It should, however, be particularly noted that seismicity is very high in the region. Earth tremors are frequent. There had been earthquakes of considerable intensity in 1897 and 1930 which rocked practically the whole of North-Eastern India, but their devastations in present Arunachal were not of the same magnitude as that of 1950 earthquake, which had its epicentre very close to Rima, just across the northern frontier of the Lohit district. The impact of the shock as it occurred on that fateful day of 15th August, 1950, followed by intermittent tremors for several days together, was so tremendous that, it left glaring white scars on the chain of mountain slopes, where very large chunks of earth collapsed, bringing down wide areas of lush vegetation. The scars marking the hillsides, loom large even today before the eyes of visitors approaching the land from very far distance, as though still fresh.¹¹

As a result of the earthquake, the course of many rivers were blocked by landslides while many other changed their courses considerably. The Brahmakund in Lohit district, a widely renowned place of Hindu pilgrimage, celebrated since the days of the *Mahabharata*, had been obliterated without a trace. The damage caused by the earthquake was manysided. Old mountain tracks and bridges, built over years, had been swept away, and many villages lie burried under tons of accumulated debris. The once flourishing town of Sadiya on

the north bank of the Brahmaputra with many historical associations, and brought to prominence in the accounts of all early British explorers, had been completely wiped out of existence.¹² Pasighat township was badly damaged. The only motorable road Koboghat, which connected Pasighat with Sadiya was completely dislocated. The river Siang eroded deep into the heart of the town. Pasighat had become a ruined and an isolated town. In 1950 ultimately, the administrative headquarter of Siang was shifted from Pasighat to Along.¹³

The country is covered by forest. Due to heavy and continuous rains for the greater part of the year, luxuriant evergreen vegetation is the most characteristic of this region. Thick jungles, with tall, stout trees with long creepers around them, are to be found everywhere, and in the extreme lower belt there are bushy jungles and shrubs in abundance. Of the climbers, cane is most ubiquitous. Orchids are in great abundance here. Orchids species numbering upto 40 and representing 16 genera have been noted from a running collection. From this collection, one species is said to be new to the Himalayan region and the Malayan species of *Coelogyne Carnea* Hook was recorded for the first time from India.¹⁴

(The Southern part of the region is remarkable for great wealth of vegetation. Among the big and valuable trees 'forming especially dense stand' are simul, hollock, bola, khokan, borpat, the oak and makahi. Bamboo of different varieties and stand is to be found in great abundance. There are also variety of fruit trees like mango, Jack fruit, lichee, orange and lemon etc. Generally oranges are plenty in the north and central region of the country.)

The banks and flood plains of several rivulets criss-crossing the entire region are literally choaked with gregarious under-growths of tall grass, chiefly *neyraudia reyna-udiana* with intertwining *equisetum* sp. and dotted with trees of *bombax ceilea* of various age.¹⁵

(The fauna is typical of the Indo-Himalayan and Burmese regions. Tigers, leopards, wild boars, monkeys, Himalayan black bears, barking deer, wild-goats, bats, squirrels and porcupine are common. There are innumerable species of

birds, butterflies, and reptiles and the country as a whole is a rich hunting ground for a naturalist.)

(The wild buffalo (bubalus) occurs mostly in the plain areas along river banks and the gaur (bos gaurus) in the lower foothills. The domesticated variety of gaur, the methun, once thought to be a separate species and named *Bos frontalis*, is now considered as a variety only. The methun is kept as a beef animal by the people and it leads a semidomesticated life. Among the birds are the green magpie, tre-pies, grey and sultan tits, parrot bills, various laughing thrushes, babblers, sibia, siva, bulbul, cuckoo, shrike, minivet, fly catcher, warbler, munia, finches, martin, flower pecker, sunbird, broad bill, woodpecker, barbet, bee-eater, hornbill, wood pecker, owl, hawk, eagle, dove, pigeon, jungle fowl, sand pipers and ducks.¹⁶)

Among the reptiles there is a large number of snakes found in the region and the poisonous varieties are represented by the vipers, kraits and cobras; and among the amphibious, various species of frogs and toads are met with; moths, butterflies, bees, wasps, ants, flies, sand-flies, dragonflies, beetle etc. are common insects.¹⁷

The rivers in the area teem with a variety of game fishes. Ingenious methods are employed to catch fish by the people. Among the more common game fishes are the mahasser (or putioea) of which all the three varieties red, brown and the golden occur here, the boak (*barbus hexagonolepis*), gharia (*Labeo dyosche-ilus*), wallago (*wallago attu*), sol (*Chana striatus*) and a number of other carps are found.¹⁸

The varied topography has a profound influence on the climate which varies according to elevation and location. The mountainous parts in the North enjoy a mountain — type climate while the low-lying narrow peripheral plains and the valleys experience tropical climate owing the generally East-West orientation of the high mountain ranges, particularly in the North. Southernly rain bearing monsoon winds exert their full impact on the windward sides and over the valleys. Copious rainfall during the monsoon is therefore another important feature of the climate on this region. The annual average rainfall is heavy and consequently rivers and

streams overflow their banks and dislocate communications temporarily. It is the most unhealthy part of the year with enervating warm humidity and quick wildgrowth of underwood jungles.

Wind circulation is mainly influenced by the nature of terrain, which gives rise to various types of local winds. Winds blowing through mountain gaps emerge out of the gaps as strong currents. December and January are generally the coldest months and July and August are the warmest months.

