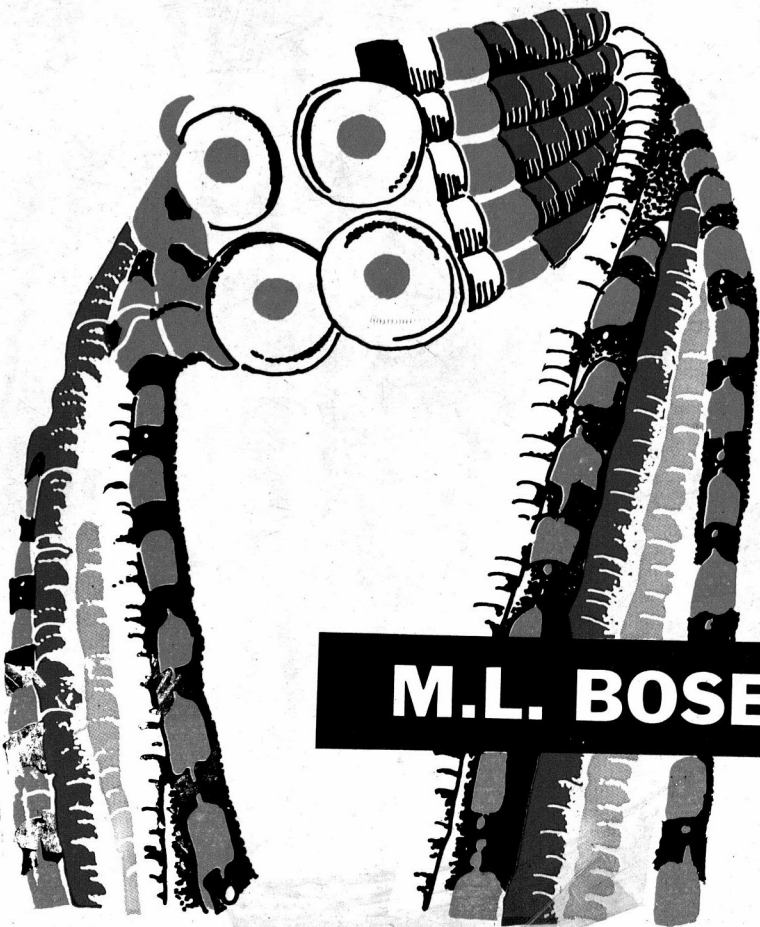


History of Arunachal Pradesh



M.L. BOSE

About the Book

History of Arunachal Pradesh in the revised and enlarged upto dated title *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency* published in 1979. The book is a prescribed textbook in Degree Honours and P.G. courses of Arunachal University and also in other Universities of North-East India. The earlier title is no more available in the market and as such a new enlarged edition with change in the title is published now to suit the P.G. students of Arunachal University.

Rs. 500

About the Author

Prof. M.L. Bose has been teaching in the Dibrugarh University for about thirty years and has contributed more than thirty papers in Regional and National Seminars and Journals of Repute. An Aurobindite Prof. Bose has guided many research scholars to produce Ph.D. thesis. His earlier published works *Historical and Constitutional Documents of North East India*, 1979, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, 1979, *Development of Administration in Assam*, 1985, *Social History of Assam*, 1989 and *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India*, 1989 were well received in the academic world.

ISBN 81-7022-665-1 (HB)

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HISTORY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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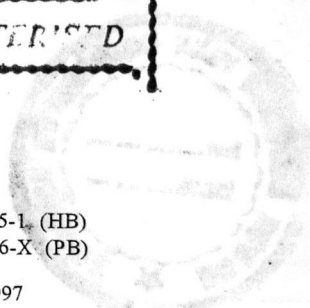
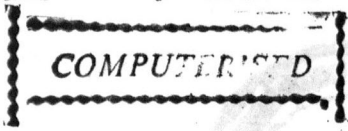
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ISBN 81-7022-665-1. (HB)
ISBN 81-7022-666-X. (PB)

First Published 1997

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Published and Printed by

Ashok Kumar Mittal

Concept Publishing Company

A/15-16, Commercial Block, Mohan Garden,
NEW DELHI - 110059 (India)

Phones: 5554042, 5504042

Fax: (011) 5598898

CONCEPT PUBLISHING COMPANY

In the Memory of

My Father

Late Sri Sisir Kumar Bose

PREFACE

This book attempts to draw, in seven Chapters, a connected history of the North-East Frontier which is now known as Arunachal Pradesh. In the first five Chapters, the period from annexation of Assam in 1826 to the end of British rule in 1947 in order to provide an understanding of the development of the North-East Frontier during the British period from a historical angle. Then in last two Chapters post-independence developments leading to the creation of the Arunachal Pradesh has been shown.

For the British period, the relevant proceedings of the revenue, judicial, police and political departments of the Government of Bengal between the years 1826-1874, and the Secret Consultations of that Government, in the West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, as well as the Home, Public, Judicial, Police, and Foreign Political proceedings of the Government of India, in the National Archives of India, New Delhi, for the same period were examined. (The history of this period has been laboriously written by Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who served under the Government of Bengal and the Government of India and had full access to all the official papers of those Governments. The book is well written, though with a purpose). Besides, the following have also been thoroughly studied: all the proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam between 1874-1905 in the Foreign Department of the Government of India; all the relevant proceedings of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam in the Political Department between 1906-12; and all the proceedings of the Government of Assam for 1913-20, 1921 and 1937 have also been consulted. Subsequent developments have been studied from the proceedings of the Tribal Affairs Department of the Assam Governor's Secretariat. The study was considerably

facilitated by the author's discovery of the records preserved in the Lakhimpur Deputy Commissioner's Record Room at Dibrugarh; all the original papers relating to the Frontier, particularly of the period between 1874 and 1914, and all the reports on the administration of the North-East Frontier till the end of the British period are available there. Finally, all the relevant proceedings of the Government of India in the Foreign Political and Secret Department had to be consulted for connecting the missing links in the development of the Frontiers. The study at the National Archives of India was, however, greatly handicapped by restrictions on the use of records relating to certain periods and certain aspects of the subject. But the difficulty has been partially removed by the publication of some White Papers by the Ministry of External Affairs. To the study of the unpublished documents was added a thorough survey of reports and articles on the Frontiers published from time to time in different journals as also books which have been published in recent times, particularly those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs.

