

Arunachal Pradesh, the land of rising sun, having an area of 83,500 sq. Kms with lofty hills, snow clad mountains and green valleys, the home of 20 (twenty) major tribes and 70 (seventy) sub-tribes with a population of more than 6 lakhs living in 2500 villages is the youngest state of Indian Union. Administratively, it has now 10 (ten) Districts, namely-Tawang, West and East Kameng, Upper and Lower Subansiri, West and East Siang, Dibang, Lohit and Tirap. The language and culture of this small state represent a Mini India, having different colours and characters.

The tribes and sub-tribes living in this state are :

- 1) The Monpas, Sherdukpens, Akas, Bangnis, Mijis, and Kowas in Tawang, East and West Kameng.
- 2) The Apatanis, Nishis, Hill-Miris, Sulungs, and Adis in Upper and Lower Subansiri District.
- 3) The Adis, Monpas, Khambas, and Mishings in East and West Siang District.
- 4) The Adis and Idus in Dibang Valley District.
- 5) The Taraons, Mijis, Khamtis and Singphos in Lohit District.
- 6) The Noctes, Wanchos, Tangsas in Tirap District.

The important annual festivals of the people are mainly :

- 1) The Loser and Torgya of the Monpas ;
- 2) The Chhekher of the Sherdukpens ;
- 3) The Nechideo of the Akas ;
- 4) The Khan of the Mijis ;
- 5) The Kshyat Swai of the Khowas ;
- 6) The Nyokum and Sirom Molo Sochum of the Nishis ;
- 7) The Dree and Mloko of the Apatanis ;
- 8) The Boori Boot of the Hill Miris ;
- 9) The Si-Donyi of the Tagins ;
- 10) The Solung of the Nishangs ;
- 11) The Solung, Aaran, Etor and Mopin of the Adis ;
- 12) The Ali Aye Ligang of the Mishings ;
- 13) The Durbachuk of the Khambas ;
- 14) The Reh of the Lous ;
- 15) The Tamladu of the Taraons ;
- 16) The Sangken, Sitang of the Khamtis and Singphos ;
- 17) The Loku of the Noctes ;
- 18) The Ojeyele of the Wanchos ;

- 19) The Mol of the Tangsas ;
- 20) The Moh of the Lungchangs, etc.

The festivals are celebrated in different seasons and characteristically these festivals are mostly agricultural, religious and merry-making, invoking blessings of their Gods and Goddesses for the prosperity of crops, good health of mankind and domestic animals. These festivals are accompanied with prayers, hymns and dances at the time of celebration. Besides these festivals, there are many melodious, romantic and joyous folk songs and colourful rhythmic folk dances. These songs contain legends, love affairs and other facts and fictions of social life of the people. The folk dances of the people can be categorised as follows :

- 1) Religious dance by priest ;
- 2) Festival dance by young boys and girls ;
- 3) Merry-making dance by young boys and girls ;
- 4) War and Victorious dance by male folks.

Under religious dance the following may be mentioned :

- 1) Shamma dance of the Tangsas ;
- 2) Monglup dance of the Singphos ;
- 3) Dongthangpu of the Wanchos ;
- 4) Damochong/Manbuong/Pongtu dance of the Noctes ;
- 5) Aiha dance of the Idus ;
- 6) Ayit Miri dance of the Adis ;
- 7) Nuiya dance of the Digarus ;
- 8) Lhatamdring dance of the Khambas ;
- 9) Wacho sum dance of the Akas ;
- 10) Daromji dance of the Mijis, etc.

Under festival dances the following may be mentioned :

- 1) Kiengpa Brophu of the Sherdukpens ;
- 2) Clow/Chasoi dance of the Monpas ;
- 3) Broh/Bardo dance of the Membas ;
- 4) Dusidu/Taktamo dance of the Apatanis ;
- 5) Biiyasodom dance of the Mishis ;
- 6) Delong/Ponung/Yakjong/Popir dances of the Adis ;
- 7) Reh dance of the Idus ;
- 8) Ojeyel dance of the Wanchos ;
- 9) Orang/Ranglo/Chalo dance of the Noctes ;
- 10) Sapokoro dance of the Tangsas, etc.