PEOPLE

Origin, Migration and Present Distribution

The tradition of origin among the Adis as recorded by R.C.H. Gumming in 1931 for the Census Report, is as follows: "In none of these tribes there are any traditions of origin which go back very far. All claim origin from one race or tribe settled at Killing in the Bomo-Janbo country. From Killing, part of the tribe journeyed south across the Siyom river and occupied the hilly country between that river and Subansiri and the Brahmaputra. They are now known as Galongs. Others crossed the Dihang (San Fo) or settled on its bank or neighbourhood."²⁰ In the *Census Report of 1961*, they are stated to be immigrants from the Kham Province of Tibet.²¹

(According to Minyong tradition, the ancestors of the Minyongs used to live on some snow ranges near about Killing Lidung which supports the *Census Report of India 1961*. They still say, "Killing Lidung king Gidung Lennahi, Kangge Lita King Gilat Lennahi" (once we crossed Killing land and migrated southwards).²² In fact, it is not possible to arrive at any definite conclusion regarding the original home of the people, the routes of immigration and dates of settlement not only of the Minyongs but other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.) W. Robinson in his, *A Descriptive Account of Assam* rightly observes: "It seems almost vain to attempt to lift up the dark veil which conceals the origin of the tribes, to trace back their history, or to gain any information of the various revolutions by which they have been influenced; these subjects

belong to times and circumstances which are beyond the limit of certain knowledge. It would be most cautious and perhaps the most philosophical course, to abstain from any conjecture relative to their origin or from any attempt to penetrate into the nature of causes of which even the most distant results are but partially known to us. Therefore, we must depend on the reflected light which is obtained by the comparison of language, by the analysis of civil and religious institutions and mythological fable, or by tracing clearly marked affinities in the manners and customs of different tribes."²³

From the beginning of humanity, there have been movements of people, races and linguistic groups. If there would not have been any movement of population, there would not have been any racial admixture. The home of the Aryans is said to be in Central Asia; the home of the Dravidians was probably some where in the Middle East. The home of the people speaking Tibeto-Burman languages was in the basin of the great rivers of China, viz. Hoang-Ho and Yangtsikiang. Aryans have spread over Middle East, Europe and from Europe they have spread over terra incognita America, Australia and New Zealand. The Dravidians have now spread over India mostly south of the Vindhya. The Tibeto-Burmans are now found in Burma, Tibet and India.²⁴ From Killing Lidung, the Minyong moved Southward, but they did not follow the course of the Siang. Instead, they came down towards Angong Valley to Mane-Pere and crossed the Takeg Adi near Dibok and finally settled at Riga and afterwards some of them followed North-eastwards and settled at pangkang. Thus, Riga and Pangkang became the first and second village of the Minyongs. Later on, a section of them managed to cross the mighty Siang at Tayek Pigo near Riu and finally spread over the areas of Riu, Komsing, Beging, Pangin, Kebang, Yemsing, Rottung, Renging and as far as Sido-Ledum.)

(Another group from Pangkang and Riga moved South-western side and subsequently settled at Sitang, Parong, Dosing, Pareng, Sine, Yuging.) Some of them continued to march towards west and crossed Liber Adi and spread over Rumgong, Jomo, Mopung, Molom, Yogong, Yosing and they

have now constituted the Sirit Banggo. From there, again a group migrated towards the valley of the Siyom and settled at Mori, Lorging, Damda, Jomlo, Sipeng and Pangkeng and they are known as Siyom Banggo. With the growth of population, in search of fertile and plain land, and at the shock of great Earthquake of 1950, many people found their hilly areas inhospitable and dangerous for habitation and started migration further south and crossed Bapi Adi near Renging and spread over at Pasighat, Roing, Mongku, Taki Lalung, Rutne, Yagrung, Miklung, Mirem, Bilat, Mikong, Rayang, Rani and Debing Depi. The Taduns of the Gallongs near Kombong village are allied with the Minyongs. Once some of them migrated from Yemsing and Kebang.²⁵ At present, the Minyong land is divided into three broad regions. The Upper region covering the area of Yambung, Bambang and Simang valley including Kebang, Rottung and Yomgo Minyongs i.e., the Sirit and Siyom Banggo and Ayring Minyong or people inhabiting in and around Pasighat including Debing-Depi and Sido-Ledum.

For a long time they have been cocks of the Assam border. Very independent and uncontrollable, they had come to regard themselves as the rulers of this far distant corner of India from the fact that so many of the Miris had submitted to their exactions.²⁶ The Minyong Abors probably had close relations with the Ahoms of the Brahmaputra Valley, for during the Moamaria Rebellion of 1792-93 twenty to thirty thousand Abors are said to have assisted the Ahom Monarch.²⁷

(Minyongs are of southern Mongoloid descent, though their characteristics differ considerably. The men of the north, stand over six feet while southern are short and squarely built. They are active, jolly, frank, lovers of freedom and independence, generous, simple, plain-spoken and honest.²⁸ There is a saying about the character of the Minyongs, "Nyioboe tungkung, Kaboe tablat" which means once a deception is detected, they never come back for reconciliation as the flood of the Dihang cannot be checked by any one.²⁹ They are fearless, their hair and eyes are black; the skin is brown; the eyes stand at right angles with the nose. the forehead is flat, the face is broad, the nose short, the cheekbones somewhat prominent and stature moderate.³⁰)

The people are hunters by taste, and farmers by necessity, yet they are excellent cultivators, Their granaries are well stored with rice, maize and several other products. The bow is their favourite weapon and they use it with great dexterity. It is their *Vade mecum*, the first toy of the child, who shoots from morning till night.³¹ The Minyongs of both sex is very partial to necklaces of turquoise stones, and to all kinds of beads.³²

The Minyong language, including Padam, Gallong and Miri belongs along with Nishi and Apatani to what may be termed, the Central Group which dominates the linguistic topography of Arunachal Pradesh. This group is fortunate in having received the attention of more linguists and anthropologists than any other speech form. *The Linguistic Survey of India* treats the Central group as whole fixing its emphasis mainly on Nishi and Miri, because it was only for these two, that sufficient material was available at that time.³³ *The Research of North-East Frontier Agency* (now Arunachal Pradesh) has arrived at different conclusions on the Agency languages and has given priority to the preparation of anthologies of folk-literature and dictionaries. *The Anthropological Department of the Government of India* undertook extensive tours in Adi country from 1948 and collected data for a systematic and scientific study of the Adi language. But the results of its researches are yet to be published. Besides, Lorrain's Dictionary, a few text books, a grammar and some stray references and observations in books, on wider subjects nothing special is yet available.³⁴ Minyong is still only a spoken dialect; it has no script, Yet in the neighbourhood of the headquarters and outposts and administrative centres are influenced predominantly by their dialect. To-day, the common medium of communication with other people are Assamese, Hindi and English; these languages have been introduced in the schools of Arunachal Pradesh as medium of instruction.

