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NEHU

EDITORIAL

As you might perhaps have noticed, *The NEHU Journal* has started coming out regularly and with the current issue it celebrates its third birthday. I would also like to inform you that the journal is now refereed internationally the joy and pain of which I have put in my editorial of volume 2, number 2. I am positive that the journal will receive quality submissions in future not only from humanities and social sciences but also from the life and physical sciences that have so far remained outside the purview of the journal, not the least due to any policy but perhaps due to the hangover of its earlier *avatar* as the *North-Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, which the present journal continues to be called.

We at the editorial office of the journal are grateful that many of our colleagues have enrolled themselves as subscribers, but the number of subscribers it has today is still not enough to make it self-sustaining. This situation is certainly not desirable.

I therefore take this opportunity to request you all to send in your subscription amount at least for three years and those of you who are subscribers continue to support the journal till it becomes self-sustaining. On our part, I shall continue to try and improve the quality and reach of the journal with each issue.

T. B. Subba

Editor

Book Reviews

R. Gopalakrishnan

On Agrarian Structures and Land Reforms in Assam by M. N. Karna

I. M. Simon

On The Great Earthquake of 1897 in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills by Reverend Robert Evans

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Enemy Spirits, Allied Spirits: The Political Cosmology of Arunachal Pradesh Societies.*

PHILIPPE RAMIREZ

In Memory of Verrier Elwin

Since almost a century ago, few theorists have basically called into question the image which Max Weber proposed of a State monopolizing the use of legitimate violence.¹ Could it be inferred that the State-free societies would allow each individual a free access to violence? If the postulate may be acknowledged as true in principle, the common and dangerous Hobbesian image of stateless societies in prey with the free course of individual passions and interests must be seriously questioned. Several recent works have shown the eminently positive role of a social violence, which weaves and vitalizes the social fabric, notably by the sublimation of a sovereign value, the prestige.²

In certain Himalayan societies, violence definitely plays a central role, defining a privileged context where interpersonal bonds are built and destroyed, individual status assessed, and highest social ideals revealed. So we would like here to try and understand what certain civilizations of the Eastern Himalayas say themselves about violence: how is violence conceived, represented, where does it start, where does it lead to? What is its meaning and specially what is its role in the human world? To answer such questions, i.e., to understand an ideology from within, one of the most accessible as well as reliable methods lies in its religious expressions. We will agree on this point with Durkheim, for whom religion is first of all a discourse of the society on itself, but also — closer to the Himalayan cultural

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* The present article is a revised translation of a French article published in *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 277, 1989.

domain — with Edmund Leach, who suggested to understand the *nat*, the supernatural beings of the Kachin world, as “ways of describing the formal relationships that exist between real persons and real groups in ordinary Kachin society”.³ We will consider the case of several Tibeto-Burmese languages speaking groups of Arunachal Pradesh who, having for long remained away from both Tibetan and mainland Indian cultural influences, are of a particular interest for the anthropology of the whole Himalayan area.⁴ Through them we have access to ideologies which, elsewhere in Nepal, Bhutan, and Himalayan India, had been reshaped in the moulds of Hinduism, of Buddhism, and above all, of the State.

The Populations of Arunachal Pradesh

In the heart of Arunachal Pradesh (Subansiri, Siang and Dibang river basins), on a relatively limited (25,000 sq. km) and geographically homogeneous area, demographic, economic and settlement features are so diverse that one would be tempted, at first sight, to make finer distinctions. Cattle breeders or shifting cultivators inhabiting “long-houses” scattered in small hamlets, sedentary farmers practising rotation of crops and living in centralized villages, massive concentrations of wet rice growers organized in clan clusters, one cannot of course treat without reserves this whole as a monolithic block. Other criteria however go in the direction of homogeneity. The languages for instance are all part of the North-Assam group of the Tibeto-Burmese family,⁵ and are closely related. As for the identity, each ethnic group claims a common origin with most neighbouring groups, so that the label “Tani group” is now being widely used to designate them. Similarly, descent and kinship systems have many features in common, although not specific to this particular region. But the unity is above all apparent in the ritual and mythological domains, as the following pages will show. Similarities can be put into light not only in the nature of elements taken separately, but as well in the structural relations among them.

Despite the anthropological importance of the region, the literature concerning this part of the Himalayas, until 1971 the “North East Frontier Agency” (NEFA), is very recent and not very profuse, especially if one considers full-fledged social or cultural anthropology. Beside G Dunbar’s 1915 invaluable but relatively short report on the Siang area, the only pre-independence significant material was provided by C. von Furer-Haimendorf

on the Subansiri area in 1947.⁶ In the 1960-70s, the Arunachal Pradesh "Directorate of Research" series offered a precious set of monographs on almost every community of the State, although focussing mainly on material culture and generally disregarding belief systems. One of the noticeable exceptions was the contribution of S. Roy on the Padam and Minyong.⁷ The last twenty-five years have experienced a blossom of substantial anthropological works, particularly under the impetus of Itanagar-based researchers, around Parul Dutta, Tamo Mibang and B.B. Pandey.⁸ Beside anthropology *per se*, Arunachal cultures have been approached from the angle of folklore, following the lead of Verrier Elwin.⁹ This made available a sum of oral traditions, which, by the use of mythological analysis, may give valuable insights into the local ideologies.

In central Arunachal, four cultural units may be distinguished from West to East: Nishi, Apa-Tani, Adi and Mishmi. Nishis are both cattle-breeders and shifting cultivators, organized in scattered "long-houses" each forming an autonomous social and political entity.¹⁰ Insulated within the vast Nishi country, the small Apa-Tani valley offers a somehow antithetic picture: a mosaic of irrigated rice fields and dense villages, divided into strong clan quarters. Each village is governed by a council, the *buliang*, which authority on the quarters is only relative.¹¹ Such is not the case of the Adi villages of the Siang valley, centred around their dormitory (*moshup*), in front of which seats a full sovereign council, the *kebang*. Adi economy is based on cyclic shifting cultivation, giving way to irrigated rice culture in the densely populated foothills.¹² At the eastern end of the Himalayas, the Dibang and Lohit valleys shelter the Mishmi, who may be roughly qualified of standing economically and politically in between the Nishi and the Adi. Cultivation is shifting on long cycles; elders' councils do not seriously entail the large autonomy of the households.¹³ Thus, several criteria make it relevant to distinguish a number of large cultural units in the concerned area. However this diversity hides a fairly high homogeneity in other features, particularly in the worldviews. As will be shown in the following lines, it may be assumed, without taking too much risk, that all the inhabitants of central Arunachal Pradesh share the same broad ideological background. It looks as if the economic or social particularities had been unable to affect a set of deep anthropological structures common to all these seemingly different communities. And we will see how many conceptions in force on this side of the Himalayas are as much central in the hierarchical and State-subjected societies of the Northern

side. The materials used in this article were all collected before the 1980s. Thus, the "world views" which will be addressed here may slightly differ from the present ones, specially following the emergence of a new religious revivalism around the cult of Donyi-Polo.¹⁴

The men hunt the animals, the *wiyu* hunt the men

When a Nishi dies at home, all men in the house seize their spears and swords. One has to remain alert, the ghosts are there, close by, and try to approach the cadaver. Without respite, the swords are shaken in each recess of the room, spears pierce the walls. Outside, arrows are drawn in all directions, particularly towards the roof. Later, the corpse will be buried at the outskirts of the hamlet. The threat however will not be removed. For a whole night, the relatives will guard the grave, climbing on the funerary structure, throwing embers in the darkness, shouting, humming, stripping arrows in the night...¹⁵

The atmosphere of fear and violence which surrounds the Nishi funerals suggests two clues: First, certain invisible forces, in this case ghosts, seem strongly attracted by an inanimate human body. Then, it is possible to counter these attacks by using material weapons, and thus to frighten invisible beings with physical threat. This brings us to a first set of interrogations: Who are these threatening beings? Do they represent a particular category? And does such violence correspond to a common attitude towards the invisible world?

The available data suggest a relatively general dichotomy: On one side, a very limited number of omnipresent and overwhelming entities, characterized by their stability and their neutrality. The notion of "deity" may faithfully qualify them. Sometimes insulated, such as Ringya, the sun of the Mishmi, but very often presented in the shape of a couple, Donyi-Polo, the "sun-moon" of the Adi, Nishi and Apa-Tani, their principal role is to guarantee an oath or to reveal the veracity of an allegation. Until very recently,¹⁶ they were specifically called to witness a treaty or an ordeal. Out of these occasions, they were propitiated only during the great annual festivals, together with other deities to which the protection of cattle and harvests was demanded.