The last two Chapters have been written mainly on the basis of data called from the statistical Hand Books prepared by the Arunachal Government and an official publication called *Arunachal Pradesh—An Overview* written by Dr. P. Datta, Director of Research, Arunachal Pradesh, (1989), besides my new work entitled *Historical and Constitutional Developments of North-Eastern India* (1979), V. Elwin's *Philosophy for NEFA* (1957) and P.N.Luthra's *Constitutional and Administrative Growth of NEFA* (1969).

Thus, the present study may claim originally in respect of collection of new facts from hitherto unexplored source materials as also in respect of new interpretation of some already known facts. It is an original work also in the sense that it has treated the history of the Frontier from a fresh point of view. It is a comprehensive study of: (i) relation of the Government with the Frontier Tribes up to the end of the British period; (ii) emergence of the Inner Line, Outer Line and McMahon Line; (iii) the evolution of the Constitution and administration of the North-East Frontier, in the perspective of

the land and the people. Secondly, an attempt has been made to study British policy against the background of political realities. Adverse criticism of that policy is usually based on the charge that it was because of the British neglect that the present problems have cropped up. This is true in a general sense, but then it is only one aspect of the issue. We cannot, as students of history, overlook the fact that British interest was concentrated on the plains—and not on the hills—for practical reasons. No threat of foreign aggression across the eastern frontiers seemed possible after the British had come to Assam; what caught their attention were the raids of the tribes from above the hills. The British were anxious to ensure safety of the plains below the Frontier Hills and for this purpose they strengthened the security measures on the foothills. Then after 1910, when the Chinese appeared across the frontier and foreign aggression became possible, the frontier was delimited and development and security measures began to be provided. It was already too late; the frontier people, deprived of governmental attention for about eight decades, remained far behind their brothers in the plains in respect of social and economic development. Administrative and security measures were thought of and provided for by the British Government during the last three decades of its rule. But this was only a beginning, and they left a complicated legacy for free India. Indian measures resulted in the emergence of Arunachal Pradesh.

The book is based mainly on my thesis submitted for the Ph.D. degree of Jadavpur University which was awarded in 1976.

For the help I received in preparation of the book, I am indebted to many, particularly A.C. Banerjee, Ex-Centenary Professor of International Relations, Calcutta University and retired Professor of Guru Nanak University. I am also grateful to P.C. Sharma, Keeper of Records, Assam Secretariat; the authorities of National Archives and West Bengal State Archives and Dibrugarh District for permitting me to collect research material from their respective archives and libraries. I am also grateful to B. Datta Ray and his family in Shillong who

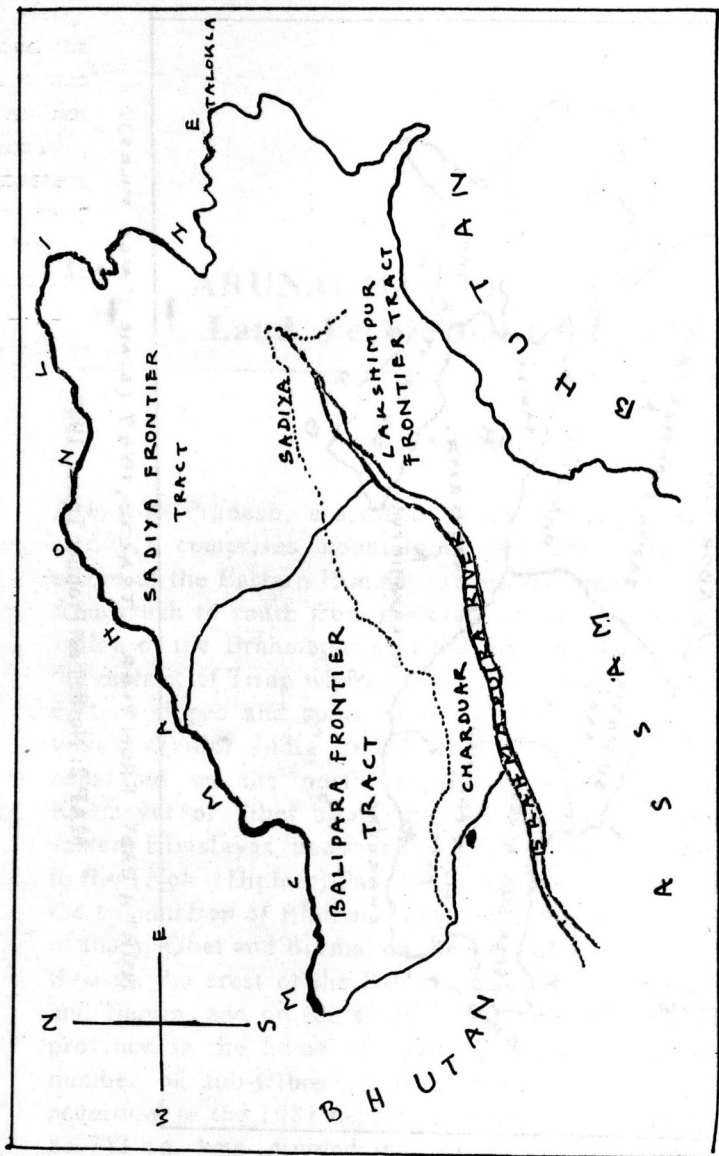
extended warm hospitality to me during my stay there in connection with the preparation of the book.