ECONOMY

Agriculture

(Agriculture is the most important economic activity of the people. About 70% of the total area is under cultivation and about 95% of the population is directly dependent upon

agriculture.³⁵ B. Kuppaswamy writes in his '*Social Change in India*' "in the simple tribal economy there are no separate economic activities. The economic, religious, the political activities and others are all interwoven. Further, the tribal economy is essentially of the subsistence type, in which the production is for direct consumption," the tribals of Central India, in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal practise shifting cultivation; it is known also as shifting axe cultivation which consists of cutting the trees on the hill slopes and setting fire to them. (Before the onset of the rainy season, the soil is prepared with primitive implements e.g., dao, axes and pointed bamboos and seeds of various crops are sown in the same plot and accordingly different crops like paddy, maize and millets are reaped at different seasons.) But this may not be applicable to all tribal people in India today. (The tribes of the North-eastern region in Assam, Arunachal etc. are more advanced in agriculture. Some of them like the Minyong, Padam, Apatani and Regma Nagas are expert in terrace cultivation. They have some surplus products which they sell at the weekly markets and village fairs, and even supply to Food Corporation of India, particularly the Minyongs and Padams of East Siang district.)

(In Minyong villages, farming methods vary according to local conditions.) Shifting (slash and burn) cultivation is practised extensively by the people of the mountains (upper region) beyond Renging; dry field cultivation which relies upon soil moisture is common in the drier areas. Wet-rice cultivation depends on the summer monsoon rainfall. Farmers in the upper region irrigate their field, wherever there is any plain area and others in the lower belt, rely on regular annual flood.

(Rice is by far the most important crop. Maize, millet and varieties of vegetables such as potatoes, cabbage etc. are also grown in abundance. Tobacco, sugarcane are also grown in some places.) No mechanisation of soil has been made so far, because soil are full of natural fertility until now, and the people are also practicing only single crop system throughout the season. (The domestic animals are methun, cow, pig, buffalo and goat. Methun is the most important and valuable domestic animal. In the society, there are three

kinds of ownership of land, — personal land, clan land and village land. The land which is held in individual ownership and is inherited through the father, is personal land; the land which is utilised by a particular clan for trapping, fishing or grazing purposes is clan land; the land on the fringes of villages, where there are forests providing the villagers with firewood, vegetables garden, and also for hunting and fishing is the village-land.³⁶ The individual's status in society is determined by his possession of land.³⁷

Perhaps, the most striking feature of the Minyong society is the lack of extreme economic inequalities. In a country where land is still cheap and abundant, nearly every person could become independent and no large class of dependant labourers could develop. Some families are relatively rich and others poor; but the difference between them is negligible. General happy mediocrity prevails in the society.

Farmer's life is by no means easy; it is always filled with unremitting toil throughout the year. But the rewards are often substantial. Barring some natural catastrophe — they raise variety of food crops in abundance which is unknown to other people of the tribal world. Producing almost all the necessities of life for themselves, they need to sell some surplus to earn money and to buy sugar, tea, salt and soap and a few other articles such as cloth and metal. But this independence does not mean isolation. They live close to their neighbours, and co-operation and generous hospitality are customary.

Trade Routes

+ Trade in the early days was based on the principles of barter, and brass bowls, beads and cattle, and cloth were used as medium of exchange among the people. It was inter-village trade. This was supplemented by trade across the frontier. During the British rule the people carried on trade with the Tibetans, as also with the Boris and Bokars, whose area lay in between and who often acted as intermediaries. Salt, beads, brass bowls and coats were most prized articles, which were brought from Tibet and bartered with cattle, spears, daos, rice and chillies. But the pathways which existed, were mere

animal tracks, while the 'best roads' were the chasms through which the rivers flowed. When the traveller was not wading waist-deep through these, he was crawling along the narrow ledges, cut out of the face of high precipices. Now and again he came to places where there was no ledge, while the path, such as it was, was continued by a rude gallery contrived out of the face of the cliffs, or he found himself compelled to climb perpendicular cliffs with the aid of cane ropes.³⁸

The Pailibos carried on their trade through intermediaries of the Ramos, the Bokars and the Membas.³⁹ There was a relatively less important trade route through the Mishmi country coming down to Aborka Pass to as far as Karko. The main items of merchandise were Mishmi coats.⁴⁰ Since 1947, there has been considerable retardation in barter trades with the Tibetans.

The Adi dao, cotton and the cotton rug or *Adi Jim* have been greatly prized in the plains. For lower Minyong region, until the earthquake of 1950, Sadiya used to be trading centre. Since the extinction of Sadiya, Dibrugarh became the convenient trading centre of the people.⁴¹

Industry

"Industry in modern sense practically did not exist among the tribal people of the North-East Frontier. But cottage industry to produce household requirements existed almost among all tribes"⁴² It is really true particularly with the case of the Minyongs. The people produced cotton blankets artistically designed called "Jim" or *Gadu*, and coats, lungi or gale for own requirements only. Occasionally, surplus one was sold in the markets. But it is to be admitted that these were not produced for commercial purposes. Handicraft works such as basketry, cane and bamboo hats, bags etc. were there but without demand from the outside world.