Under Merry-Making dances the following may be mentioned :

- 1) Khakhang dance of the Singphos ;
- 2) Hambowson dance of the Wanchos ;
- 3) Moman Ponung of the Adis ;

- 4) Northom dance of the Nishis ;
- 5) Boyen dance of the Hill Miris ;
- 6) Koinereto dance of the Tagins ;
- 7) Mikside dance of the Akas ;
- 8) Jee dance of the Mijis ;
- 9) Gesisiu dance of the Khowas, etc.

Under War and Victorious dances the following may be mentioned :

- 1) Ajilamu dance of the Monpas and Sherdukpens ;
- 2) Ka phiphai/Ka Mukchu dance of the Khamtis ;
- 3) Nibo Tam of the Tagins ;
- 4) Dosodow dance of the Akas ;
- 5) Damadu Niwai dance of the Mijis ;
- 6) Ropi dance of the Nishis ;
- 7) Pajuk/Erap dances of the Adi Gallong ;
- 8) Keeking/Myosong/Taapu/Kiimu/Roja dances of the other sub-tribes of the Adis ;
- 9) Gellapu dance of the Wanchos ;
- 10) Banvabong dance of the Noctes ;
- 11) Moikukship dance of the Tangsas etc.

Till a decade after independence, the festivals were celebrated by the people in old traditional way, after which people have started to celebrate their festivals in a befitting manner, giving a new face to celebrations.

Pre-independence period was a totally dark period for this region. New light and life of all development took place only after independence. The first outlet of people's culture from dark period started in 1947 when Lord Mountbatan, the last Viceroy of British India and the first Governor General of free India, visited Shillong as his farewell visit to this North Eastern Region of India, where two folk dance troupes from eastern section (present Kameng area), a Musk dance troupe and middle sector (Abor hills) of the then NEFA, Ponung dance troupe, were invited to present folk dances in his farewell function at Shillong. Then during the time of Sir Akbar Hyderi the Governor of undivided Assam, a Ponung dance gtroupe from Pasighat area was invited to receive and welcome him by the people of North East India in 1948. These functions brought great opportunities to the people of this region to know the outside world and vice-versa which greatly encouraged them to develop their traditional folk dance in the light of other brethren of North East India. Then came the republic day of 1950 which opened more outlet to the people of the then NEFA. Diffe-

rent folk dance troupes representing different tribes and sub-tribes of the then NEFA presented their colourful folk dances in the capital of India which added more spirit, enthusiasm and eagerness to improve their respective culture on competitive spirit.

The Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh after attainment of Union Territory in the year 1972, chalked out state level folk dance festival programmes where folk dance troupes from every district and major tribe were invited to take part. It is a great pride for the people and a golden opportunity to come closer who before could not see folk dance of other tribes could now see them at their home towns.

This folk dance festivals encouraged the morals of the people, value of indigenous culture, self respect for preservation of identity by improving and developing folk dances.

### **Celebration of Annual Festivals**

As stated above, till more than a decade ago people had been celebrating their annual festivals in old traditional way, but today, all the annual festivals of the tribes are celebrated in befitting manner with highlight programmes which included :

(a) Festival procession, (b) Distribution of festival celebration programme, (c) Invitation of Chief guest to grace the occasion, (d) Arrangement of cultural programme and competition ; (f) Installation of Fair and Stall in the festival ground, (g) Collection of Fund for festival from Public, (h) Arrangement of public meeting during festival and community feast, etc. Thus unlike the old practices of only drinking, gossiping and dancing and other performances of religious programme, in the present day, various colourful programmes have been added in festival celebrations.