The second category consists of a number of "spirits", designated by the same generic term: *wiyu* (pronounced *ui* by the Apa-Tani and *uyu* by certain Adi). Within this broad class, the Nishis distinguish the *orum*, "souls"

of those defuncts who did not have access to the land of the dead; their relationship with the living men, however, is not peculiar compared with other *wiyu*. Most spirits are located in space, i.e., each one of them evolves in a specific natural environment: forest, rivers, hilltops, air, underground... Some have settled in the villages of men, sometimes even in the houses themselves or in the granaries. By essence, no spirit is strictly malevolent or benevolent. Of course, the spirits of the wild world are more feared than those residing near or within settlements. However, not only is it common to call "wild" spirits for assistance and protection, but the "domestic" spirits may also be prone to revolt, sometimes causing calamities. Although not exclusive to the societies of Eastern Himalayas, the ambivalence of spirits has to be emphasised.

The Arunachali is primarily a farmer. But he is also a hunter, and very often a tradesman, who travels either up to the Tibetan border or down to the plains of Assam. He thus frequently traverses long distances through deserted mountains, dense forests and infuriated rivers. Everywhere, the spirits are nearby and threaten him. They are not "devilish" beings, seeking evil for the sake of evil; simply, as expressed by a Nishi: "the men hunt wild animals, the *wiyu* hunt the men".¹⁷ The number and the diversity of invisible beings are too large to enable an exhaustive account here. Instead, let us take a particular example by considering what the world of the *wiyu* consists of for a Shimong Adi of North-Eastern Siang: In the underground live Kine-Dene and Sitking-Kedeng who harass men by shooting arrows. This makes the legs shake, gives indigestions and dysentery. The *epom* reside in the forest in great numbers. They often take human form, wearing helmet, sword and spear; one can hear them sharpen their *dao* (machete) on the rocks. They are great fisher(men), and where they have placed their traps, not a single fish is left for men. They used to abduct humans without killing them. For example, they hide at the top of a tree and imitate a crying child. The imprudent traveller approaches and finds at the foot of the tree a decapitated wildcat. Taking advantage of his amazement, the *wiyu* jumps on him and carries him far deep in the forest. For the sleeping man, the greatest danger is the *wiyu* of high summits. They seize his soul, which they enslave or sell to other *wiyu*. When this occurs, one does not awake any more. No sacrifice can prevent them from harming. In addition there are the *nippong*, spirits of the women who died in delivery; they disturb the childbirth and cause abundant menses to the girls; the *wiyu* of the rivers who make fall people from the bridges; those of the sky, among which Banji-Banmang, the vampire, which always

carries its gourd of human blood, and Doying-Botte, which gives strong headaches and epilepsy.¹⁸

This description of the Shimong *wiyu* world, although partial, corresponds, often in its least details, to what the other groups depict.¹⁹ It already suggests some aspects of the relationships between men and spirits. The *wiyu* attack men in various ways. According to their nature, they strike with a disease, weapons, create accidents, prevent the birth of children, suck blood, seize "souls", or capture people in flesh and bone. At the least they represent economic competitors, depriving men of their means of subsistence, in particular by monopolizing game. Another characteristic of the spirits, quite revealing, is that they use various tricks to entrap men, thanks to their capacity to take all kind of animal and human forms.

Of these first images, let us retain also what does not appear. First, attacks by the *wiyu* do not apparently respond to the violation of any social prohibitions, and thus do not take the shape of "supernatural sanctions". Then, if the spirits sometimes use extraordinary powers, in most circumstances they resort to the same means as men: weapons, abduction, and enslavement. Up to this point we have considered contexts where the man kept a passive role with regard to the spirits, that of the victim. Let us now introduce other instances, where man is depicted as an acting being, which defends himself against attacks, who intercedes with the aggressors, and even calls them as allies to help him fulfil his own designs.

Among the Adi, in case of difficult delivery, and if the presence of a disturbing *wiyu* is suspected, armed men surround the house, hold up their weapons while shouting and strike the walls with ferociousness. In the same way, when fire strikes a Padam Adi village, armed men climb to the roofs and brandish their swords to stop the blaze.²⁰ The villages themselves are defended by a magic enclosure; each entering path is barred by an imposing gate, equipped with bows and arrows, and on which carcasses of pigs and dogs hang.²¹ And the shaman, first intercessor with the invisible forces, never officiates without his sword and dagger hanging on his belt.

It seems that the societies of central Arunachal Pradesh conceive their relationships with the supernatural in terms of a power balance, and by no means in those of a submission to a sovereign or higher authority. If the spirit attacks, one does not bow down, one defends oneself; if it remains deaf to a request, one gets rid of it. In a village struck by epidemic, a Shimong shouts in revolt: "the *wiyu* are devouring us. They take no notice of our

offerings. Do not believe them! They eat our gifts and they eat us as well. Let us give them no more".²² The attacking spirit is not the enforcer of a punishment, it is indeed an enemy, and thus in a way a similar being, with which one has to fight on an equal basis. For the same reason it is a possible ally, whose power will be used against a third party. In 1944, Furer-Haimendorf experienced — and was involved in — a quarrel between an Apa-Tani and the Nishi village of Licha. At the time when Apa-Tani warriors prepared for a raid against Licha, their priest called upon spirits: "May no evil befall the Apa-Tani participating in the expedition, may their swords and spears be sharp, but may the swords of Licha be blunted and their arrows miss their mark".²³ Furer-Haimendorf interpreted this invocation as a call on the spirits "to bear witness that the fault of the quarrel lay with Licha". It is difficult to agree. The context as well as the data produced do not suggest that in this raid the spirits were considered as a kind of judges. If this was the case it may have been somehow anomalous. In these feuds, "divine justice" has no role to play, because the fight does not aim at pointing a "culprit", a transgressor of the norm. One fights possibly to affirm his prestige, but not to prove the righteousness of one's own claims. The supernatural being does not "sanction" the vanquished by imposing defeat on him. It simply acts under the terms of a request by one of the opponents. The other party may as well call upon it. It is common, in troubled times, to ask the shaman to bounce back against the enemies the forces that they themselves had previously solicited: Ramo Adi may call upon Singro to obtain the destruction of an individual or even of his entire clan. With the help of a veteran priest (*nyibo*), a tree and a big-sized dog are cut down each evening during three successive nights. To counter this type of assault, one will perform the same rite, but during the day.²⁴ Significantly, the same competition for the propitiation of a helping force may oppose a man, or a group of men, and a spirit: a Pailebo Adi who falls sick should as soon as possible propitiate Sibbo-Rabro, before the attacking *wiyu* does the same. If the *wiyu* is the first to put Sibbo-Rabro on its side, the patient will perish.²⁵

Some men permanently benefit from the power of an allied spirit. The shaman entertains a particular relation with a guardian *wiyu*, which revealed his vocation by appearing in his dreams. During healing cures, it remains near him to assist in the search of abducted souls and in fights against other spirits. The shaman can request his guardian to wound or kill his personal enemies, or to capture them so that he devours them himself, although such behaviour is generally disapproved.²⁶ Beyond the particular case of shamans,

do men and spirits entertain alliance relationships? Alliance presumes firstly reciprocity, i.e., a mutual exchange of services, and possibly of goods, between the partners. And furthermore the bond should be a lasting one, and not only a short-term contract. When the spirits defend the men, what do they receive in exchange? It would be tempting to claim that the sacrifices offered at the time of the invocations are intended to bind the invisible forces into a debt bond. Available descriptions of rituals are too scarce and superficial to go that far. Continuity of the relationship must also be questioned. During the annual festival of prosperity, certain Nishi go down on the banks of large rivers to ask the aquatic *wiyu* to prevent the use of the bridges by hostile warriors.²⁷ Does such a ritual point to a relationship of lasting alliance or is it just a recurrent request? Additional details on the content of the ritual would have helped to answer. On this point, as in others, investigation on the indigenous concepts is hampered by the lack of data on religious practices, which have for long characterized cultural studies on Arunachal. However, thanks to the “tribal romanticism” inspired by J. Nehru and V. Elwin a rich mythological corpus has been accumulated, and usefully balances our ignorance on rituals.

The spirit, brother of man

The close affinities of patterns in Central Arunachal mythologies conduce to investigate further on about their ideological coherence, or “structure”. Oral traditions of different groups will be contemplated here as informing each other.²⁸ First of all let us try to uncover the most frequent models pertaining to our main concerns, on the one hand the relationship between men and spirits, on the other hand the circumstances presiding over conflict and alliance. From this point of view, two aspects emerge at first sight: the very rare intervention of higher or creating figures, and the original indistinctness of nature between men, spirits and animals.