Fairs

There were no weekly or monthly fairs or daily markets inside the tribal belt, particularly in North-East Frontier Agency. People could neither sell their surplus products nor purchase their daily requirements. During the British period,

some trading shops at Pasighat and Sadiya were set up by tradesmen with official licence, but essential items such as sugar, ghee, milk and luxuries-soap and cloth were not allowed to be purchased by the tribal people. Only salt, tobacco and agricultural implements were available to them,⁴³ However, there were some weekly fairs in the foothills outside the Inner Line at Murkongselek, Laithmekuri, which are in continuance till these days. After 1837, fairs were held inside Inner Line, as was the case with Sadiya. At such fairs, Padam, Minyongs, Mishmis and other tribals could sell their products and purchased their annual requirements.

Fair is an important institution for an agrarian society. Farmers after the end of their harvesting season, take stock of their last season's balance and plan for the next year. They sell what they consider surplus and purchase new and essential items for next year. The British were mainly interested in finding out an expanding outlet for goods manufactured at home. An annual fair was held at Udalguri where the Sherdukpens and Akas exchanged ponies, sheep, dogs, salt, a little gold, blankets, yak's skin and tails, musk, chillies, spices, wax, madder, oranges, walnuts for English and Assamese clothes, yarn, rice, betel-nuts, brass and iron utensils, bar iron etc. It is recorded that in 1875 and 1876 the fair was visited by 2,000 and 3,000 tribesmen respectively.⁴⁵

The Government Report on Fairs gives the export and import figures of 1885 at Udalguri as Rs. 90,380.00 and 1,20,792.00 respectively.⁴⁶

The biggest annual fair was held at Sadiya, where the main transaction from the hills were the Miris, Mishmis, Khamtis, Singphos and Adis. As early as 1837, the Government of India instructed the Bengal Government to arrange a fair, and make it a rendezvous for the tribal chiefs. Rabijit Choudhury writes, "It (fair) was advertised among the ryots and the different chiefs of the Singphos, Khamti and Abor and Mishmi tribes through interpreters. A sports ground was prepared and accommodation was arranged for the visitors. The total expenditure in getting up the fair and in

feeding the tribal visitors was Rs. 1,000/- only, double the amount originally assessed."⁴⁷ "In 1876, 3000 tribesmen were present and the numbers rose in later years. In 1874, they brought down over Rs. 25,000/- worth their own articles and took home goods to the value of Rs. 17,630/-. In 1876, the turnover was much greater : they sold Rs. 49,100/- and brought Rs. 44,475/- worth of goods."⁴⁸ This indicates that the hills were having a favourable balance of trade, that is their exports exceeded imports, leading to inflow of each (Indian rupees) into the tribal economy. Goods sold by the tribesmen were handicrafts, hand-woven cloth, rubber, copris Tita (Mishmi Tita), elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, and various other forest products etc. Goods purchased by them at the fair were English yarn, English pottery, salt, brass pots, iron, sugar, gur and opium etc.

It is significant to note that in 1879, according to the Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for 1878-79, 40 Europeans took part in the fair for exchanging goods with the hillmen.⁴⁹ The British were actually looking for opening of a trade route to China through these hills. The plan was to export broad clothes etc. to Yunan through this route. "It was finally given up when it was found that it would be cheaper to send exports to Yunan via Rangoon as water communication by the Irawaddy is facile."⁵⁰

As regards manufacturers, with the exception of spearheads, daos, hoes and a few articles of this nature, these tribes were incapable of producing quality implements or utensils of their daily use. Even among the advanced Padams, Krick remarks, "the worker in an iron can be called neither a blacksmith nor a farrier; his anvil is a stone, a bamboo serves as a substitute for the bellows and the work is as wretched as the tools"⁵¹ The genius of some of these hillmen, however, was revealed in their commercial traffic with the people of the north and the south. In spite of extreme difficulties of inter-communication, the Mishmis formed as the intermediaries between the Assamese on the one side, and the Chinese on the other, the Adi economy was linked up with the Miris; and they took from the latter salt, cloth and other requirements from Assam in exchange of daos, cooking utensils and slaves; some of these formed the imports of Tibet.⁵²

The trade fairs helped boost up production of various primary goods and products of handloom and handicrafts in the tribal villages. This became a source of generating surplus in the tribal economy. But one disastrous effect of the growth of trade relations with the plains was the reckless use of natural resources for increased earnings. S.E. Real in his report on a visit to the Nongyang Lake, on the Burmese frontier, in February 1879 noted : "Kaiyas, or Marwari merchants, or their agents, are now seen at every place of importance, they exchange opium, brass-ware, and clothes for ivory, rubber, and such like. Indirectly, they have been the cause of the extermination of the rubber trees over large tracts; the ready sale for ivory has also asset to the natural tendency among the Nagas to hunt and kill elephants for the sake of their flesh."⁵³ C.R. MacGregor in his *Notes on the Akas and Akaland* also observed "Rubber is the chief source of wealth of the Akas...at present the rubber supply is large; but the reckless way in which the Akas treat the trees will probably soon lessen their source of supply."⁵⁴ His forecast came true in no time; the hills became denuded of rubber trees.

Another important source of leakage of resources from the tribal villages was the import of opium from outside. Opium constituted an important item of purchase by the hill men. According to Elwin, "In one year at the trade fair at Sadiya the value of opium sold to the tribesmen amounted to Rs.30,300."⁵⁵

It was the policy of the colonial rulers not only to earn profits from opium traffic, but also to keep the frontier tribes subdued, and morally and physically weak by encouraging them to be addicted to opium-taking. The growing habit did cause demoralisation, indolence, and poverty of the addicts. Commenting on the prevalence of this obnoxious habit Verrier Elwin said: "... in my opinion, opium addiction is a greater evil than head-hunting... The Noctes, Konyaks and Mishmis addicted to opium are poor, thin, miserable, caught in a various circle so that the poorer they grow, the more they turn to opium for relief, and the more they smoke, the poorer they become."⁵⁶