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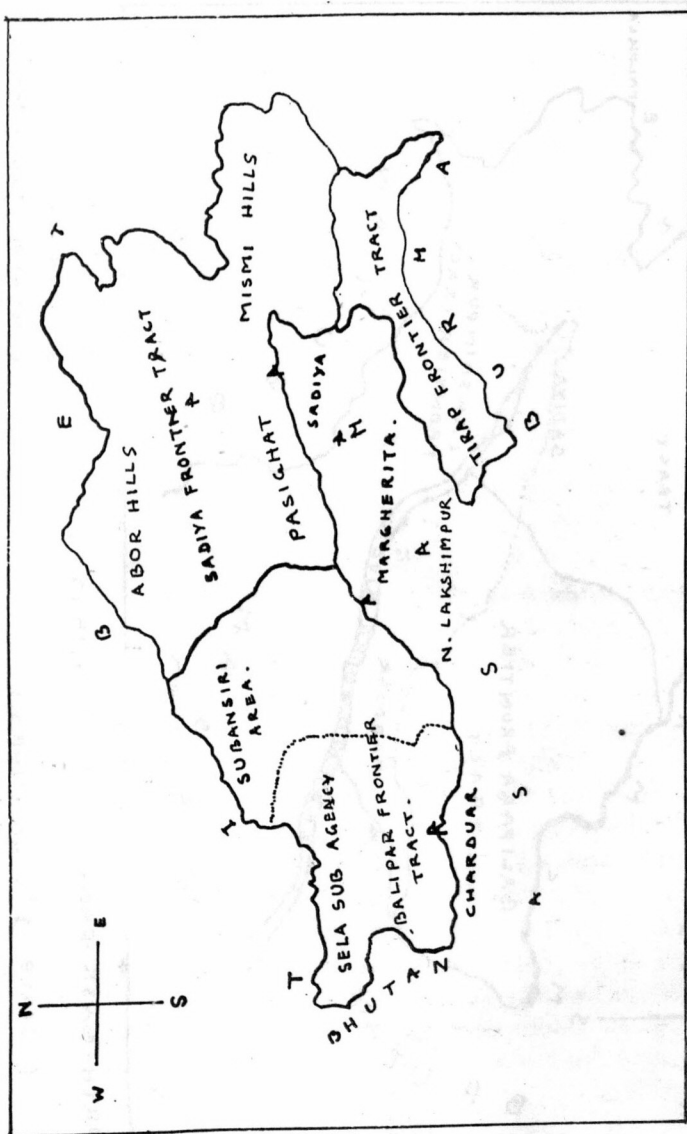
REFERENCE

- INNER LINE = - - - - -
- MCMAHON LINE = ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER TRACTS, 1919

(SCALE 1" = 64 MILES)

MAP 1: North-East Frontier Tracts, 1919



NORTH EAST FRONTIER TRACTS, 1947 (SCALE 1" = 64 MILES).

MAP 2: North-East Frontier Tracts, 1947

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

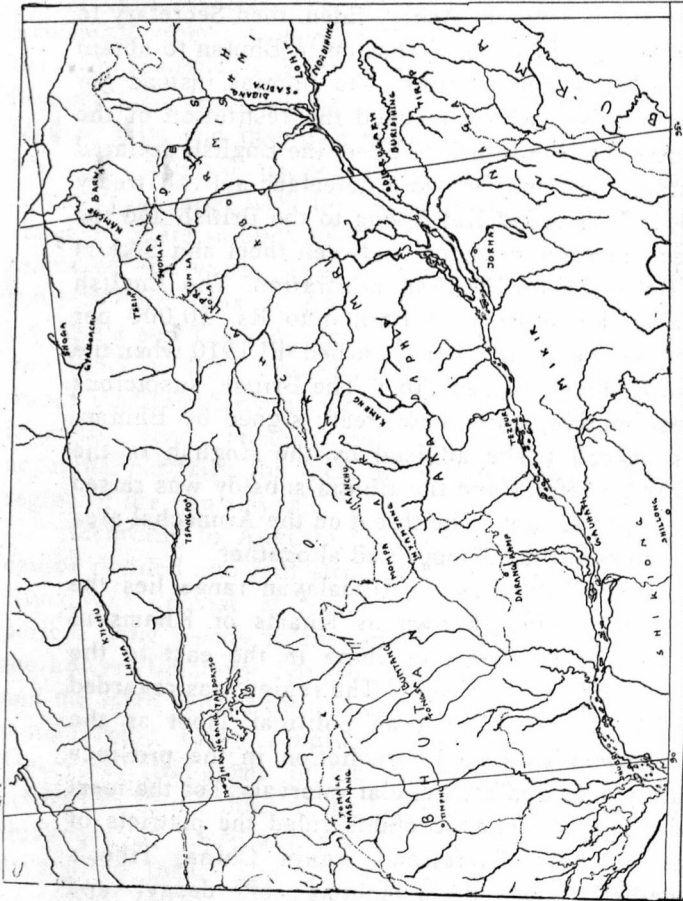
Land, People and Culture

THE LAND

Arunchal Pradesh, erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), comprises mountainous territory on the southern slopes of the Eastern Himalayas with the spurs coming down from north to south from the crest of the main range to the valley of the Brahmaputra in the State of Assam, except in the district of Tirap where the territory consists of the north-eastern slopes and spurs of the Patkai range, the crest of which divides India and Burma. Thus, the province is separated on the north by the province of Khams or Khamsyul of Tibet along the 700 mile long crest of the eastern Himalayas, known since 1914 as the McMahon Line,¹ to the Talok (Diphuk) Pass to the north-west of Burma, from the tri-junction of Bhutan, Tibet and India to the tri-junction of India, Tibet and Burma; on the west by Bhutan; on the east through the crest of the Patkai range which separates India and Burma; and on the south by Assam and Nagaland. The province is the home of twenty-five major tribes with a number of sub-tribes totalling a population of 6,31,859 according to the 1981 census. The total area is said to cover 83,743 sq. kms. divided into eleven districts from west to east: West Kameng, East Kameng, Tawang, Lower Subansiri, Upper Subansiri, West Siang, East Siang, Dibang, Lohit, Changland and Tirap.²

Geopolitically speaking, the province was regarded as unimportant³ till 1910 when the contingent of Chao Er-feng, after occupying Tibet, appeared at Rima and demanded the submission of the Mishmis to their orders, bounded as it was on three sides by states which were neither powerful nor intentionally dangerous for the British Empire. The Himalayas always provided India with natural defences and the Eastern Himalayas were regarded as barrier against the invaders from the north-east. To the east, Burma, after the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) was regarded as an aggrieved and powerful state and to stop an immediate attack on the British territory by Burma, a hedge of semi-independent petty states was created between Burma and the British possessions in Assam. In the north-east—the Kampti and Singpho tracts—were the Ahom principality of Upper Assam and Manipur. As the earliest approach from Burma to British India lay through the Kubo Valley, a contingent called the Manipur Levy equipped, paid and commanded by a British officer was maintained there. To strengthen and gratify Manipur, some tracts of Cachar were made over to the Raja of Manipur.⁴ But after the second Anglo Burmese War (1852), when Lower Burma was annexed to the British Empire, the dangers of Burmese aggression receded to naught; finally, the Chinese overlordship over Burma was brought to an end by an agreement between China and Great Britain in 1876.⁵