Stemming from the original mother, from the sea, from the encounter of sky and earth, or from unspecific creatures (named without being described), the three categories of beings are invariably introduced as kin, children of the same father, the same mother, or offsprings of three brothers. Originally, men, animals and spirits were not distinct, neither in their appearance nor in their respective aptitudes. At a certain chronological stage — within a true “evolution” — each one progressively developed specificities: the spirits became invisible to the men, the animals lost their houses, their weapons and the speech. But all remained on an equal footing in their competition or co-

operation for the exploitation of natural resources. A Shimong Adi myth describes the links that Tani, ancestor of men, maintained with Epom, *wiyu* of the forest, and Jimu-Tayang, *wiyu* of the high mountains, all three sons of Peddong-Nane, the original water:

Tani and Epom live as neighbours, settled respectively on the banks of the Siang river and in the large trees of the forest. Tani and Epom hardly commiserate and carefully avoid glancing at each other. So Tani covers his eyes behind a leaf, which will prevent him, and his offsprings to come, to see Epom. But Epom does not find anything else than a basket, through which he is still able to see Tani. The two brothers decide to share game: each one thus sets his own traps. Tani however, jealous of the preys of Epom, uses to steal them. The two elder sons of Tani disappear while hunting in the forest. Helped in his quest by the bird Sigo-Pereng, Tani reaches the lair of Jimo-Tayang on the snow peaks, where he finds the bones of its two devoured sons. Tani gets enraged and asks Jimu-Tayang a compensation (*midum*) for the loss of his sons. Initially reticent, Jimu-Tayang then concedes to Tani the ibex, the musk deer, the *tanang* wild goat, the mountain reed (*emo*), the aconite, and the wild garlic.²⁹ Tani accepts and they sit together to share *apong* beer. Tani then goes down, bringing back his new belongings... However, none of these mountain creatures manages to adapt in the warm and wet country of Tani. Soon he decides to bring them back to their original environment, where he regularly comes to collect them. Jimu-Tayang however keeps a grievance towards this brother who enjoys his own former properties: each time Tani, and later his offsprings, visit the summits, searching for the deer or the aconite, Jimu's sentinel, Poli-Adi, jumps on them, tears off their eyes, makes their nose and ears bleed, twists their testicles and throws their body in chasm.³⁰

With only a few words the framework is set: man and spirit are true economic competitors, exploiting the same resources, in particular wild animals.³¹ In this instance competition follows the division of domains. Elsewhere the process is opposite: it is the scarcity of land or game, on a previously undivided space, which induces spirits, animals and men to gather in a meeting (*kebang*) and partake the space.³² Competition may be of various natures, according to the respective needs of each category of beings:

- ♦ Some spirits are cannibals or vampires, other just hunters or farmers, and all seek wives and slaves, possibly human.

- ♦ Predatory animals may have the same preys as men, they may also be found of cattle, or simply of human meat.
- ♦ Men are primarily hunters and must target animals. As farmers they may also encroach on spirits' domains. And for the sake of breeding, they must get wives, possibly among the *wiyu*.

In this struggle for survival and perpetuation, no category definitely takes over. Each has its own assets: the spirits have the capacity to be incarnated in various forms, the animals to fly or to smell at long distance, the men have the weapons. As we will see it, it is the possession of weapons which makes the specificity of the man. Indeed, neither intelligence, which is far from being poorer among spirits and animals, nor sociability constitute human prerogatives. The myths depict an omnipresent society, independent of superficial differences among the three categories. All marry, all owe matrimonial payments to their father-in-law, all meet in councils to deliberate...³³

Let us pursue our classification of the raw material of the myths, to now consider which place is held by alliance. Alliance, in particular matrimonial, is always conceived under an ambivalent aspect. Basically, it takes the form of a union between two beings or entities previously separated, a union which brings fruitfulness and prosperity. However, this union is considered by both sides with suspicion: the partner is likely to be a disguised predator and remains in any event an avid competitor, which benefits from the confidence granted under the terms of the new relationship. The fertilizing union is depicted by the myths as a universal process; we would say in our language that it is not only biological and social, but also physical. Thus, far from limiting itself to the three types of individualized beings, it may as well involve cosmic entities, spaces. The most concise illustration is found in a myth of the neighbouring Miji, but the themes are common in Central Arunachal traditions:

At first the Earth and Sky were far away from each other and the Sun and Moon lived separately. In those days the Sun and Moon did not move. It was the Earth and Sky that moved. For the Earth has many children whom she held in her lap. She was afraid that her husband, the Sky would approach her and give her more babies and was always moving round to escape him. But from time to time the Sky succeeds in going to the Earth and when this happens there is an earthquake. At such a time many new trees grow up and there are fine harvests³⁴

The picture cannot be more explicit, and we will see that its range exceeds simple poetry. Sexual relations may as well involve dwellers of the earth and planets. Thus, Taming-Tamo, an enormous *wiyu* overflowed with virility, unceasingly chases his fellow females as well as human women, defying Donyi the sun by regularly capturing its wife, Polo the moon, to rape it, causing eclipses.³⁵ Elsewhere it is a cock which is caught making love with Polo.³⁶ Fecundation is not reduced to contact-coupling. Remote fertilization is also a possibility. For instance, bees take a tiny fragment of dirtiness on the skin of a man and will deposit it on the body of a woman who lives on the other side of the mountain: soon she becomes pregnant.³⁷ Elsewhere, a woman immobilized by ropes is fertilized by the cries of hunters passing at distance, just like the hen by the songs of the cock.³⁸

But the function of union is not limited to biological breeding. When it implies a set of exchanges and mutual obligations, acquiring a dimension of continuity and turning into a true alliance, the union between two beings possess other virtues. In Arunachal, numbers of accounts pertain to the unceasing quest for the bride, which compels the hero, an animal, a man or a spirit, to face all kinds of dangers and to deploy many artifices to obtain a partner. Tapeng, the bat, leaves to search a wife for Mirung-Guppu, disfigured by goitre. Reaching the place of the *wiyu* Sitking-Kedeng, in the underground world, it notices a girl husking rice. Pretending to be sick, Tapeng asks the girl's parents to organize a sacrifice for its healing. He then requires that all share the meat with him. Tapeng finally addresses the girl: "Your parents ate my food, it was your bride-price, now you must follow me and marry my brother".³⁹

The trick — but this is also a pure political act — thus constitutes one of the means to obtain a wife. If a gift was accepted, voluntarily or not, a counter-gift must be returned. And a bride is a common compensation.

Abo-Teni, the first man, recklessly marries the fire. As could be expected, hardly has he embraced his new wife, that his genitals start to burn; soon, nothing remains of his virility out of a worm born from the wound. Searching a more lenient wife, he successively crosses several villages inhabited by animals, where each time a similar scenario replicated. A cock swallows his worm, his only wealth. Threatening to kill it, Abo-Teni compels the cock to follow him. Then the dog comes, which devours the cock and has to give Teni a whelp-slave. The history continues, through successive repetitions and interlockings. Lastly, Teni, provided with his new — but again single

— belonging, the tree which crushed his *mithun* (*Bos frontalis*, a Bovidae), reaches the village of Daini the sun. The sister of Daini, Mumsi, climbs on the tree, which breaks. Teni, once more, gets angry and shouts at the culprit: "Marry me or I will kill you!"⁴⁰

Marriage, although the apex of reciprocity, does not conclude it. Quite to the contrary, it may be considered as its (new) starting point. The bride's parents, and later on the maternal uncle, become allies which will provide material help in time of shortage, and a political support in time of conflicts.⁴¹ The maternal uncle constitutes, in violence, the ally par excellence. Tikdeng, the Shimong frog, calls its "maternal-uncle-the-Siang-river" to engulf the village which refuses a wife to it. Then two other of its "maternal uncles" come to help, the Stone, which causes a landslide, and the Laughter, which gives spasms.⁴² This leads us directly to one of the favourite mythological themes in Arunachal. Caused by an insult, a personal animosity, a theft, jealousy, adultery, homicide, or defiance between leaders, appears the conflict. Among the Adi, another motive may be added: the control of land, trade routes and villages. The content of the accounts may reflect specificities in the social structures, as the importance of the Adi village solidarity. However, it is the fundamental values of prestige and reciprocity which strikingly emerge.

The myths explain how, following an original murder, the succession of revenges can last for eternity. It is, among others, the case of the constant fight between snakes and men.

Nibo, one of the first ancestors of the Ramo Adi, catches his sister flirting with a human-headed snake. Apparently revolted by this union, Nibo kills the two lovers. Unfortunately the idyll had been already consummated, and the girl had, a few hours earlier, given birth to a litter of small snakes. Since then, the snakes bite the men to avenge the murder of their original parents.⁴³ Conversely, the same Ramo claim that, when hunting the tiger, they avenge their ancestor, devoured by his own brother the first tiger.⁴⁴ But often, feud is limited in time, causes few wounds, and — essential aspect — concludes itself by a treaty and an alliance. In contrast with the Indian classical epics, for example, which describe in length the bloody and morbid circumstances of war, details on physical violence occupy little place here. This is in tune with the morphology of traditional warfare in this area, based on ambush and raid and avoiding direct physical confrontation. Nevertheless, what matters before all is to stage the universal principles of feud and alliance, two principles which, in the logic of the myths, pre-existed to the appearance

of animals and men.