RELIGION AND CULTURE

The European writers and officers on whose writings or reports we have to depend mainly for our information of the North-East frontier during the British Regime, have not left any favourable account of the religious practices of the tribal people. Their general attitude towards the tribal religion is that, the tribes did not have any religion at all, or that it was a mixture of all the various idolatries and superstitions.⁵⁷ In fact, it is a poor and wrong opinion about the tribal people. They have indigenous faith and practices. 'In the sphere of religion, says Sochin Roy, 'fundamental beliefs go back to the dawn of civilisation. All objects around them were to them as animate as themselves, they lived in a world where everything was living with invisible spirits presiding in them. Animatism, animism and supernaturalism came to be basic ingredients of Adi religion.'⁵⁸

(The Minyongs believe in the existence of a supernatural being, who is all powerfull, omnipotent, and whose existence is even beyond the reach of modern science and technology. Everything that exists in the universe, is existing through Him. He is called Donyi-Polo, the Hindus called Him Bhagavan, the Muslims called Him Allah while the European called Him God.⁵⁹ The physical celestial body, the sun and the moon are also called Donyi-Polo by the Minyongs. In wider connotation Donyi-Polo is the common spiritual authority of the Adis.)

(The supernatural world of the Minyongs consists of supernatural being and spirits-malevolent and benevolent. Among the malevolent-*Urom* (Spirits of dead persons), *Nipak Porak* (Common evil spirits), *Asi-Among Uyu* (Spirits of Jungles), *Epom-ejeng Uyu* (God of wild animals), *Banji-banmang* (God of hunting) and among the benevolent, *Kine-nana Ute-Poro* (Goddess of wealth and prosperity), *Togungyogam* (God of protection). Sometimes, if offended, they act and behave like human beings, they take revenge by causing harm to the offender.) For instance, *Asi-among Uyu*. when offended, takes revenge against the offending person causing serious illness; sells the soul of the person to other evil spirits from one jungle to another. It is called *Asi-Among Kinam* (ailment

of the jungle). They also cause *Ammo Kinam* (failure of the crops), cause damages to the houses by lightening and similar other calamities. Such abnormal behaviour of the supernatural being is appeased by performing appropriate rites and sacrifices with fowl, pig, and methun. Nature, more hostile than friendly, appears to the people to be controlled by a host of spirits who are ill disposed towards men and lurk in every corner looking out for chances for doing them harm. And the religion of the Minyongs is moulded in practice to counteract it. "His untutored mind sees a demon everywhere, in the sun and the thunder, the earth and the water. It is a spirit of evil that takes lift from all things that have breath, that smites with sickness, that, in the questionable shape of a kinsman from some distant villages, lures the unfortunate to his doom in the dark recesses of the forest. And, the beginning and end of his religion, in sickness and in health in peace time and in war, in the agonies of death and in the burial rites that follow, is to appease the malevolent spirits of an unseen world,"⁶⁰

The spirits of the dead form a separate category in the supernatural world. They are called *Urom*. (Minyongs believe that every individual after death, turns into a spirit and leads an ethereal existence; the spirit occasionally shows itself to a particular person in the shape of the dead person. Sometimes, they cause illness to human being, which is called *Urom-Kanam*. They are vividly called as '*Nipong-Urom*' (Female spirits), '*Taleng-Urom*' (spirit of the sky). A spirit remembers its friends, kinsman, even belongings and occasionally appears before them in dreams.)

An ordinary person cannot see a spirit either in daylight or at night. There are some people in the society who possess certain spiritual qualities. They are well conversant with the language of the spirits and with all technicalities of religious rites of the society. They are called '*Miri*'. Apart from giving physician's medicine, an ailing person is cured through a ceremonial performance which is called '*ipaknam*' or offer of prayer to demons and spirits. To determine the type of illness and the particular spirit responsible, some rice grains wrapped in a leaf are taken near the patient and the spirit

is invoked to come inside the grains. Then the grains are taken to a '*Miri*' who carefully determines the identity of the spirit and prescribes particular offerings necessary to please him.⁶¹ In accordance with the advice of the *Miri* an altar is erected with variety of wild leave; offerings are made. A methun or pig with some fowls are sacrificed near the altar. The '*Miri*' and the '*Mijik*' use the entrails of the fowls livers as signs of their forecast. After completion of these formalities, the '*Miri*' restricts the diets of the ailing person; such as to abstain from taking liquor, pork, wild boar meat and chillies, variety of vegetables and even salt for a specific period; and also restricts his movement towards the rivers and jungles. It is called '*Nyionan*' or observance.⁶² But there is no separate *Miri* class in the society. Any one may become *Miri* at any period if one is liked by the spirits. One thus possesses extraordinary qualifications and generally is above the ordinary. A great deal of perseverance and concentration is necessary for one who can freely communicate with spirits and see them when desired. A *Miri* in a trance can even forget his surroundings and attain a state suggestive of hysteria during which he enters into heated arguments with an obstinate demon or spirit who may refuse to leave the body of the afflicted person. With his sword violently shaken, his appearance keeps all in intense suspense and sometimes, when he tries to run or jump up, he is restrained by attendants.⁶³

The '*Mijik*' is one who locates the spirits by studying the liver of a chicken. Liver is considered to possess the power of revealing the mysteries of the spirit land and so *Miri* or *Mijik* consult to trace out the cause of ailment. He occasionally meets the spirits in dream, so he tells the family members of the ailing person to perform offering of sacrifices to such and such diety responsible for the sickness. In most cases, he initiates the sacrifices to propitiate the spirits. Such performance are not only psychologically beneficial but also cures the ailments and other physical disabilities. Sometimes, even a fractured leg or hand is completely plastered and cured by a '*Miri*' which is a direct challenge to a modern orthopedic specialist. (The Minyong society has been witnessing this phenomena from time immemorial.)

