



Library in India Series-13

P.S.G. KUMAR

**Library Movement
and
Library Development
in
North-East Region**

**Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur,
Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura**

BR
Publication

This is the thirteen volume in the 'series' covering the 'seven sisters' in the North-East :Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

Starting with the history and geography of the states in the region, provides ethnic and cultural identity of each state the languages spoken, literary traditions, etc, as a back-drop to the literary movement.

Under each state, history of libraries, library development present scenario of public, academic and research libraries were discussed.

Subjects like library legislation, library education, library personnel are also added to make the study a well rounded one.

May be it is for the first time a comprehensive work of this nature has been brought out on the library scene in the North – East region.

Dr P S G Kumar is a prolific writer in the field of library and information science. He wrote about 70 books and 142 papers which include *Indian Library Chronology* (2 editions); *Indian Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (25 volumes); *Kumar's Curriculum Series* (16 volumes); and *Library in India Series* (14 volumes); etc.

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MOSAIC OF NORTH-EAST

North-East India is a mosaic of seven sisters and those are the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura, and the Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Each one of them, except Assam, Manipur and Tripura, has got overwhelming tribal population. Since they practically remained isolated from the mainstream of Indian events, they are not very often referred to in the historical writings of India. But Pragjyotishpur that is modern Assam, and Manipur, have found their place in the epic of *Mahabharata*.

The Rakshasa princes Hidimba and her son Ghatotkach by the second Pandava brother Bhima are characters in the *Mahabharata*. It is believed that Hidimba was a Kachari princess, and the Kachari kings had their seat in Dimapur in present Nagaland. Thus, we can say that Nagaland has also been referred to in the *Mahabharata*, though indirectly. If we accept this proposition, that was a Kachari princess of Dimapur, we should say that the history of Dimapur area of Nagaland goes back to the time of the *Mahabharata* and its Kurukshetra war in which fell Ghatotkach, the son

of Hidimba by Bhima. It is also believed that the Princess Ulupi whom the third Pandava brother Arjuna Married and begot a son named Prabira was a princess of Zeliang area which lies in the south-east of the present Nagaland.

Speciality of North-East India

The north-eastern region has got many problems and those are mainly anthropological and linguistic. Almost the entire region, except the valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak, are inhabited by people of Mongoloid origin and they are divided in many tribes and they speak different languages. These divisions and subdivisions in the character of the population have made the problem complicated and probably it will take some time to solve the political problems of this region to the satisfaction of all.

Unity in Diversity

It will not be an exaggeration to say that some 30 years ago, many people outside the North-East had never heard of the Nagas. Of late, however, the Naga people have begun to feature in the daily talks of the average man on the street. Who are these people? These Nagas? They ask. An assortment of answers follows: "Oh! just another tribal group!" Or, "a fine people those." Or else, "fierce head-hunters!" Then again mostly Christians or, more commonly, "They are gifted with splendid dances and love-music – we saw a group on the Republic Day."

Most of the above observations are no doubt true but they tend to dwell on the obvious. They smack of a partial or sketchy knowledge of the people in question.

With the departure of the British, the Nagas were confused regarding their self-image with no clear conception of national identity. They were left adrift. They were not involved in the Independence Movement

launched by the Indian National Congress, for, the then Naga Hills was administered as an "Excluded Area."

The new political awareness of the dangers involved in the departure of the British dawned on the Nagas. The fear of being placed under the domination of India, motivated by dislike of the lowlanders and the fear that land, natural resources, customary laws and religion would be exploited, became strongly intensified. The dislike of the lowlanders was largely due to discourtesy and prejudice shown to the Nagas by people in the plains; the difference in religious beliefs was another major reason.

Co-Existence of Cultures

The composite culture of contemporary India is a heritage of the past. Various dynamic strands have gone to the making of contemporary India. It is difficult to claim one culture as the Indian culture. Any attempt to impose one culture upon others or any threat to level down all others to one monotonous pattern will certainly lead to national disintegration. The words of the late Jawaharlal Nehru are appropriate here: "I am alarmed, when I see – not only in this country but in other great countries too – how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness, and to impose on them their particular way of living. We are welcome to your way of living, but why impose it on others?"

"I am not at all sure which is the better way of living, the tribal or our own. In some respects I am quite sure certain theirs is better. Therefore, it is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to behave or what to do and what not to do. There is no point in trying to make of them a second-rate copy of ourselves."

Human beings all over the world learn to behave in an extremely large number of patterned and different ways. Each society teaches its individuals the 'proper' ways to think, feel and react to their environment. Thus they develop a particular organized way of viewing themselves and their environment. It is from this 'frame of reference' that the individuals in a society re-act to any given situation. Once a pattern is formed, the group will defend it and resist any attempt to change it. To cite one example. The idea of blood-revenge is deeply embedded in Naga culture. Writing about this, Colonel Woodthorpe, one of the early British administrators in the Naga Hills, wrote: "With them (Nagas) it is an article of faith that blood once shed can never be expiated except by the death of the murderer or some of his near relatives and though years may pass away vengeance will assuredly be taken one day." Among the Nagas blood relationship is vital. The strong kinship obligations bind all its members closely, so that any harm to one of its members affects the whole group and redress must be made. The fear of relation from relatives of a victim serves as a strong deterrent against crimes.