To the west of the province, along a frontier of 159 km lies Bhutan which was a petty vassal of Tibet. The location of Bhutan, between the Tibetan plateau and the plains of Bengal and Assam, gives it a highly strategic importance. But Tibetan control over Bhutan had become extinct and Bhutan had become independent for all purposes; the Bhutanese ruler became practically sovereign. The British had come to the rescue of the ruler of Cooch Behar in 1772 when the latter had been carried off by the Bhutias. The East India Company's army marched into Bhutan and defeating the Bhutia army not only brought back the Cooch Behar prince but also got a treaty signed by the Bhutia authorities



REFERENCES:
RIVER
Tribes in pattern line
Tribes in dotted line
Tribes in solid line

MAP 3: Tribes and Rivers with River System

to the effect that they would never entertain hostility against the British nor would they give asylum to any enemy of the British.⁶ Gradually Bhutan Duras were annexed to the British Empire. In 1857, the Bhutia sympathy for the Sepoys in the Mutiny, antagonised the English. After the suppression of the Mutiny, the English deputed Ashley Eden, then Secretary to the Government of Bengal, on a Mission to Bhutan to obtain a fresh teaty on favourable terms. The Bhutias instead got Eden to sign a treaty which pledged the restitution of the Duras to Bhutan. On the return of Eden, the English declared war on Bhutan. The Bhutias were defeated; a fresh treaty was concluded. This ceded Kalimpong to the British and the Bhutias agreed to refer disputes between them and Sikkim and Cooch Behar to the English arbitration. The English agreed to raise the subsidy to Bhutan to Rs. 50,000 per annum. Since then peace was not disturbed till 1910 when the army of Chao Er-feng invaded Tibet. The British, suspicious of the Chinese motive, got a new treaty signed by Bhutan. The Bhutias agreed to be advised by the English in the conduct of foreign affairs and the Bhutia subsidy was raised to Rs. 1,00,000 per annum.⁷ The threat on the Arunachal area from the Bhutan side thus disappeared altogether.

To the north of the Eastern Himalayan range lies the eastern division of Tibet known as Khams or Khamsyul extending from the frontiers of China in the east to the Tibetan province of U in the west.⁸ The region was regarded as ethnographic Tibet rather than political Tibet as the Tibetan Government exercised jurisdiction in the province only in certain places and at irregular intervals. For the most part, the local lay or monastic chiefs ruled the districts of varying size at their discretion.⁹ Again China, Tibet's suzerain, herself showed symptoms of decay and disintegration and till 1910 her control or direction of affairs in Lhasa was nominal rather than real. Neither Tibet nor China showed signs of virility or aggressive propensity. No danger thus loomed across the northern frontiers. Therefore, the British, instead of guarding the frontiers and arranging

for their proper defence, remained unconcerned about the province¹⁰ and left the affairs there to the helpless people themselves.

Geographically, the Eastern Himalayan range of Arunachal from the eastern border of Bhutan through the gorge of Tsangpo (Dihang) up to the syntaxial bend in the Mishmi hills lies entirely within Tibet and Assam.¹¹ The Mishmi hills and that part of the Patkai range which falls within the Tirap district of Arunachal are within Burma and Assam. Compared with the Sub-Himalayas, the information about the more interior parts of the Himalayan mountains is restricted and vague. The main trafficable trade route from south to north runs along the Kameng Valley through Bomdi La, Se La and Tawang; along this route, the Dalai Lama fled into India in 1959 and then three years later the Chinese troops made their major thrust into Assam. Further east, no important trade routes cross the range and that factor accounts partially for lack of full information about this region of the Himalayas.

According to Augusto Gansser, the Eastern Himalayas can be divided into four structural units: (i) The Sub-Himalayas consist of Siwalik sediments of the Tertiary period, lying mostly in the southern part of the region; (ii) the Lower Himalayas lying between the main boundary fault and the main central thrust comprise varied sedimentary and metamorphic rocks ranging in age from Palaeozoic to Mesozoic; (iii) north of the central thrust lies the basal crystalline thrust sheet of the Higher Himalayas; (iv) a great thickness of fossiliferous Tertiary sediments cover the crystalline thrust sheet of the Higher Himalayas.¹² The geological structure and process of erosion have influenced the surface appearance of landforms, which are intricately related to man's use of the land. But in this part of the country, the natural environment has remained inhospitable and adverse features have seriously impeded human development over large areas.

Very little information is available about the soils. The rocks are generally of the Himalayan type—shales, schists

and conglomerates; the derived soils are sandy and progressively clayey in the lower reaches of the valley. Soil acidity caused by heavy rainfall is high. The recently cleared forest lands exhibit a thick layer of leaf mould, rich in organic matter, but as a result of early rains the top soil is easily washed off. Soils in the foothills are alluvial in nature, being either loam or sandy loam mixed with pebbles, brought down by rain from higher altitudes. Soils in the valleys are clayey alluvium and rich in organic content.¹³

At least three major climatic zones can be recognised on the basis of temperature although temperature, pressure, precipitation and winds vary with altitude. The foothill area is hot and humid and has a sub-tropical climate; the lesser Himalayas enjoy cooler or microthermal climate; and finally in the higher region, a Himadri type (Alpine) climate is found. The flora and fauna of the province vary with the climate and soil. The forest types range from tropical evergreen in the foothills, through temperate evergreen in the middle ranges, to the coniferous in the higher elevations and the high Himalayas in the extreme north.¹⁴

Be that as it may, the hills of this province up to the Mishmi hills may be sub-divided into sections based on the major tribes that inhabit the respective mountains. From the west at the eastern border of Bhutan to the east, they are the Mompa, Sherdukpen and Aka hills, the Nishi hills in the Subansiri district, the Miri hills and Adi hills in the Siand district, the Mishmi (Idu, Taraon and Miju) hills in the Lohit district; the Daphabhum and Patkai ranges are known by their names even to the tribes that inhabit them. The Daphabhum range is populated by the Singphos and the Singphos, Wancho, Nocte and Tangsas populate the Eastern Patkai range of the Tirap district.¹⁵