At that time, the earth, dry and barren, carried neither tree, nor grass, nor the smallest insect. Langkon-Tumbo had a son, and his brother, Langtang-Kenne, had nine. The nine sons of Langtang are one by one poisoned by an old *wiyu* which cuts them into pieces that it makes dry. The single son of Langkon sharpens his sword and sets out to search for his cousins... He arrives at the cave of the *wiyu*, which like usual invites him to a meal. But Langkon surreptitiously swaps the two shares, and it is the *wiyu* who this time is poisoned... "If I bury this evil body, who knows what will grow from it?" So he decides to throw the corpse from the top of a hill over the village of Nite-Nippong. Enraged by the offence, the villagers pursue the boy, seize him and kill him. Thus Langkon must himself assume the revenge. So he submits Nite-Nippong. Back home, he finds his brother Langtang assassinated by a *wiyu*. After many investigations, he finds out the murderer and kills it. Immediately, an impressive tree emerges from the corpse of the victim. Langkon, irritated, sets on the tree and cuts it down. From the trunk comes out a beetle, but hardly had the insatiable avenger taken his sword that the insect metamorphoses into a pretty girl. Langkon, moved by such a sight, decides to marry her.

She gives birth to Pedong-Nane, mother of waters, and rains start fertilizing the ground. Then two sons come, Tani, ancestor of the men, and Taro, ancestor of the spirits.⁴⁵

The immediate motive behind feud is revenge in response to a murder. But the enemy — "opponent" would be a more exact term — never vanishes; in a form or another it always reappears out of its ashes so that finally alliance is possible between the two sides, generally through marriage. Murder is thus not restricted to destruction. From the corpses emerge new beings, from inflicted death — and not from any death — life is renewed. Revenge in itself is insufficient, and it is by the alliance, which comes to conclude the cycle of violence, that long-term prosperity is ensured, here thanks to the feeder rain.

Our preliminary aim was to analyze the concepts of conflict and alliance as depicted in the relationships between men and spirits. In the pieces which we presented up to now, the spirits appeared on several occasions. It could be reasonably objected that these instances concerned a "mythical" space and time where the *wiyu* stand as a symbolic substitute of "the other", in order to describe the "real" interactions between men. Thus it is necessary to go ahead and to show how certain patterns obviously put in scene the

relationship with the invisible beings, either implicitly, or explicitly like the following example, drawn from a Pasi Adi myth.

At that time, the world had already been divided between the men and the *wiyu*. The first lived in the fertile lowlands, the second in the high mountains and the forests. One day the *wiyus* captured a man and retained him captive. To release him, his kin offered to the kidnapers poultries, pigs and a *mithun* which they brought to the mountains. The *wiyus* accepted the ransom and promised to free their prisoner. But in the evening, instead of their brother, the men saw returning the cattle. Immediately, the animals were brought back to the country of the *wiyus*. But soon after they reappeared in the plains [where the Pasi Adi live]. For the third time, the men went to the mountains, and tried to settle the affair with the *wiyus*: "We have given you, twice, those that you asked, but each time you have driven them back to us, and still you will not release our brother". The *wiyus* explained that as long as the cattle always fled away, they had to keep the prisoner. The men had an idea: "We will kill the animals, their soul will go to you, and return to us no more". The first sacrifices appeared and the prisoner was released.⁴⁶

The brilliant invention of sacrifice... From the time of its creation, this offering to the *wiyus* has been included in reciprocity. Sacrifice is more than mere propitiation and in any case not a mark of devotion. Like feud, it is concerned with a debt, with a cycle of exchange. Through reciprocity, the enemy, whether human or *wiyu*, becomes a partner, and later on, by the perpetuation of exchanges, an ally; from violence, exchange is born, from exchange, solidarity.

First of all, the ally provides material assistance: according to the Minyong Adi, when the men started to clear land for cultivation, they asked Kine-Dene, an underground *wiyu*, to provide them seeds. The dog, their messenger, was sent for that purpose. Since then, the annual sacrifice of Mopum is offered to Kine-Dene in exchange for good harvests.⁴⁷ But the ally is also a mediator, who will help you to win over in litigation. When Kebung the rat and Petang the bird violently clashed over the possession of a salt mine, a *kebang* council was called to decide between them. Each one was represented by a spokesman, Dobak and Pukso for Petang, Nyoning for Kebung. The council admitted only spokesmen, not lawyers: Dobak defended the bird so much that all the members were exasperated and struck it on the beak. Nyoning also was beaten for the same reason. Only Pukso

did not take party and advised with the two adversaries to cease their quarrel. This was appreciated by Pedong-Koniyong, the delegate of men, who lined up in this opinion.⁴⁸

On behalf of other particular allies, however, one awaits a total solidarity, up till violence: Robo, one of the original men, envied Doni, a deaf-mute being, whose exceptional qualities as a hunter, made him prosperous. All being jealous, lined up with Robo against Doni. To defend their insulated son, his parents called upon Tori-Mone, a *wiyu* full of wisdom, which sat on his shoulder to advise him, then upon Ute and Pore, to persuade the animals, especially the tigers and the snakes, not to assault him. Her mother made a shield of *ekkam* leaves, "like the darkness of night", so that he would be invisible to all, even *wiyu*. Doni finally concluded a treaty (*omum*) with Dadi, Master of the *mithun*, who would provide him with the required cattle. The fight then began: Ute and Pore are said to have covered Doni "as a shield" ...⁴⁹

The multiple functions of the ally are thus specified: we saw him as a mediator; here he is a military advisor, a supplier of cattle — the nerve of war in Arunachal — a spokesman, and finally a true mercenary. The allies of Doni are *wiyu*, but hardly symbolic ones: here the myth describes very concrete situations. The day before a raid, on behalf of the warriors, the priest call upon the allied spirits, which will protect them directly, and also call upon the enemy's allied spirits so that they will betray him.⁵⁰

Taru-Tase is a *wiyu* which can take the shape of a hawk or of a firefly. When two enemies are in war, it is incarnated in falcon and fight for those which offered him a sacrifice. But the other part may also offer a similar sacrifice. It then takes the shape of another hawk which will fight the first one. Thus, the victory on the ground of one or the other of the opponents depends on the fight occurring in the sky. Sometimes still, Taru-Tase also fights on the ground: it takes the shape of a firefly and blinds the enemy by landing on his eyes.⁵¹

Things cannot be more explicit: certain spirits behave as pure mercenaries, serving those who spend for it. However, there are more clues in this piece. The hawk, indeed, does not appear haphazardly. Of course, it is a tough fighter, with exceptional vision and speed. But this predator directly evokes the fighting function of the shaman. The wings of hawks, fixed on the back and held by hand, is an essential part of Nishi priest's panoply.⁵² Before Apa-Tani raids, wings of a hawk are moved before the snout of the dog which will be sacrificed.⁵³ One may wonder whether the hawk of the myth represents a *wiyu* or the officiant himself. As a matter of fact, the shaman

may be identified with its guardian *wiyu*, which is obviously a warlike *wiyu*. We have seen that he officiates with his sword. This weapon is directly useful in his functions, for example, while protecting the newborn child from the attacks of the spirits.

After his elder brothers had been, one by one, devoured by the Atu spirits at the time of their birth, Atungi Aru was saved by the *dao* (a machete) that her mother used to keep the predators away. The son of Atungi Aru, Aru Pe, became the first *igu* priest of the Idu Mishmi. Everywhere where a child had just been born, Atu Pe came. He stayed near the baby and cut the Atu into pieces.⁵⁴

The shaman is undoubtedly an intercessor, but some *wiyu* remain insensitive to his diplomacy: so he should be able to handle weapons, even beyond his own death.

Under the ground lives an enormous creature, Modi-Mobe-Ane, which carries the world on its back. When a famous shaman dies, he meets this monster which tries to bar the road. The shaman must then strike it with his *dao*. Angrily, Modi moves its spine violently, causing earthquakes.⁵⁵

A Political Cosmology

How to organize the different patterns that have come to light till now? Is it possible to outline the broader ideological structure into which cosmological conceptions and the mechanisms of violence and alliance are connected? Let us proceed from general to particular, i.e., in the time of the myth, from the origins towards the present time.

The universe consists of beings with similar behaviours and concerns. Their shape, their external appearance may be different, but their essence is identical, and this also pertains to "inanimate" objects. Descending from the same original father or mother, the animals, men and spirits remain brothers, therefore of similar status. The death is not itself characteristic of the sons of Tani. Spirits, like men, live several successive lives in distinct worlds, where each time they marry, cultivate new lands and face new enemies.⁵⁶ Just as visible and invisible worlds are hardly different, life after death does not differ from life before death. In this non-divided universe, all beings are on an equal footing, whatever their respective form, therefore in competition one with the others, but also in complementarity: they can devour anyone, be

devoured by anyone, trap, be trapped, help, marry, reject, and especially fight anyone without hesitation.