In the public meeting during festival, various problems for improvement of traditional culture are discussed and resolved. In such gathering manuscript/script and articles are presented by intellectuals depicting the original background of a particular festival to let other people also know. These papers are published in leading daily, weekly and monthly magazines from time to time. This now at least, the major annual festivals of the major tribes with their names, places and dates of festival are known to the people of outside world and they have become national festivals of India today.

### **Fixation of Festival Dates**

Earlier, those annual festivals had no fixed dates for celebra-

tions. People used to celebrate them at their own convenient time. But today, with education and understanding of the importance of such traditional festivals as the only identity of the people and media of their preservation, the people fix the dates of respective annual festivals unanimously. And the Arunachal Government has accepted the dates, by granting state holidays and local holidays in honour of these festivals. Besides, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh plans to publish officially all the dates of important annual festivals of the people in official calendar.

### **Printing and Publication of Books on Arunachal Culture**

Many writers from outside and within, have written books, pamphlets and articles on Arunachal culture and their writings have been printed and published by Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh from time to time. Among these writers, the names of late Dr. Guha, late Dr. Verier Elwin, Dr. Parul Datta, Shri T. K. Bhattacharyya and Shri B. N. Choudhury are worth mentioning in particular and the field officers of Research Department of Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh in general. Besides them, writers from local young generation have also sprouted like Shri Lummer Dai, Shri Oshong Ering, Shri Ngangin Osik and many others whose works of literature have contributed a great share to the documentation of Arunachal Culture. Through their writings, the culture of the people of this region has become the national property of high value.

### **Film on Arunachal Festivals**

Besides the above, the state govt. have also taken up film making programme on the important festivals of the people. This has created a higher and wider horizon for cultural development. This audio-visual media has played a great impetus on the cultural development of Arunachal and the credit goes to the Department of Information and Public Relation of Arunachal Government.

### **Establishment of Cultural Institutions**

In order to promote and preserve the indigenous culture of the people by keeping in view the challenging and exploiting waves of other culture from outside, the people have established cultural institutions in the District voluntarily and as protective measures. Their main functions are to organise the annual festivals on scheduled dates in a systematic way, promote folk dances and songs, collect materials for literature and print and publish them for pre-

servation. The District cultural Institutions have taken up the following Programmes :

#### **i. Maintenance of Cultural Troupe**

Some District cultural societies have maintained cultural troupes to perform dance, drama and songs during festivals and on other occasions in the villages based on tribal mythology and legends, whereas some District cultural societies have promoted the composition of folk songs, dances and dramas.

#### **ii. Printing and Publication of literature**

Some District Cultural Societies have been printing books and booklets after collecting folk songs/legends/hymns/prayers/rituals and myths which are classic in form and nature

#### **iii. Picturisation of Image of Gods and Goddesses**

Some cultural societies of the district have drawn pictures of deities out of imagination and exhibited them during festivals. The images drawn out of imagination may not be the exact or actual image of a particular god or goddess but that may act as media to draw one's mind nearer to one's god. Thus, today's imagination may become a real thing tomorrow if, it is held with sufficient faith by the people. In this way, people are trying to protect, promote and preserve their culture. If these efforts become effective, these will be mile stones in the cultural development and may bring back the minds of the people to worship their own religion.

#### **iv. Organisation of Annual Festival**

In organisation of annual festivals the cultural societies in the district have been taking leading part in performing songs, dances and dramas and worshipping gods and goddesses. They exhibit pictures of gods and goddesses and invite suggestions from critics, appreciation from well-wishers and encouragement from interested persons.

#### **Enactment of Rules and Acts for Preservation/Promotion of Peoples' Faiths and Practices**

Majority of the population of Arunachal Pradesh have their own indigenous faiths and practices, but they did not take initiative in organising constructive movement for promotion of their faiths till recent years. Taking advantage of their simplicity and innocence, waves of other faiths from outside world intruded into

this land and eroded hard rocks of some people's minds. To support peoples' movement and protect indigenous faiths, the Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh adopted and enacted an Act in 1978. Under this Act, further unnatural erosion of people's faiths was to be arrested in order to let the indigenous faiths grow freely in their homeland.