THE AKA, SHERDUKPEN (THONGJI) AND MOMP HILLS

Former Kameng district which is now divided into three districts named West Kameng, Tawang and East Kameng

covers 14,000 sq km and is the habitat not only of the Mompas, Sherdukpen (Thongji) and Aka tribes but some other tribes live there as well. The Mompas live in the Tawang district as well as in the Dirang and Kalaktang circles of the Bomdi La sub-division, that is to say, in the hills of west north-east region. The Sherdukpens (Thongji) live largely in the Rupa circle and some parts of the Kalaktang circle, that is to say, in the hills east of the Mompas, but covering the hills of the south-western part of the West Kameng district. The Aka hills are bounded on the north by the Miju hills, on the west by the Sherdukpens, on the east by the Bengni hills and on the south they stand above the Darrang district of Assam. In between the Nishi hills to the east and the Mompas, Sherdukpen and Akas to the west, and bounded by the northern border of the Darrang district of Assam on the south and the territory of the Bangros and Sulungs on the north, lie the extensive Bengni hills. From the Bengni hills on the south to the McMahan Line on the north and between the Mompas of Tawang and the Tagins of Subansiri stand the Sulung and Bangro hills. Besides some Mijis live in the hills near central Mompas tracts and a few Buguns are found in between the Sherdukpens and Akas of East Kameng district.¹⁶ Thus, the territory of the district is bounded by Bhutan on the west, the Tibetan province of Khams on the north along the McMahan Line, the Nishi hills on the east and the Darrang district of Assam on the south.

On the west, from the Mompas region of Tawang, flows the Nyamjang chu (Dargong) drawing the waters of the Mela ridge. It flows from north to south and a number of tributaries having their origin in the Mela ridge debouch their waters into it flowing eastward. The waters of the Namka chu, which assumes the name of Tawang chu and receives the waters of the Thangla ridge, are discharged into the Nyamjang chu.¹⁷ After flowing through the Mompas hills, the Nyamjang enters into Bhutan and flowing through that country discharges its waters into the Brahmaputra through the Manas river. East of Tawang through Se La flows the

Dirang which draining the western Momp hills feeds the Kameng river. From the south-west, the Rupa river through the Sherdukpen hills sends its waters to the Kameng which with the waters of the Dirang flows into plains under the name Bhorali and discharges its waters into the Brahmaputra.¹⁸ So the rivers of the eastern Kameng hills flow in the south-westerly direction and the rivers in the eastern region flow in the south-easterly direction.

The altitude of these hills is comparatively lower except in the north than the other hills of this region of the Himalayas. The hills in the lower region on the plains are steep and inaccessible. The pass leading to Tawang along the Kameng valley and then through Bomdi La and Se La lead through higher altitude; at Se La the elevation is 4,680 m. But the Tawang region is relatively lower and the altitude of the Tawang itself is, 3,000m above the sea level.¹⁹ The climate of these hills is humid up to 1,200m, temperate up to 2,100m, and cold with heavy snowfall beyond that. Rich with evergreen deciduous forests, the hills in the upper region are dressed in pine, oak and fur. Carpeted with wild strawberries and a display of rhododendrons and a score of other multicoloured flowers, these hills are the most picturesque of all the Arunachal hills.²⁰

NISHIS AND APA TANIS

Former Subansiri district covers 20,042 sq km and is now divided into two districts of Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri is the habitat of the Nishis.²¹ Only a few Apa Tanis are found engulfed in and about Ziro, the headquarters of the district, and a few Hill Miris are found on the north-eastern extremity of the Nishi hills, adjacent to the Adi hills of the Siang district. The Miri hills are bounded on the south-east by the Dirjemo river which separates them from the Abors inhabiting the low hills north of Dibrugarh; on the north-east by a low range of hills forming the southern boundary of the Dihang valley; on the south by the Sub-division of North

Lakhimpur; on the south-west by hills to the east of the Ranga river which separate them from the Nishis. The Subansiri river divides the hills east and west. To the north up to the McMahon Line and between the Bangros and Sulungs of north Kameng in the west and Membas and Gallong Adis in the east are found over extensive territory the Tagins who are regarded as Tagin Daflas.²²

Robinson places the Nishi hills between 90°50" to about 94° north longitude and forming the northern boundary of the valley of Assam from the Kuriapara Duar to where the Subansiri debouches into the plains. G.W. Dun, in his preliminary notes on the Nishis, holds that the Nishis are a tribe of the "outer hills" of the southern slopes of a spur of the Himalayas which divides the Bhorali from the Subansiri Drainage. "This spur is well defined as far as a peak called Lollupo, but at the point it is split into numerous minor valleys and spurs among which the Daphalas have established their villages. On the west, a very distinct ridge coming down from Lollupo separates the Daphalas from the Akas, who inhabit the basin of the Bhorali. On the east, another district ridge starting from Lollupo peak divides the Daphalas from the Miri of the Khru river (an affluent of the Subansiri) and of the Subansiri."²³ Thus, the Nishi hills are bounded on the north by the McMahon Line, on the west by the Bhorali river, on the east by the Sundri river and on the south by the Naoduar of Darrang and Cheduar of Lakhimpur districts of Assam.