As a hunter, man cooperates with spirit to set traps and to beat up the game. But each partner may deceive or be deceived by the other, falsely claim that it is its own arrow which killed the deer, or empty the nets of his rival... As farmers, man and spirit help each other in the fields; but soon quarrels emerge, and each one must mark its territory. Lastly, both seek the wife who will give them children; if coveting the same girl, they will have to use bravery and tricks to win the decision of the father-in-law.

In short, in this particular context of generalized non-division,⁵⁷ it is necessary to defend one's own ambitions, and unceasingly assert one's own identity. Therefore, the son of Tani sends back the spirits in the mountains, cut the tongues of animals, burn their houses and deprive them of their weapons. It is not meaningless that monkeys are the principal targets of this original segregation: their particular form makes the man doubt of his own specificity.⁵⁸

However, although a constant sublimation of the distinction towards the equal-other is necessary, as a means for each individual and each group to work out his own identity, this Other cannot be radically rejected. As a father of the wife who will give you children, as a talented mediator who will defend your claims before the assemblies, and as an ally which will provide you with help during scarcities and war, he is essential. However threatening he may be, he must exist, first as an opponent, then as a partner, allowing union, complementarily, thus fertilization, from which will emerge prosperity. We saw how the earth was opposed to the sky, feared it, and unceasingly tried to escape him: however, it was out of their encounter that the trees, the crops and all kinds of wealth sprung up.

Formerly were Buru-Gudu in the water and Doje-Karangu in the sky.⁵⁹ Each one had a girl, but wished a wife. Doje went to see Buru: "Let me marry your daughter and you can marry mine". Buru answered: "How can such a thing be? You are in the sky, I am in the water". Doje gave an idea: "I will make a path from the sky to the earth and in one day you will be able to fetch my daughter and I will fetch yours". Following the path, Doje went down towards the water and Buru went up towards the sky. On their way back, each one with his new wife, they met "in the space between earth and heaven": "We must do no work, nor approach our wives, nor go hunting. If we fail in this, there will be disaster for us both"...⁶⁰

The acquisition of prosperity implies a meeting between two separated entities. Consequently, the construction of a path which will connect them and allow exchanges proves vital. In Northeast India — as in neighbouring areas — every element evoking a communication between separated domains, like a rope, a ladder or a bridge, is directly associated with the concepts of prosperity, abundance, vitality. Shimong Adi mention “the long bridge connecting the country of the Nimat (Northern spirits) to that of Tani” as one of the elements which, resulting from the dismemberment of a gigantic original creature, formed the land relief.⁶¹ According to the Singpho (of Eastern Arunachal), the first men landed on the Himalayas along silver and golden ladders.⁶² For the Shimong, those who dream of building a bridge or fighting an enemy — please note this association — will soon catch a big game.⁶³

It should be made clear that connecting two entities does not aim at confusing them. Alliance should mean neither obliteration of the limits nor submission of a protagonist to the other. Before “meeting the other” and exchanging with him, it is essential to show who you are, to be recognized by him and others as a specific individual, member of a specific group. As a matter of fact, who is a best ally than the one you fought without mercy and who far from submitting to you, took up arms to defend his prestige through violence? And thanks to him, you could publicly and dramatically express your own otherness and your own claims to independence. This is the logic which, it seems to us, explains why the majority of feuds ended in an alliance treaty.⁶⁴

It should be stressed that, in the symbolic system of these myths, violence in itself, as well as the death which it brings sometimes, are in themselves sources of wealth. Out of each cadaver a tree inevitably grows or an animal comes out. The process leading from violence to prosperity is often depicted by a short cut, in order to better point its essence. But sometimes, the precision of the details does not leave any doubt about the cause-effect link between violence and prosperity, as when murder is directly identified with the acquisition of a wife.⁶⁵

Midang-Kanga avenges his two sons, devoured by a large *wiyu*, his own friend in addition. After killing it, he throws the body in the jungle... Later, coming back to the spot, he discovers the desiccated skeleton, which he brings to the great blacksmith Ningnu-Botte.⁶⁶ The blacksmith transforms the skull into a cauldron (*danki*), the arms into rifles, the fingers and the teeth into beads, the palm into a *beyop* belt and gives these objects to Midang-Kanga...⁶⁷

The Tibetan cauldron, *danki*, the rifle, the beads and the beyop belt are all part of the dowry of the Adi bride.⁶⁸ Revenge is thus explicitly equated to a matrimonial transaction between the *wiyu* and Midang.

The realization of alliance, possibly marking the temporary end of a feud, thus allows the initiation of a cycle of exchanges of goods and services. It does also set up a situation in which the attitudes between new partners remain fundamentally ambivalent. This is particularly true of matrimonial alliance. Through his daughter, who entered your home, who cooks your meal, raises your children and approaches your treasure, the adversary, under its mask of father-in-law, constitutes a persistent threat. Because he may use his new statute, in particular the commensality now granted to him, to better abuse your confidence, impede your freedom, if not slaughter you. The wife herself, due to the powers linked to her feminine nature, is prone — according to the very Adi formulations — to “block your path”, to “make you loose your way”, i.e., to prevent you asserting your identity in war, or simply making your arrows miss the game.

The types of taboos imposed on the women in period of hunting or war makes it possible to draw up an image of the dangerous aspects of wives⁶⁹: The woman is endowed with the uterus which, although carrying the baby, may as well prevent its birth. Throughout the day, while cooking, she rubs elbows with these containers of which she “closes” the lid. When weaving, she handles the shuttle, which passes through the weft to “tighten” the fabric. She prepares the beer, which makes man loose his lucidity. Lastly, she produces this menstrual blood, which brings sterility...⁷⁰ It seems that the woman is symbolically associated with inhibiting acts, such as closing a space, barring the road, disturbing the sight, sterilizing... The man, on the contrary, would be endowed with the opposite powers: to open, move out, release... The confrontation between these two opposite dynamics appears clearly at the time of a difficult delivery, here among the Adi:

An egg is posed on the ground. The mother must break it with her knee, then drink cold water. The husband makes a grass wristlet, places it in front of the woman and proclaims: “If I forgot anything, if something remained closed, if an earthenware jar or a basket were not opened, it is my own fault”. He then slices the wristlet with his *dao*.⁷¹

The powers associated with women may not be regarded as only negative: when it is necessary, in the case of an invisible threat, to “bar the path”, to close up the socialized space of the village or the house, women play an

essential role. It is they, in particular, who will welcome the warriors coming back from the raid, and who are followed by the malicious spells cast by the enemy, or against the enemy. When Padam-Minyong warriors are out for war, the use of the weaving shuttle (*sumpa*) is strictly forbidden in their village, so that the advance of the attackers will not be blocked; on the contrary, as the warriors reach home, women hold their *sumpa*, enabling a magic enclosure of the village against the return of the warlike spirits.⁷²

Thus the nature and functions of man (male) are defined dialectically by opposition to the domestic and enclosing functions of the woman: he is facing outside, his function consists in "opening", for the renewal of his group's vitality.⁷³

Rabbo, ancestor of the spirits and eternal brother-enemy of Nibu, ancestor of the men, succeeds in locking him between two dugouts, which it pushes in the river. Nibu, terrified, shouts: "I want to go on living, I want to create the race of men...".⁷⁴

This idea may be considered as a central one: wealth, prestige, fertility, power, are acquired by leaving the civilized/socialized world, or in other words, by opening it to the external and dangerous world. To "leave" or "open" may be in fact summarized under a single act: to communicate with the Other World or with the Other, to draw the substance of survival, of perenniality. In this respect, all major acts, whether economic like hunting or trade, social like marriage, political like war or alliance, or religious like sacrificing or fighting the invisible, are conceived as transactions with the outside. Logically, dangers are conceived as external, and defence consists in closing the socialized space, in cutting it from the external world. At the end of the rite marking the control of war trophy, Apa-Tani burn it and bury the ashes under a stone: "Go to your place, we send to you under the ground, we close the door of the earth... Till ten generations you will not be able to hurt our descendants...".⁷⁵

The ambivalence of the ideal act reflects the ambivalence of the Other, living in the external world. It is on this precise point that the political values are connected with those that social anthropologists call "religious". Indeed, the invisible spirit is not essentially different from the alien human. Like him, it is both an incontrovertible means of prosperity and a permanent source of danger. The attitude towards it will thus follow the same lines: seeking transaction but protecting oneself, and especially keeping one's integrity, one's own freedom. According to this ideology, one does not submit to a deity, one

fights it, one pursues it with the help of the priest, one treats it on an equal footing, one pays ransoms to it, not devout offerings. The spirit is called upon like the maternal uncle, to help fight the enemy, not as a redresser of wrongs.