The hollock tree is a favourite haunt of the Epom-Ejeng that waylays unwary travellers. So when a man goes out and does not return, the villagers go out in a body and stage an attack with daos and arrows on a hollock tree in the vicinity in the hope that the spirit residing in it may be frightened into giving up its prisoner. This is perhaps the nearest approach to the forcing of spirits into carrying out the wishes of men among the Minyongs. The 'Epon' may sometimes appear in human form, but it may not always augur well for a man to see him. For instance, he may be seen, in the likeness of an old gray bearded man, sitting under a tree or roaming in the forest. Occasionally, till now, this sylvan spirit kidnaps man and woman in the region. Generally minor kids are their easy prey. It may be due to widespread dense jungle in the entire region.

(In the event of an epidemic of any kind, the Minyongs construct a gate near the village, suspending a cane thread across with bamboo shavings hanging from it. A dog is sacrificed at this gate. It is called '*Torgo Monam*' or '*Ekipator*' (gate against evil spirits). If any one from a different village should enter the village, taking no notice of the gate, he is invariably caught and made to pay a heavy fine. Sometimes, they even block all roads to the village by felling trees across the paths and passages. They believe that by this method the evil spirits ill-disposed towards the village can be kept at bay. They also perform a special offering against ominous spirits. It is called '*Rogum-Sinam*'. When one of the family members narrowly escapes from an accident like falling from trees or from the attack of wild animals, snakes, the soul of the man is supposed to have fled away with the evil spirits and to bring back the soul of the member to the house.⁶⁴ Guests are not allowed to enter the house and the family observes *genna* for at least three days.)

(The Minyongs believe that every material object has 'soul'. If anybody commits an offence by stealing some one's fowl or methun, he is to give an additional poultry or methun for sacrifice. If anybody steals a string of beads, he must, in addition to the compensation for theft, give a pig or fowl to persuade the soul to return into the necklace⁶⁵ and is applied to an exceptional case only.

(In case of occurrence of land dispute between two parties, a ritualistic oath '*Peki-Nikki Sinam*' is administered to the parties involved. Soil is accepted as media of justice. A handful of soil is taken out by both the parties from the disputed area and is thrown at each other, and then eaten up by the two parties before the presence of the village members. Afterwards, within short period of time, the guilty one develops blood vomiting his urine, stool etc. also become bloody; ultimately he dies. Whereas the innocent one enjoy longevity of life.)

(Though worship of any idol or images are not found among the Minyongs, there are make-believe images made of wild leaves and bamboo, represented differently by the images and find their separate places in different cultivated fields such as *Mopun-Monam*, *Lipum-Panam* or corners in the villages, where offerings of egg or fowls are made to them. Every object of nature rain, sun, snake, wild animals and trees receive their share of worship from the Minyong people.)

(Still a considerable number of people of Arunachal Pradesh follow what may be called tribal religion or so called the animism, which is a sort of primitive religion found anywhere in the tribal world.) The characteristics of primitive religion, as Will Durant has observed, "are an animistic fear and worship of spirits lurking anywhere, a poetic reverence for the impressive forms and reproductive power of earth, and an awed adoration of a heaven, whose energising sunlight and fertilising rains are parts of the sky."⁶⁶ This definition of animism is corroborated by Prof. B.O. James who writes : "The doctrine of animism represents a complex attempt to interpret the materials and spiritual aspects of the phenomenal world by resolving the universe into a fundamental dualism of body and soul."⁶⁷ Closely connected with religion is the practice of disposing of dead bodies. The dead body is kept in the house for one full day. A special sacrifice known as *Dotgang* is offered to the departed soul. The sacrifice may involve a methun in case of rich families; a poor household has to be satisfied with sacrificing a pig, or even some fowls. It is believed that the animals would accompany the soul of the deceased.⁶⁸ An old man or a

woman, near relative of the deceased starts the funeral hymns known as *Penge*. In *Penge*, he addresses the *Aiith* (soul) of the deceased, cautions him about the difficulties and dangers lying ahead of him in land of the dead. He tells him to go carefully for there are steep climbs and deep rivers to negotiate on the way. He must proceed by stages, camping when he must. He is specially warned of the dangers, while he has to cross through the land of the spirits, who always look out to catch straying soul.

The Soul of a man, after its separation from the body goes to the domain of that spirit who has been the instrument of his death. The soul of the woman goes to the realm of *Nipong-Uyu* (land of female spirit); those killed in forest become subject of *Epom* and *Miris* go to a special district ruled by 'Boki' and 'Bogo' (God of flute and orchestra). In the land of the soul they enjoy the status that they had on earth and live the same way of life and they also feel the same want for the things they owned here. So it is customary to dedicate the possessions of a man when he dies. These are placed either inside the grave or on the top of it and if it is not possible to part with such things, representative tokens are buried instead.

A fairly deep grave is dug up, not far from the village. The body is wrapped in a sheet of cloth and is made to lie on one side with its knees touching the chin. In that position, it is laid down in the grave. Over the body are placed planks so as to cover it and then the hole is filled up with earth. On the ground above the grave, a small hutlike structure is built in which rice and rice bear are kept. These are changed daily for a week and then only the rice is left there for as long as it will last. After the burial of the body, villagers who take part in the proceedings go down to the streams or rivers for a bath. A fire is kindled inside the hut and kept burning for a very long period, which may be as long as one year in ordinary cases and a few days more for men of importance; but for a child, hardly for one month. Personal belongings of the deceased such as hats, weapons and trophies are hung on the structure and left there.