The hills of the region are rugged and the lower region is covered by dense forest. The hills rise towards the north to 6,000m (20,000 feet) on the Tibetan border and remain snow-covered all the year round.²⁴ The valley in the hills lies east and west. The distinguishing feature of the territory of this district is a remarkable level valley, 4 km × 125 km (or 2.5 × 7.5 miles) at Ziro which is 1,500m high.²⁵ Between Bhutan and the Subansiri river the Kandgu massif (7,089m) forms the only major culmination. It forms a marked southward-directed spur and it seems possible that this culmination

coincides with a southward-extended 'bulge' of the main thrust zone. From the Subansiri river to the east-north-east, the main range is surprisingly straight and no river flowing to the south crosses it. The Tsangpo, flowing from south of Lhasa in an easterly direction has approached the range to as near as 15 km and now follows its north-eastern track.²⁶

Two principal streams drain the interior of the triangle enclosed by two spurs of the Nishi hills, viz. the Humberi or Ranga on the east and the Dikrang. The Dikrang has a small tributary from the east called Barpani, and further west are the still smaller stream of the Buroi with its tributaries the Poma and the Papum, and still further west the Borgang, a stream of the other slopes. The general direction of the rivers in this triangle is easterly.²⁷ But, by far the largest river of the district after which it has been named is Subansiri. It has a long course through the Himalayas and flows through a series of gorges and rapids. This river cuts the main Himalayan range in Arunachal Pradesh east of Bhutan and sends its headwaters into Tibetan territory pushing the actual watershed almost to the Tsangpo river. It is known as Tsari chu in Tibet and in the upper course of Arunachal as Mara where in the Tagin territory the Galen, a tributary, discharges its waters.²⁸ The principal tributary of Subansiri in Arunachal are the Kamla and Sidan draining the west and east respectively. The range from which the Sidan flows is a comparatively low one on the south-west of Dihang. The Kamla flows from the high mountains of the north-west.²⁹

ADI HILLS

Between the Nishi hills on the west and the Dihang river which borders on Mishmi hills on the east and in between Lakhimpur district of Assam and the McMahon Line on the north lie the extensive Adi hills of East and West Siang districts which covers 18,518 sq. kms.³⁰ These hills constitute the slopes of the main Himalayan ranges which at the very eastern extremity rises to the highest elevation of the whole

eastern Himalayas in the still practically unknown Namche Barwa (7,755m).³¹ The northern region is full of high, steep and inaccessible mountains and wild valleys. The southern part is comparatively flat. But the mountain in the south running north-east to south-west stand as a solid wall and shut the Brahmaputra valley from the north.³² The passes along the northern boundary on the main range are surprisingly low; the tree studded Tum-La is only 3,600m high and the more eastern Shoka La apparently still lower. We have here one of the lowest passes crossing the whole Himalayan range, similar to or even lower than the Zoji La in Kashmir (3,529m) and only 600m higher than the Tsangpo river which meanders in a rather steep gravel-filled valley, flanked by impressive terraces.³³

The Tsangpo known in Assam as Dihang (now known as Siang-Brahmaputra) turns its north-easterly course into a southern and south-western direction at Namche Barwa. As the counterpart to the famous Indus gorge at the western end of the Himalayas north of Nanga Parbat, the Tsangpo cuts exactly through the highest culmination of the eastern end of the Himalayas. Down to Pe or Timpa, just west-south-west of Namche Barwa, the Tsangpo flows placidly in a gravel-filled, though rather steep-walled valley. From here downstream, the river which was previously over 1 km wide suddenly narrows to a mere 90m and tumbles through a deep gorge with enormous boulders in most impressive cataracts.³⁴ The Tsangpo-Brahmaputra is one of the longest rivers of the world traversing a distance of 2,900 km through Tibet, India and Bangladesh.³⁵

The Siang-Brahmaputra (Tsangpo-Dihang) flows through the centre of the Adi territory. Those living on the left or east bank of the Siang river up to the Dihang are called Bar Adis or Great Adis. Those living on the right or west bank of the Siang are known as Pasi-Meyong and formerly only Meyong Abors.³⁶ With the variation in altitude, the topographical and climatic conditions vary from south to north. The whole ranges are covered by dense forests and

between October and January gorge wind occurs.³⁷

MISHMI HILLS

South-east of the Siang (Tsangpo-Dihang) valley, the Mishmi hills form the still very obscure eastern syntaxial bend of the Himalayas.³⁸ Divided into two districts of Lohit and Dibang covering 24,431 sq kms it consists of a continuous chain of hills which in the higher region of the northern boundary remain perpetually covered with snow. The firs, and the highest in the horizon is the turret-form which is commonly known as the Sadiya peak; its base extends to Dihang on the left, and to the right it covers a considerable extent, allowing a more distant class of mountains to peep above its sloping sides. The next is the huge three-peaked mountain; the Mishmis call it as Thigritheya. It is succeeded by a wall after which Thathutheya, a round-backed ridge, rises high above the ranges near Parasuram Kund. Then there is a fall filled in by low mountains. Immediately to the east, at about a distance of 65 km the ranges are high and snow is seen above them throughout the cold season. The last peak in that direction is known as Beacon or Daphabhum as it is called by the Singphos. The lofty mountain retrogrades to a considerable distance beyond Daphabhum and forms a deep basin, the southern and eastern sides of which are alone visible; through the centre of this basin, the Dihang winds, having its source in the most distant point.³⁹

Thus, the Mishmi hills are flanked on the west by the Dibang river, on the north by the McMahon Line and on the north-east by Burma, while in the south-west it is bounded by the valley of the Brahmaputra and the Patkai range. The hills and mountain ranges up the Lohit river from the Parasuram Kund as far as the Tibetan frontier on the east and round to west as far the Digaru up to the Tibetan frontier on the north are inhabited by the Digaru Mishmis.⁴⁰ The territory to the south-east is occupied by the Mijus, and to the west of the Digaru up to the Dibang on the west and

Tibetan border on the north live the Idu or Chulikata Mishmis, to the south-east of whom, up to the foothills, live the Bibijias.⁴¹ Some Khaptis live on the plains just below the Mishmi hills and a few Singphos inhabit the Daphabhum range part of which lie in the Lohit district. These areas have been brought under the Lohit district (23,191 sq km or 9,059 sq miles).⁴²

The altitude of the hills of the Lohit district ranges between 600m and 5,100m. The craggy hills and blue green valleys are very narrow and steep. High river terraces, some 200-300m above stream level, border the valley.⁴³ The hills in the Dibang valley are generally more pointed and the hill slopes are steep and precipitous.⁴⁴ The plain areas in the foothills are covered by tropical jungle and are intersected by numerous ravines and water courses. Because of the inaccessible nature of the terrain, population in the Mishmi hills is sparse, particularly in the eastern region which embraces a number of high mountain ranges. The majority of the population is concentrated in the western part, chiefly in the southern portion of the Lohit valley.⁴⁵