Arunachalese myths outline a true political cosmology, at the same time deeply egocentric — everything is centred on me and my fellows — and eminently egalitarian — no higher authority is able to infringe on individual designs. From this point of view, the priest is much more than a mere sacrificer or a therapist. One of the dreams which predicts the vocation of shaman among Gungu Nishi is crossing a large river in a raft⁷⁶: the shaman is the one who “knows how to cross”, like the hunter, like the warrior whose outfit he wears. Therefore the Nishi priest may be proud to exhibit in his house, on the wall devoted to hunting trophies, the scapulas of animals sacrificed under his authority.⁷⁷ Obviously, war and sacrifice are not similar in their practical aspects. However it would not be completely unwise to suggest that in both instances the same representations and values are at stake.

Are the ideological structures put in light here restricted to Central Arunachal Pradesh? And would they provide useful clues for the study of political and religious ideologies of neighbouring societies? One knows the importance of reciprocity in Ancient China’s wars. If “eating the enemy” was a common expression — to say the least — the same enemy frequently became a son-in-law, or was a son-in-law already, and in all cases finally turned into an ally, after the treaty closing the feud.⁷⁸ But it is primarily in Tibet that the ideas highlighted here find an echo, not only in the great number of symbolic elements, but strikingly, in their structural arrangement.

Tibetans, including members of the nobility, trace their origins from union between human and invisible spirits. Original beings, which populated the world before the appearance of men, had both human and divine features. The *bon* tradition describes the conception of its saints as an association between the “sperm-arrow” of their father and the “blood-spindle” of their mother.⁷⁹ Are we far from the Arunachalese opposition between the hunting male and the weaving female? On the same point, it is said that husband and wife are opposed “like sky and earth, right and left, maternal uncle and uterine nephew”.⁸⁰

Similarities are confirmed in the human attitudes towards invisible forces. In the event of an attack, one tried to “entrap” the spirits, to “crush” them, not — at least in the ancient periods — to submit oneself by offerings. In troubled times, two favourite techniques were used: “closing the gate of

the sky” and “cutting the rope to the sky”. When, on the contrary, it became necessary to communicate with the invisible, in order to enquire about the god’s aims or “bring the luck”, the rope linking sky and earth (*mu*) was “fasten”.⁸¹ Thus, in Tibet as in Arunachal, prosperity is conceptualized as resulting from a communion with the outside of the socialized space, although “outside” is there identified with the sky: appearing in fundamentally egalitarian societies, the State would impose to the political and religious perceptions a new dimension, vertical and exclusive.

In Tibet similarly, the invisible being is dangerous, therefore powerful, it is possibly an enemy, to which the *bon* priest pays “ransoms”. In the event of conflict, the warlike gods stand “on the shoulder of man”, like *Tori-Mone* on the shoulder of *Doni*, to protect it from the enemy. And the individual is “structurally” defined as the outcome of the relationships between “the god of man, the god of woman, the god of maternal uncle, the god of war and the god of land”.⁸² This statement of the pillars of society could have perfectly applied to Arunachal, if it had not included the “god of land”. But in a sense, its absence in the South of the Himalayas does nothing but reinforce the similarities between the two ideologies: ritual fixing within a given territory, which expresses the concrete attachment to a particular area, is undoubtedly the principal characteristic which distinguishes the populations of Eastern Tibet from those of Arunachal. In Eastern Himalayas, the indigenous histories tell of a constant mobility.⁸³ Local migrations were still going on recently; shifting of whole villages in the 1960s were reported to me in the *Galo-Minyong* area (Lower Siang). The *Apa-Tani*’s sedentariness would slightly diverge from this model: their way of life is indissociable from a very specific space, that of a flat valley convenient for irrigated rice cultivation. And the myth of foundation of the site thus tells how the first two hero-pioneers drained the marshes covering the country, edifying the cradle of this civilization in a particular point of space.⁸⁴ But, to our knowledge, no localised and sovereign divinity sublimates this territorial rooting. The absence of a “god of the land” and the vivid memory of the migrations which led them to their present valley,⁸⁵ show that the *Apa-Tani* sedentarisation has not yet been translated mythologically and ritually.

Our preliminary interrogation on the perception of violence in Arunachal may be answered to by reinstating violence in its broader ideological framework. This series of discourses on the world — can one still speak

about “myths”? — make us discern an undivided world, deeply egalitarian, in which each one is able, but also compelled, to assert his own identity. If the universe is ordered, it is not by a superimposed hierarchy, but indeed by the sovereign principle of reciprocity. Building a relationship with the Other means communicating with the Outside, trying to make coincide disjoined spaces, but taking care not to blend them. To work one’s way in the world, to assert one’s vitality, confrontation with fellows is unavoidable. Because it is by the fight, and then by the gift, in short by the reciprocity, that prestige and prosperity are acquired.

From such a point of view, how can religion be demarcated from politics? Possible answers obviously stumble on the concept of “sacred”. If the sacred is a domain “unreachable” to man, governed by transcendent rules, then there is no “religious act” in these societies. If the sacred on the contrary means an external but penetrable world, the relationships with the invisible may be qualified as “religious”, but it is as well the case of feud and matrimonial exchange, which, as we saw, consist also in an opening, in a communication with the Outside. And thus the proposal by which Durkheim defined the nature of the religious act, would perfectly account for the originality of the political ideas in this part of the Himalayas: “This placing in relationship [with the sacred] in itself is always a delicate operation that requires precautions and a more or less complex initiation. Yet such an operation is impossible if the profane does not lose its specific traits, and if it does not become sacred itself in some measure and to some degree”.⁸⁶

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NOTES

1 Weber, 1978.

2 For instance Myers, 1991, Nader, 1991, Harrison, 1993.

3 Leach, 1954, p. 182.

4 Paul Mus considered the mountain dwellers of continental Southeast Asia as the last stronghold resisting the formidable Sino-Indian cultural "pincers" (Mus, 1979, pp. 109-121).

5 On the Himalayan languages, see van Driem, 2001.

6 Dunbar, 1915 ; Fürer-Haimendorf, 1947.

7 Roy, 1966.

8 For instance B.B.Pandey. *The Buguns, a Tribe in Transition*. Itanagar: Himalayan Publishers, 1996 ; Parul Chandra Dutta & D. K. Duarah (eds.) *Aspects of Customary Laws of Arunachal Pradesh*. Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, 1997; Mibang, Tamo and M. C. Behera, *Dynamics of Tribal Villages in Arunachal Pradesh : Emerging Realities*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004.

9 See for example Elwin (1958, 1970), Bhattacharya (1965), and more recently, Pandey (1996)

10 On the Nishi, cf. Fürer-Haimendorf, 1947 & 1956, and Shukla, 1959.

11 On the Apa-Tani, see Fürer-Haimendorf, 1947, 1956 & 1962.

12 On Southern Adi, Dunbar, 1915-16, and Roy, 1966. On Northern Adi, see for example Dhasmana, 1979. Only Galo Adi (Gallong) of the South-west of Siang live in monochal villages (L.R.N. Srivastava, *The Gallongs*. Shillong: NEFA, 1960). On irrigated cultivation among the Adi: P. Lai, 1979.

13 On the Mishmi, see T.K.N. Baruah, *The Idu Mishmi*. Shillong: NEFA, 1960, and J.P. Mills, "The Mishmis of the Lohit Valley, Assam", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 82, 1952, pp. 1-12.

14 Cf. below.

15 Shukla, 1959, pp. 116-120.

16 Donyi-Polo has become in the very last years the central deity of a revivalist cult

promoted by ethnic leaders; see Regunathan, 2000. Permanent shrines of Donyi-Polo are being built and a specific day (31st December) is dedicated to this deity.

17 Shukla, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

18 Elwin, 1970, pp. 31-32.

19 See for example Shukla, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

20 Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 94ff.; Roy, 1966, pp. 234-236; FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, 1954, p. 599.

21 FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, 1956, p. 123; Elwin *op. cit.*, p. 33.

22 Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

23 FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

24 Dhasmana, 1979, p. 243.

25 Kumar, 1979, p. 127.

26 On the religious specialists in Arunachal, see FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, 1954 and Elwin, 1970, pp. 33-37. For recent data see Kani, 1996, the tutelary spirit is a fundamental element of the shamanic pattern, present all over central and oriental Himalayas; see for instance J.T. Hitchcock, R.L. Jones (eds.), *Spirit possession in the Nepal Himalayas*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1976 and more recent works on Nepal by P. Sagant, M. Oppitz, A. de Sales, M. Gaenszle and G. Maskarinec.

27 Pandey, 1974, p. 127.

28 In this work, we have mostly used Elwin, 1958 & 1970, as well as Bhattacharya, 1975. On the contexts where these myths are narrated, little information is available. Elwin (1958, XX) notes the dances, funerals, harvest festivals and dormitories. Roy, (1966, pp. 157 ff.) gives some details on the Adi tales chanted during dances conducted by the "dance shaman" (*solung miri*) and in the dormitories (*moshup*).