To outsiders, the practice of blood-revenge may appear barbarous, but underlying it are factors affecting the Naga culture complex, involving the tribes' need for security, group-life and its perpetuation. Therefore, this practices persists among the Nagas. Tradition is defended because it is more meaningful and relevant to the group. The Nagas, as any other group, perceive reality from their 'frame of reference' moulded by pervious cultural conditioning.

When a group and tradition-oriented society like that of the Nagas is thrown into a new situation, they will react favourably if they feel it re-inforces their present phenomenon world and negatively if they see it as a threat to their present beliefs, understanding, customs and goals.

As a result of any situation threatening to them, they will either mobilize their defences saying, 'our way is best' or retreat from the threatening situation. Therefore, to impose one's way of life upon others or to shape others according to one's image is not right, and is fraught with serious consequences.

Today, in India nationhood is still in process of becoming. Many talk about incorporating or assimilating the minorities into the larger society under the concept of equal citizenship. Many talk about enabling the minority groups to enter the major currents of national life and participate in the benefits that modern science can bring.

India is declared to be a Secular State, but there is the danger or visible signs of the nation becoming a monolithic society where the majority may define the limits of national society, and where the majority are often confused with the national society. The 'ethos' and values of the majority may be imposed upon the minority groups. The real danger to the structure and unity of India lies in the danger of relapse into traditional ways donning the raiments of progress and diverting the direction of growth. This trend, if not checked in time, will be one sure cause leading to the disintegration of the nation.

Today, certain amount of national concern is shown to the tribal people and their welfare. But could it be that this present concern is for externals only, not for the core-elements of tribal cultural and its people, which may be reflected in the concentration of attention on the exotic, such as tribal dances, songs, colourful costumes and their pretty women? It is a pity, if the distinctive contributions of the tribal are recalled only on national occasions such as August 15 and January 26, when they are invited to New Delhi to appear in colourful costumes. In brief, the relevances of tribal cultures to national social goals and purposes is still narrowly conceived by the majority.

The national society can achieve its goals only through the differential participation of diverse elements, each contributing to the achievement of the goal in its own unique manner, a contribution that is nevertheless essential. It is important that each diverse element in a nation should have that consciousness of identification with the national life and its goals. The cultivation this sense of identity and of belonging to the national life is a serious and crucial problem, particularly, for the tribals of North- East India today.

Understanding and communication begin when two peoples are aware of the similarities and differences of each other's values, goals, interests and motivations for behavior. The urge to make others conform to our ways is rooted in weakness and the ability to permit alternative solution to problems. A climate of peace and understanding results when all groups feel secure from any threat to their way of life, and when groups desist from imposing their ways on others and avoid attempts to change the behaviour patterns of others.

The composite nature of the culture makes it difficult to adopt and enforce the same pattern of administration for the whole country. This calls for wisdom and farsight to permit alternative solution to problems. In the area of development, the techniques applied in Uttar Pradesh, or in West Bengal may not suit the tribal areas. Often from the official viewpoint, the progress of development of tribal areas is measured in terms of money spent yearly. Important and impressive as these statistics are, and yet, the investment in man which concerns the proper development of the human mind and spirit, should be the scale by which to measure progress.

Many think that the tribal problem is largely a problem of peace and order and needs military solutions. But it will be a grievous error to follow this policy.

I would like to cite one example from the Nagas to support this statement. The Nagas are a freedom-loving people and a proud race. Formerly, their society was geared for warfare, and for them bravery is a sure asset to status. Their cultural conditioning motivated all males to fight and die like 'men'. Even today they cannot be intimidated by threats or the use of force, for the idea of surrender to force is repugnant to Naga psychology.

The whole region of North-East India is of tremendous strategic importance for India, and the surest defence against this vulnerability lies in her ability to win over the confidence of the indigenous people of this region through the arts of peace and love. Any ethnocentric and dogmatic approach to these people will help only in deepening the gulf and widening the social and cultural barriers.

This Seminar is timely, for the problems of North-East India are complex and intriguing, and yet, an honest search must be made to understand the people and their values, and this possibility is greater through a Seminar like this where there is academic freedom. The problem of search for the right answers must be pursued even after this Seminar is over.

The ultimate's question posed before the nation today concerns how to create an atmosphere conducive to tolerant creative nationalism, and how to make all the diverse groups conscious of their sense of belonging and of identity with the national values and goals. Is it only a dream or a possibility?

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