The principal rivers drain the Mishmi hills; both originate across the border within Tibet and flow down from south-eastern slopes of the Namche Barwa. The Lohit, known in Tibet as Zayul chu, flows into the Mishmi hills from the Tibetan post Rima, and through Menilkrai it approaches the Parasuram Kund across the high mountain and debouches into the wild valley below at a short distance from it.⁴⁶ A number of tributaries both across the Indian border and from the Digaru and Miju Mishmi hills feed it to make it a mighty river. From the western side, the Dibang, similarly, drawing waters of tributaries of Tibet and upper hills of Bibijia and Chulikata or Idu territories, flows into the plains and unites with the Lohit below Sadiya.⁴⁷

The climate of the Mishmi hills is generally moderate throughout the year. The foothill areas are warm during the summer, but the temperature in the high region goes down even in summer. As a result, innumerable varieties of trees

grow in the district and some of them make good timber.⁴⁸

DAPHABHUM AND THE EASTERN PATKAI RANGES

South of the Mishmi hills lay the districts of Tirap and Changland where the Daphabhum and Phunganbhum meet, the Patkai range begins covering 7,024 sq. kms. It separates Assam and Burma and stands in a south-westerly direction projecting spurs on the Assam side in the northerly direction. The portion of the range in Arunachal is almost uniformly high, 1,500m above the sea level. Only the Pangsau Pass connecting the upper valley of the Brahmaputra with Burma stands at 1,238m above the sea level. The elevation of the range varies from 2,040m at Maium Peak in Upper Burma to 924m in the Sympana Saddle.⁴⁹

Towards the north-east fringe along the Daphabhum and Phunganbhum and the Patkai live some Singphos who have been in close connection with the Kakheyans of Burma.⁵⁰ Adjacent to them in the northern spurs and slopes of the range live the Tangsas who were known as Sarkari Nagas; next to them along the main range and the middle spurs are found the Wanchos who were known as Rangpangs and further south-west along the Tuensang district of Nagaland live the Noctes known as Namasangias.⁵¹ The Noctes, Tangsas and Wanchos were regarded as Nagas and they still have close connections with their Burmese counterparts across the Patkai. A few Lisu or Yobins, Chakmas, Huzongs, Deonias, Kacharis and Miaos also live on the hills of the Miao sub-division on the north-eastern extremity of the Tirap district. These hills borders on Burma on the east, Nagaland on the south-east and Assam and the Mishmi hills on the north-east.⁵²

Towards the north-east originates the Namphuk river which drains the north-eastern spurs and valleys and discharges its waters into the Buri Dihing river. The Tirap river, after which the district has been named, drains the huge valley along the eastern flank of the Patkai and after a

long course falls in on the left bank of the Buri Dihing.⁵³ But the Buri Dihing is by far the largest of the rivers of the district that drains the entire basin of the northern slopes of the Patkai and receiving the waters of all the streams that flow from the north-eastern slopes of that range discharges its water into the Brahmaputra south of Dibrugarh.

The altitude of the hills of the district varies from 400m in the Daphabhum range to 150m in the foothills of the Patkai range.⁵⁴ The general relief over the entire north-western part of the Tirap district is low and the district is highly dissected by a number of wide river valleys like those of the Tirap and the Nou-Dihing. It is in these river valleys, particularly along the Brahmaputra plains, that the major part of the population is concentrated. The eastern part of the district is comparatively sparsely populated.⁵⁵ The climate conditions also vary to a great extent. The climate of the foothills and plains valley is hot and humid whereas that of the higher hills is moderate and pleasant. As a result, the district is rich in sub-tropical evergreen forests and varieties of fauna.⁵⁶

INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY

The physical features of the territory of Arunachal have restricted the mingling of the people of different tribes and retarded the growth of national consciousness among the people; geography of the area favours retention of local identity, and lack of transport and communication facilities had kept the tribes separate from each other. Much of the land in the northern region of the Greater Himalayas has remained virtually empty; the middle zone is moderately populated; but the foothills and valleys are relatively closely populated and are characterised by the scattering of population clusters. The uneven distribution of population among several small valleys without adequate communication with each other hinders cohesiveness among the people. To the people the tribal loyalties come first and national allegiance—if there is any such sentiment at all—comes

second. The environment is largely responsible for the multiplicity of language and customs of the tribes which do not have easy communication with the neighbouring areas.⁵⁷

Geography has influenced the cultural development of the province to a great extent. The northern region had little contact with the lower region, particularly the valley of the Brahmaputra, and has been greatly influenced by the Indo-Tibetan culture. For the past many centuries, the Tibetan traders crossed the borders and traded in the region; many of them settled down in the valleys of the Greater Himalayas. This accounts for the large Buddhist settlements in the Siang districts and the Buddhist impact is visible in the way of life in the higher regions. The southern belt of the foothills has had similar contact with the plains of Assam. The results are manifest in the religion, language, clothing, food habits and mode of agriculture. But the middle zone has remained comparatively backward and both Tibetan and Assamese influence are visible in their way of life there. The tribes living in this region had very little contact with the outside world and even today they are living in extremely primitive conditions.⁵⁸

But nature has endowed the land with beauty and hydro-electric potential which, if developed properly, can more than offset the physical difficulties. The province is full of scenic beauty and can attract tourists from all parts of the world. If transport facilities are improved and the restriction on the movement of visitors is removed, a flourishing tourist trade will develop. The hydro-electric potential, if developed to its logical capacity, will transform the face of the land. If human efforts come to the aid of nature, Arunachal can develop into a second Switzerland.⁵⁹

PEOPLE

ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF TRIBES

History furnishes a very imperfect insight into the origin and

descent of the tribes of the North-East Frontier. Robinson in his *A Descriptive Account of Assam* observes : "It seems almost vain to attempt to lift up the dark veil which conceals the origin of the tribes, to trace back their history, or to gain any information of the various revolutions by which they have been influenced; these subjects belong to times and circumstances which are beyond the limit of certain knowledge. It would be most cautious and perhaps the most philosophical course, to abstain from any conjecture relative to their origin or from any attempt to penetrate into the nature of causes of which even the most distant results are but partially known to us. Therefore, we must depend on the reflected light which is obtained by the comparison of language, by the analysis of civil and religious institutions and mythological fables, or by tracing clearly marked affinities in the manners and customs of different tribes."⁶⁰