29 These are the items which Arunachal people used to collect in high altitudes.

30 Bhattacharya, 1965, p. 36-38.

31 e.g. on the Adi, Elwin, 1970, p. 69.

32 Adi: Guha, 1966, p. 53.

33 e.g. Elwin, 1958, p. 174; 1970, pp. 114 & 142; Guha, *loc. cit.*.

34 Miji: Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

35 Adi: Elwin, 1970, p. 140.

36 Shimong: Elwin, 1970, p. 100.

37 Bugun: Elwin, 1958, p. 104.

38 Shimong: Elwin, 1970, p. 110.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Tagin: Elwin, 1958, pp. 176-179.

41 Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

42 *Loc. cit.*, p. 26.

43 Elwin, 1970, p. 149.

44 Dhasmana, 1979, p. 235.

45 Shimong: Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

46 Elwin, 1958, pp. 241-242; the terms "gods" and "spirit" in Elwin's translation have been replaced by respectively "spirits" and "soul", in order to avoid confusion with the terminology we use here.

47 *Ibid*, p. 381.

48 Shimong Adi: Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

49 Adi: Guha, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

50 Shimong: Dhasmana, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

51 Bori Adi: Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-303.

52 Pandey, 1974, p. 22 and Shukla, 1959, pp. 302-303.

53 Furer-Haimendorf, 1956, p. 120.

54 Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

55 Tagin: *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91. In another version, each defunct must fight the monster which guards the underworld. The earthquakes are due to the fighting by the most valorous ones.

56 Roy, 1956, p. 251; Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70; Furer-Haimendorf, *An Himalayan Tribe: from Cattle to Cash*. New Delhi: Vikas, 1980, p. 173.

57 On the "non-division" as a fundamental concept in some stateless societies, see Clastres, 1987.

58 Minyong Adi: Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-405.

59 In the mythology of the Tagin and Apa-Tani, original lakes were inhabited by huge animals, the Buru. Hearing tales about the survival of the *burus*, some British explorers set up an expedition in the late 1940's to find out these animals, without success... see R. Izzard, *The Hunt for the Buru*, London: Hodder, 1951.

60 Tagin: Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 80. These taboos are typical of a time of prosperity renewal; they occur among others during annual festivals and feuds and, in this particular form, would be characteristic of the ancient Asian cultures: see A.W. Macdonald, "The Cloistering of Villages", pp. 81-101 in A.W. Macdonald (ed.), *Essays on the Ethnology of Nepal & South Asia*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1975.

61 Bhattacharya, 1965, p. 56.

62 Elwin, 1956, p. 210. This obviously reminds the silver ladders along which Thai kings used to come down on earth; for the Ahom see G.C. Barua, *Ahom Buranji*. (1st ed. 1930), Guwahati: Spectrum, 1985. The pattern is also common in Yunnan.

63 Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. XXXIII.

64 Furer-Haimendorf, *op. cit.*, p. 185; 1956, pp. 139 & 155; Shukla, *op. cit.*, p.90; Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. XXI; Dhasmana, 1979, p. 32.

65 For instance Elwin, 1970, pp. 71 & 106.

66 It is likely that "Botte" refers here to a Tibetan or at least to a Tibetan-like character. "Botte" closely resembles "Bhotya" or "Bhote" by which North Indians call the people of Tibetan culture. Moreover, most of the valuable metallic objects owned by Arunachal people were formerly bought from the Northern fringes. On the trade of valuable objects in Arunachal, see a well documented article recently published by S. Blackburn: "Memories of Migration: Notes on legends and beads in Arunachal Pradesh, India", *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 25/26: 15-60 (2003/2004).

67 Adi: Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 112. The *beyop* is a belt of metal disks worn by pubescent Adi girls, and strongly connected with fertility. All the objects listed here were obtained by the Adi on the Tibetan border, together with knives and swords.

68 On dowry among Galo Adi, see Lai, *op. cit.*, p. 137; as for the Gungu Nishi, see Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.

69 Particularly Elwin, *India's NE Frontier in the 19th Century*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 6, and S. Roy, "Abor Weapons of War & Chase", *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol. XXII, No 163, 1957, p. 159.

70 Adi: Elwin, 1970, pp. 41-46.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

72 Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 150 & 156-158. Weaving, generally a feminine activity, is central in the economy of the hill dwellers of Northeast India and Southeast Asia. The occurrence of the shuttle as a symbol of specific feminine qualities, although almost universal, is therefore particularly common in this area.

73 This illustrates quite faithfully the general principles enunciated in Leach, 1965.

74 Minyong: Elwin, 1958, p. 174.

75 Fürer-Haimendorf, 1980, pp. 165-166.

76 Pandey, 1974, p. 134.

77 See Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, p. 197 & Shukla, 1959, p. 102.

78 Granet, 1959, pp. 147-149 & 262.

79 R. Stein, 1981, pp. 187, 212, 214.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 187, 201, 206, 209

82 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

83 See Blackburn, 2003.

84 Fürer-Haimendorf, 1955, p. 54.

85 Blackburn, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 ff.

86 Durkheim, 2001, Chap. 1, pp. 55-56 of the 1985 French edition.

Book Reviews

Agrarian Structures and Land Reforms in Assam by M. N. Karna, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong and Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2004, 103p, Rs. 250/-.

A brief review of peasant movements in India from 1860 to 1950 clearly reflects the changing trend of agrarian structures and land tenure/land reforms in the country. It identifies the changing features of Indian agrarian societies, which show more of discontinuity than continuity.

Initially, the East India Company's trade with India was insignificant. The decisive moment came in 1765, when the financial sovereignty over Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar went to the hands of the Company with the concession for levying taxes in exchange for a sum of Rs. 2.6 million per annum. In 1793, Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement brought a final regulation on the procedure for levying taxes, which led to decisive changes in land tenure. The British did all this as if the land belonged to the state and was thus at their disposal.

The objective of the British was to establish their commercial interests firmly in India. Since the textile industry played an important role in the beginning of industrialization in England, very large amounts of cheap products manufactured by mechanical looms were exported to India and this soon led to a collapse of her home textile industry. A large number of weavers became unemployed. In order to secure a basis for existence, they migrated to rural areas and tried to lease land for cultivation. The monopoly over the means of livelihood soon shifted to the hands of *zamindars* who were able to extort more and more taxes as the demand for land increased. This led to peasant indebtedness and even loss of their occupancy and usufructory rights. This was compounded by rise in prices of agricultural produce between 1860 and 1950. The landlords asserted their proprietary rights by evicting tenants while the latter claimed, and were occasionally granted occupancy rights. Over the century, the peasants' ability to resist landlords increased and landlordism stood considerably weakened by the end of British rule.

Consequences of the changes in the land tenure brought about by the Permanent Settlement undermined the rural stability. More and more cultivators became indebted, lost their occupancy rights, and dropped in status

to tenants-at-will or agricultural labourers. On the other hand, the wealth of *zamindars* increased on account of the income they earned from the difference between the amount of taxes and the rentals, increase in cultivated areas, money lending, and expropriation of debtors. In the course of time, the *zamindari* areas were characterized by marked difference in wealth, power, and prospects in life between the two distinct rural classes.

More liberal *ryotwari* system was introduced in Madras, Bombay, and Assam. Under this system, the government claimed property rights to all of the land and allotted the same to cultivators with the proviso that they paid taxes. They could use, sell, mortgage, bequeath, and lease the land as long as they paid taxes. Otherwise, they were evicted. This direct tax relation between the government and the cultivators was meant to prevent sub tax collectors. It sought to increase purchasing power, and, widen the market for British products in rural India. Taxes were pre-determined and fixed in a temporary settlement for a period of thirty years. It was revised and the tenure was extended.

Communal rights to land were common in North and North-West India. This system ideally fitted with the *Mahalwari* system. Tax was imposed on the village community, which distributed the same among the cultivators. Everyone was liable for the others' arrears. A village inhabitant - the *lambardar* - collected the tax and remitted it to the state. Tax assessment was also revised at intervals.

Over a period of time the *ryotwari* region was no longer a self-cultivator area. More than one third of the land was leased and in many districts more than two thirds. Indeed, it was not possible to transfer land to the people who were not from the locality, but the result was that landed property became concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy people, whereas the others lost their rights. A constantly increasing number of people became landless. While in the middle of the nineteenth century there were no landless persons, in 1931 and 1945, respectively 33 and 70 million landless labourers were registered. Others succeeded in renting some land, but on less favourable terms. Share tenancy increased greatly.

After Independence, economic situation in rural India changed very differently. A large part of the population remained poor and landless. A complicated relationship between landlords, cultivators, and landless emerged based on mutual rights and obligations.

Assam is a miniature replica of the Indian subcontinent. It has noticeable

diversities and variations in demographic and economic characteristics. It has a wide range of human responses to natural-ecological settings and historical compulsions. Within the confines of this region, a variety of people with diverse ethnic origins, representing different racial strands, speaking different languages and professing diverse religions have migrated and settled. The modes of living of the people, their lifestyles, and material basis of culture and consumption behaviours are diverse.