The idea of soul, matter as a fertilising agent is probably also responsible for distinctive treatment of the bodies of those who, die by "bad" death and are therefore probably

either infertile or unsettle or likely to lead to the reproduction of bad results. It is thus, that we find everywhere special treatment accorded to the bodies of women, who die in child birth, while other forms of death are treated differently, i.e. as bad or otherwise, by different tribes. In the case of persons killed by wild beasts, the idea is perhaps that the soulstuff of the dead is absorbed by the wild animal.⁷⁰

(Whatever, the nomenclature may be, the Minyongs have their own religion. Their religion is an important part of their identity. Their religion is based on a strong sense of history, a pride in the descent of the race from a great ancestor, and a belief in the value of sacrifice for the common good; and is closely associated with social ethics — generosity, hospitality, truth, kindness and devotion to work. Finally, gives them the power to reconcile themselves to frequent emergencies of life.⁷¹)

CULTURE

(The Minyongs have a rich culture and a glorious tradition. They are lovers of beauty and an artistic people. No one can withhold his admiration from the best traditional products of their arts, the splendour of its weaving, the gaily and variety of its songs and dances.) Verrier Elvin writes, in his '*A philosophy for NEFA*': I believe that by encouraging the arts of the tribal people, creating in them a pride in their own products, keeping before them their own finest patterns and designs, and by providing them with raw materials, it will be possible to inspire a renaissance of creative activity through out the hill areas of India, especially in Assam where there is so much on which to build. There is thus, no question of keeping the people 'as they are'. We are not aiming at a mere preservation of culture, the establishment of a static society under museum conditions. We want more, much more of living to enrich a people, who in the past have had to face unimaginable hardship and isolation."⁷²

(Apart from the thatched huts, which almost all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have, cane and bamboo are used in making different kinds of baskets, household utensils, suspension bridges, fishing and hunting traps, dress and ornaments, war implements and religious paraphernalia etc. house

From the point of view of multifarious use of bamboo and cane, a part of the material culture of the people of Arunachal Pradesh may be called as bamboo and cane culture.⁷³ Making of cane and bamboo crafts item is a man's job, but there is no taboo for women. Normally, the womenfolk devote their leisure time at the loom and produce varieties of textile items.)

(The Minyongs have colourful dress and garments of own style and pattern. The arts of weaving and handicrafts are believed to roll down to their Society from the land of Engo-Takar, a civilised group of people when the world was young.) The traditional inventor of implements is a semidevine hero, who was the first ironsmith and maker of ornaments; he persuaded the woodpecker, to cut holes in the first beads he made. The Singphos describe how the first craftsmen learnt how to make a stone hammer by watching an elephant's feet crushing everything beneath them and a pair of tongs, when a crab caught him with its claws.⁷⁴ The arts are part of the mythology and draw their vitality from very ancient roots.

(The items of game and sports are — archery, tug of war, swing. Archery is of two kinds — archery on moving object and on unmoving, i.e., fixed target.) Young boys of the village collect bows and arrows from every house and gather on play-ground and perform archery competition. (The belief behind this archery game is to remove all diseases and germs from the surface of the earth, with the power of bow and arrows.) By practicing on moving object and unmoving object during the archery competition, the menfolks get habit and skill of shooting a running animal with arrows and in the same way by virtue of the second method, one gets confidence of shooting of unmoved object.⁷⁵

(The Minyongs celebrate a number of festivals such as *Unying*, *Mopun* and *Solung*, which are considered vital to the well-being of the individual, the family and the community.) Methun, cattle, pig and fowls etc. sacrifice is common during festival; *Apong* or rice beer is abundant in every family. Every one sings, dances and enjoys *Ponung*. *Unying* is celebrated during January-February to mark and greet the new year. It

lasts for about fifteen days. At the concluding day of this festival, *Tapu Ganam* (war dance) is performed in the *Dere* (hall of the village council). In fact, on the eve of spring, this dance is performed in every Minyong village as a precautionary measure against all kinds of diseases and evil spirits. In ancient days it was also performed after a war as celebration of victory in the battlefield.

(During *Unying* festival, a special ceremonial dance is also performed. It is called *Roja-Ganam*. It is generally performed by issueless couple of the village, The object of this dance is to get blessing from the Almighty God for a child.) An altar with bamboo is erected in front of the house. Members of near and dear relatives perform the dance with swords and caps around it. The wife with male attire leads the dance. It is the traditional belief of the Minyongs that this dance blesses the couple with sons and daughters. In many cases it comes true. *Mopun* is celebrated during April to offer prayer to Goddess' Kine-Nane' for blessing the people with healthy crops. *Ponung* dance is performed during this festival. The theme of the *Ponung* dances are connected with mythological stories.

(Dancing has been described as life expressed in muscular movements. The pattern of life lived by a society is the creation of the human spirit in its endeavour to adjust itself to its surroundings.) The efforts again produce vibrations in the soul that are translated into expressive rhythms of the body. So the dance has been the natural method of expressing individual ideas and emotions, and of celebrating communal joys and sorrows, aspirations and fears, love and hatred, achievements and ideals.) Frequently, it is accompanied by singing of rhapsodic pieces which crystalise the same ideals in so many myths and legends. Such dances are the most controlled, refined, beautiful and profound revelation of the soul of the people.

(*Solung* is an annual festival of the Minyongs which comes during autumn. In *Solung*, the 'Abang' is very much consulted and, openly discussed. 'Abang' is the ornamental cultural literature of the Adis, dealing with the mythology of the creation of the universe. It is the source of light of knowledge of human civilisation and advancement in faith, belief and

practices of all culture of the Adis, like the flame of light which gives life to the society from generation to generation from times immemorial.) The *Solung Miri* (priest singer) of *Solung Ponung* plays the sword musical instrument in such a scale that the steps of *Ponung* dances are synchronised and excited by the movement of *Ponung* in rhythmic pose and speed. The sound of the ring of the sword keeps awake the body and mind of the members attending the *Ponung* whole night. During the *Ponung*, girls dance continuously through the night, the more the night deepens, warmer the dance becomes and the singer forgets himself with the sound of the instrument played by himself.⁷⁶ *Solung Ponung* is the old style of Adi dance which is sober and grave in pose and pattern. Oshong Ering writes, "The Adis of Arunachal are wonderful people who are very fond of traditional myths and stories. The Miris or Baris or the traditional tellers use to tell myths or stories in typical poetical languages, called, the *Abang*. One admires when the traditional Miris or Baris sing and dance for nights together, narrating the story of birth and creation of the universe, the earth, man, animals etc. Their religious, spiritual and ideological belief and faith are expressed through the *Abang*"⁷⁷ Many a festive nights, follows wearisome laborious days in which youthful feet tread the lawn in rhythmic glee to chase around the melodious 'Miri', gaunt hardships and lack privations ever haunting the hillmen's life.