### **Indigenous Missionary Institution**

Challenging attitude of the people with self constructive measures had developed to awaken the sleeping minds of the people. As the first initiative, Donyi-Polo Mission was established in 1979 with its headquarters at Itanagar with proper recognition and registration by state government with the main objectives of promoting social, cultural, economic, and educational advancements of the local people. This Missionary institution has presently opened schools, dispensaries and vocational training centres for handicapped persons located at Itanagar. These institutions have been running smoothly to serve educational, health services and employment opportunity to handicapped persons. A branch of cultural society for promotion of socio-culture of the people has also been added. With the initiative of some interested members of this cultural wing, Donyi-Polo Mission has been registered and recognised in the world Religious Body - International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), headquarters at Frankfurt, Germany. Now it is an active member of this religious body of the world and participated in its conference of Indian Chapter at New Delhi in 1985 and at Bangalore in 1986. Representatives of Donyi-Polo Mission presented papers in the above conferences on the faiths, practices and philosophies of Donyi-Polo. Recently, Donyi-Polo Mission has formed a cultural Advisory Body for Arunachal Pradesh at Itanagar. Ambitious programmes on cultural developments have been taken up by this Advisory Body.

### **Modern Songs and Dances of Arunachal Pradesh**

Despite all efforts to promote the traditional folk songs and dances, modern songs and dances have become increasingly popular. The young generation takes all pains to compose songs only in modern tunes and lyric, totally avoiding old styles. The reasons for this avoidance of old styles is that the young generations do not try to learn the teachings and practices of old school of traditional culture at all. They seem to be ashamed of learning and practising it. Therefore, they create a gap between old and modern

instead of producing modernised traditional songs. However, one must be proud to say that some of these modern song composers, singers and dancers have been able to earn good reputation by virtue of their talent and skills.

### **Peoples' Dresses and Its Developments**

The dresses of the people of Arunachal Pradesh vary from place to place and tribe to tribe suiting the climate of a particular place. Therefore, one will find the dresses of the people from half naked condition to indigenous royal types. Also one will find the dress of a particular tribe to be quite distinct from another. Thus every tribe or sub-tribe can be easily identified from their dresses.

In the developmental aspect dress is the quickest and very fast changing culture of every community of the world. So also, the people of Arunachal Pradesh have changed in dress in keeping with the pace of the fast changing world. Besides personal or individual make up of dress, improvement of dresses in folk dances have gone in high speed. Secondly, the women, expert in weaving, have been producing new designs of fabricated and flowered dresses for personal use and commercial purposes. But the western dresses and styles are making inroads in such a degree that there is a great danger for the survival of the indigenous dresses.

Thus the slow death of traditional culture is a threat to the society. Imitating modern and western pop music, disco dance, movies and video tapes, showing glamour, violence and horror, these are killing genuine culture of the people.

Before we conclude, I want to suggest that let us bring back through cultural reformation, the glorious values like bravery, charity, courtesy, kindness, decency, hard work, respect for old school of culture and revival of social laws, rules and moral codes. Before folk lores, folk dance and traditional practices of worship, prayers, hymns and rituals are buried deep down, let us try to revive them as these are valuable properties of countless tribal people. For them, the songs, dances, legends, myths and wish-sayings are the source of knowledge and wisdom. For a state like Arunachal Pradesh, which prides herself in her high spiritual, cultural and moral values, to maintain them requires great effort today.

Therefore, to day, it is the responsibility of the educated group to help to discover their own pristine culture as expressed through folk songs, folklores, folktales, music, dances and dramas so that all the tribes may live and prosper as distinct tribes of the many splendoured peoples of this great land of India.