There are communities in the valleys whose agricultural calendar keeps them busy most of the year while those in the hills and mountains raise a single *jhum* crop. Then there are communities who are partly agrarian and partly dependent on forest produce. In the river valleys of the region, particularly the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, the peasant communities live in a state of dynamic equilibrium with nature and are surrounded on all sides by tribal groups. The varied ecological-environmental settings in the region encourage a variety of agricultural practices and cropping patterns to emerge. The natural factors also influence the human choices in two crucial areas—land and its quality and water and its availability. These greatly influenced their responses and settlements.

A littoral and East Indian model of the Asiatic monsoon regime with dominant wet conditions prevail over a longer duration in the year, and demand prolonged spell of work in the fields in North-East India. In this wet region paddy has emerged as the most dominant crop. The diversities in the crop ecology and the resultant cropping pattern engendered differences in the social division of labour, the absorption of women in the agricultural labour force, in the quantum of agricultural work and leisure available to the agrarian communities. Female labour force participation rates varied strikingly between the hill-mountain and plains-valley communities.

In an area like Assam, with a variegated politico-administrative set-up, there are significant inter-regional differences in the landownership patterns and tenurial relations. In fact, the British policy, like in the rest of the country, was so designed as to accommodate multiple forms of landownership in the hills, mountains and plains regions, depending on agro-climatology, social custom and local tradition. These types of landownership evolved in the course of social history of the various peoples within the niches provided by their respective ecology.

It is in this background that the book under review assumes significance. This book is an outcome of a series of three lectures by Professor Karna

delivered as Professor H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures at Dibrugarh University, Assam. It is an attempt to study agrarian structure and land reforms on all India level. Karna raises the issues of peasant mobilisation, policy decisions and their implementation in a broad temporal framework. He has also traced the peasant uprisings such as Phulaguri uprising and No-Rent agitation. He has been successful in providing wider canvas on which land reforms in India can be better understood.

He provides a broad assessment of the land reforms adopted since Independence. With the abolition of intermediary interests the ownership of land is broader based and the erstwhile superior tenants acquired a higher social status.

Karna argues that while abolition of intermediaries brought about a measure of uniformity in the agrarian system of Assam, tenancy reforms provided a new confidence to the disgruntled tenants. He states that a preponderance of tenants with virtually no ownership rights on land characterises the Assamese agrarian structure. He adds that this has been further complicated by the religio-feudal establishments like *Satras* and *Maths*.

Under the prevailing socio-economic condition in the country no tangible progress can be expected in the field of land reforms. Wherever effective mobilisation of beneficiaries has taken place the result has been positive. The beneficiaries of land reforms, especially sharecroppers and landless labourers, are crippled by social and economic disadvantages. By tradition they are inarticulate, passive and unorganised. They do not constitute a homogenous social and economic category. Hence, a deliberate attempt at mobilisation is needed to generate an appropriate political and administrative climate for implementation of land reform measures. Such a change leads to better implementation of agrarian laws.

Those who believe in a liberal market-oriented path of development may come to accept the necessity of enforcing any package of land reform measures to foster sustainable agricultural growth, a pre-condition for rapid industrialisation and steady economic development. Undoubtedly an outmoded agrarian structure characterised by absentee ownership, widespread tenancies, persisting religio-feudal land control, and scattered holdings is a grave impediment to the optimum utilisation of land and water and to the adoption of improved technology and modern farming practices in the otherwise agriculturally well-endowed plains districts of Assam. Thus, the

need of the hour is to complete the unfinished task of reforms, which should include abolition of absentee landownership, identification and protection of *adhiars* (sharecroppers) effective and efficient enforcement of ceiling laws, speedy distribution of acquired surplus land, and consolidation of holdings and provision of supporting facilities to enforce minimum standards of cultivation. If these steps are integrated with development programmes related to surface irrigation and ground water, soil conservation, social forestry and such other activities, Assam should be able to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty and backwardness.

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The Great Earthquake of 1897 in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills translated by Basil Moris, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong, 2003, pp.40 + xiii, Price : Rs. 95.00 (SB), US\$3.

Like any other eyewitness account of an event of importance, this one by the Reverend Robert Evans, who was a missionary to the Mission Field in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills between 1878 and 1901, makes interesting and fascinating reading, as indeed anything about the Great Earthquake of 1897 is. With the epicentre in the Shillong Plateau, and with a magnitude of 8.5, a report of the Meteorological Department says: "It is one of the major earthquakes in the seismic history of the world. Lasted about 2.5 minutes and completely ruined an area of 150,000 square miles and was felt over an area of one and three quarter of a million square miles. Caused landslides, fissures, vents and disrupted normal communication line. It was followed by a large number of after-shocks. The epicentre tract was within a cot-shaped area covering the entire Shillong Plateau". The severest shock might not have lasted for less than one minute but the devastation was complete.

To the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, originally named the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, the event was of particular significance as the areas most severely affected were those within the Sohra (Cherrapunji) area, where the Mission had established the first church and schools. One may understand the concern that the 'Mother Church' must have felt when news of the devastation reached England. The Reverend Dr. John Roberts,

whose name will always be linked with the development of Khasi literature, was in his country at that time. He had, in fact, just been nominated Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Mission of Wales. The scene of devastation that they saw on their return, with most familiar landmarks beyond recognition, and roads and paths on which they had often travelled drastically altered, was almost beyond belief. The Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills at that time, Mr. J. C. Arbuthnot, whose report to the Government of India was perhaps the most detailed and graphic of the reports submitted, bears out the fact that no comparable natural disaster has ever taken place, perhaps for centuries! This is what he had to say: "In my tour of the district, I have been much struck by the way in which the ancient Khasi monoliths, often of immense size, the antiquity of which unknown, have been levelled with the ground and in many cases snapped off two, three and four feet from the base."

Eyewitness accounts agree that during the two minutes or so when the full force of the earthquake was felt it was impossible for anyone to remain standing. It was said that two women cyclists who were riding past the old All Saint's Cathedral fell down and from where they lay, they saw the church building collapse. The Chief Commissioner of Assam and his wife, who were preparing to go for a ride, had a narrow escape when their residence, the Government House, met a similar fate within minutes of their leaving the porch!

Although Shillong was well within the area most affected, it got off comparatively lightly, with only 23 deaths including Mr. McCabe, the Inspector General of Police, who was buried under the debris of his bungalow on the near side of the Umkhrah River opposite the Polo Ground. It is worth mentioning that the memorial that was erected on the spot has unfortunately been built over by unauthorised constructions during the past few years, which is a stark reminder to the state government to take more interest in what happens in the city than what it has been doing, in order that historical sites are not obliterated as has been done in this and other cases.

By contrast, it was the area closer to Sohra that was more grievously affected, the reason being in the nature of the topography, with steep slopes and cliffs everywhere. The village of Laitiam in the deep valley below the Mawsmat falls accounted for 86 deaths, all lost when the overhanging cliff broke off to overwhelm the habitations below. With these casualties, the Sohra Syiemship lost a total of 237 lives. The Khyrim Syiemship lost 146 lives mainly in the villages on its southern slopes.

Literally, earth shaking events such as this one do arouse strong reaction, and impressions upon those who experienced them. All of them suggest that the earthquake was a form of devil. Retribution for the wickedness of men, which at this point of time may conflict with the belief held by many, in a merciful, forgiving God. Who would extend His compassion not only to His noblest creation, Man, but even to animals, as may be seen in the Book of the Prophet Jonah (Ch.4:13).

Over the next few decades, however, there would be many eyewitness accounts left to various people in the form of newspaper articles, or even in poems published by individual authors, as by the Reverend Morkha Joseph, many of which bring to mind the destruction that overwhelmed places like Shella, the wealthiest village in the Khasi Hills at the time, but today reduced to a shadow of its original self. The once prosperous village of Shella Circle lost a total of 217 lives of which 117 were from the Shella village itself. This village, which was perhaps the most prosperous in the district at that time, with a population in 3658 in the Census of 1891 never recovered from this disaster having been reduced within minutes to a shadow of its former condition.

As one goes through Reverend Evans' account, one will appreciate that primarily, Robert Evans prepared this account for the Mission Board which would want to know how the earthquake affected the new church in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and more especially upon the believers. This account would appear to have been a vindication of the faith that God would not abandon His own in times of crises, but give them strength and ever greater faith, as one can see from the short personal experiences of local pastors and their flocks. What will impress the reader even more is the effect upon the young, who never lost their faith but carried on in the belief that was the time when they would declare how their faith had sustained them even at the worst moments of their young lives.

The account left by the Reverend Robert Evans will therefore be better appreciated if also read against the background as provided by official records.

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DECLARATION

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I, T. B. Subba, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

T. B. Subba

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