As a matter of fact, occasions for songs and dances are many and varied. Some *Ponung* (songs) narrate the story of the origin of paddy, and is sung during *Mopun*; *Etor Ponung* on the evolution of methun, cock and *Solung Ponung* dealing with mythological stories regarding the creation of the universe. These are called *Abang*. *Luman Ponung* or entertainment songs which are sung while welcoming guest to the village. It includes love songs; boys sing in the *Dere* (dormitory) and girls in the girls dormitory. Generally, it is performed on all possible occasions simply for recreation. Young girls carrying younger brothers and sisters on their backs is a common sight in Minyong villages. The child generally keeps quiet, but when it starts weeping or otherwise fretting, the elder sister gives her body rhythmic jerks and rocks and sings lullabies. This is known as *Yo Yo Gognam*.⁷⁸

The third type of song is *Bari*, which is sung on festive occasions such as *Etor* and house warming ceremony. People gather round the fire and narrator starts singing the *Bari*. It deals with the legendary history of the house; how a house came to exist as dwelling place of human being or why human being required to build a house for shelter.⁷⁹ Most of the songs are connected with folktales transmitted by words by mouth from generation to generation in the absence of the art of writing.

They have a vast unwritten treasury of folk-tales. Most of these tales are based on imaginary objects which are natural as the origin of all creation in this earth or in this universe is a mystery to the people. One cannot fail to be impressed at the extent to which, their forefathers exercised their imagination to compose the stories which, going back to the beginning of time, describe in detail the various natural phenomena and the ultimate creation of *Tani* — the man who later introduced cultivation and acquired a property with which he settled down to a comfortable life.

'Tribal culture', said Pandit Nehru, 'lead to a way of life which particularly makes the people rejoice in song and dance. Our mentors who go to them frown at their way and tell them to desist from them in the name of reform. The result is that they lose somewhat that joy in life which they possess in abundant measure, and gain little else in its place. They become joyless and devitalised, dull and insipid. Surely, that is a wrong approach.'⁸⁰

To preserve and revitalise the cultural heritage of the people, every District Headquarters has a cultural centre, consisting of a museum, a library and an emporium for the sale of local products. This policy has been followed in part of Africa, where the display of the finest creations of the people's genius in places readily accessible to themselves has greatly encouraged their art. Another way of creating self respect for the people has been through pictures. Hundreds of enlarged photographs of Arunachal scenes and people have been distributed for display in offices, schools and hospitals in the interior. An attractive calendar illustrating the arts and crafts of Arunachal was published in 1958, and another

illustrating the dances of the people in 1959.⁸¹ These calendars are not only, or even primarily, for official use; the main purpose is to give the common man pictures for his home. The Belgian Congo, for example, has always been shown local scenes and people on its stamps. The French, in Africa, Oceania and elsewhere, have shown similar imagination. There are stamps from Togo with pictures of women, husking grain, men hunting deer and women spinning, as well as examples of carved masks and images. The Cameroons, the Ivory coast, Dahomey and Equatorial Africa have issued attractive sets illustrating men and women in their own attire, dancers, hunters, weavers and scenes of village life.⁸²

To-day, there are many all over India, who think that the unity of the nation, requires a recognition of uniformity or identity of the cultures of yesterday, but in fact this is against the ethos of Indian culture or our basic ethos of unity in diversity. Recognition of diversity is also in itself, a process of building up ourselves. In fact, diversity and differences of traditions, even differences of sentiments and emotions need not be barriers to building up a united nation. India itself is an amalgam of heterogeneous cultural groups. Tribals and other different communities with varied cultures and traditions — such as Assamea, Bengalee, Oriya, Telegu, Marathi, Kashmiri and so on. All these are various communities from one Indian culture. It is not a strange thing, nor something singular and extraordinary in the world. In America, there is no community named American though there is an American nation composed of diverse ethnic and cultural groups. So, is the case of Switzerland and also in Russia.

Dr. S.K. Chatterjee writes, in 'The Outlook on NEFA' "Culture is a mobile theme; it is a course of civilisation. If once upon time since 6000 years back or even less, according to the book, "Volga-Se-Ganga" our fore-fathers were merely food-gathering primitives. Today we live in a scientific era, an era of industrial civilisation. Are we not proud of it, or do we lament that we have lost days of the "Noble Savage"? Yet culture, like a hill stream, does not progress uniformly everywhere."⁸³

The Linguistic Survey of India has shown that the tribes living in the present frontier tracts speak a language of Tibeto-Burman family of North Assam with exception of the Khamties; the study of the population shows that they are of Mongoloid descent; and so a review of their culture leads one to conclude, that it is an admixture of Indian, Tibetan and Burmese elements.⁸⁴ But the recent excavations of Bhismarkanagar near Sadiya, of Malinithan in West Siang district and famous Parasuram Kund, the Hindu Pilgrimage in Lohit district and many other relics of Hindu culture at Bhalukpong, a Buddhist Gompa or Cave at Dirang and the Stupa at Vijayanagar in Tirap district, clearly speak that Arunachal culture belongs to the mainstream of Indian culture.

(If culture means the training and refinement of mind, tastes and manners on the conditions of being thus trained and reviewed, then the Minyongs are gifted with a cultural heritage which is rare in the contemporary world. Adi culture is reflected in their very way of life. It is simple and scientific, egalitarian and altruistic, and above all, liberal and wholistic. This unique culture is rooted in the customs and usages, myths and mythologies, both tales and folk dances, folk lores, folk songs, festivals and ceremonies, religious beliefs and social practices of the people.)