Indeed, it is very difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion regarding the original home, the routes of immigration and the dates of settlement of the myriad tribes of the North-East Frontier. Even the names by which they were popularly known were attributed to them by the neighbours in the valley of the Brahmaputra and were quite unknown to the tribal people themselves who had no contact with the plains.⁶¹ The tribes of the present Kameng districts were collectively known by a generic name Bhutia, except the Hrussos who were known as Akas for their custom of tattooing their bodies.⁶² The Nishis were known as Daflas but the reasons why they were so called are still to be ascertained. The inhabitants of the present Siang districts were called Abors, perhaps for their unruly nature, but they call themselves "Adi" which means "hillmen".⁶³ The tribes of the Lohit district were called Mishmis, but they have objected to be known as such and are now known by their group names, e.g. Idu, Miju and Taraon. Of the North-East Frontier tribes, only the Khamptis and the Singphos do not express any objection to being called by their agelong popular names. The tribes of the Tirap district were called

Nagas; they are now recognised by their group names like Wancho, Nocte and Tangsa.⁶⁴

But the identification of the tribes by their proper names has not in any way established the link with their past history. It has been pointed out that the assumption of the present nomenclature is perhaps more due to the rise of a sense of dignity and pride among the tribes who no longer like to be branded by their plains fellows in any manner they want.⁶⁵ It is not due to a tendency to identify themselves with a glorious race or kingdom elsewhere in the past or present as is the case with the Ahoms who now establish their connections with the empire of Pong which existed to the north of Burma and the Shan tribes who live in Thailand or Siam.⁶⁶

The tribes of the North-East Frontier trace their origin in the north-east. George A. Grierson holds: "North-western China between the upper waters of Yang-tse-Kiang and Ho-ang-Ho was the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese races, and from that starting point successive waves of immigrants entered Assam. The first were the Maan-Ahoms who have left Khasis and are now to be seen in Annam and Cambodia. Second came the Tibeto-Burmans, the ancestors of the Bodo tribes with whom the Abors, Miris and the Daflas are clearly connected."⁶⁷

C.H. Hesselmayer says: "The Himalayan mountains as they form the northern boundary of Assam are inhabited by two distinct races of men. Originally probably one and the same race, they seem to have undergone a change sufficiently marked to authorise their being considered at the present moment as two distinct races. The mountaineers who occupy the eastern half of these frontier hills seem to be original occupants, or first arrivals, and to have retained their original habits and customs. Those who live to the west appear to belong to a later period of immigration, subsequent to their descent from Central Asia."⁶⁸

It is very difficult to ascertain the date of immigration of tribes. But the statement of Hesselmayer also seems to be

untenable. Beginning from the west, we know that the father of the Mompa tribe, Rupati of Kameng, had migrated to its present home in the hills from the plains of the Brahmaputra valley in the tenth century and is said to have married the daughter of a prince of Kamrup.⁶⁹ The progenitor of the Sherdukpen tribe is the grandson of an eighth century king Srongtson Gempo; he again is an immigrant from Tibet and is said to have come from the ancestral home in the eighth century.⁷⁰ According to a tradition recorded by Capt. Kennedy, the Akas trace their origin from the east. They trace their descent from Arima who migrated from the plains below the hills in remorse for having killed father in ignorance.⁷¹ The date of their immigration is not known, but it must have been after the decline of the dynasty of Bana, whose relics are found in Bhalukpong and Tezpur sometime after the twelfth century.⁷²

The origin of the Nishi is not known. They trace their descent from a legendary ancestor whose three sons are believed to have been the forefathers of the three clans known as Dapum, Dodum and Døl respectively.⁷³ The first mention of Nishis is found in the *Ahom Buranjis*. Their atrocities caused the Ahom kings to hold a portion of their territory and erect a line of fortifications along their hills.⁷⁴ But no account is available regarding their migration and origin elsewhere. It seems possible that they came from across the McMahon Line from the Khamsyul division of Tibet. To the north of the Nishis live the Tagins who are definitely immigrants of Khams. Some Tagins are to be seen across that Line in Tibet. The Nishis in the north are called Tagin Daflas and the Tabins, though a separate group, are off-shoots of one and the same stock.⁷⁵ The two other tribes, Apa Tanis and Sulungs, have been overwhelmed by the Nishis. They seem to have been living in the region before the coming down of the Nishis from across the McMahon Line. The Apa Tanis have remained independent, but the Sulungs have been reduced to the status of serfs in relation to the numerous and powerful Nishis. The Apa Tanis trace their

migration from a valley of two rivers Supupad-Pudpumi. They have cultural affinities with the Adis and Nagas.⁷⁶

The tradition of origin among the Adis, as recorded by R.C.R. Gunning in 1931 for the Census Report, is as follows: "In none of these tribes there are any traditions of origin which go back very far. All claim origin from one race or tribe settled at Killing in the Bomo-Janbo country. From Killing, part of the tribe journeyed south across the Siyom river and occupied the hilly country between that river and the Subansiri and the Brahmaputra. These are now known as Galong. Others crossed the Dihang (San Fo) or settled on its bank or neighbourhood."⁷⁷ In the Census Report of 1961 they have been stated to be immigrants from the Khams province of Tibet.⁷⁸ The Abors probably had close relations with the Ahoms of the Brahmaputra valley, for during the Moamaria rebellion of 1792-93 twenty to thirty thousand Abors are said to have assisted the Ahom monarch.⁷⁹

About the Mishmi immigration, J.P. Mills wrote that they were immigrants from Burma who entered Assam 500 years ago.⁸⁰ The Mishmis were followed by the Khamptis and the Singphos. The Khamptis began to migrate to Assam from Khampti-long from north of Burma, somewhere in the 18th century.⁸¹ The Singphos followed them from north Burma much later. During the decay of the Ahom kingdom the Singphos crossed the Patkai *circa* 1793, entered into Assam, and capturing Assamese slaves settled down on this side of the Patkai range.⁸² The Wanchos and Tangsas of the Tirap district perhaps were preceded by the Ahoms who entered the valley of the Brahmaputra along the Buri Dehing valley crossing the Patkai range in the vicinity of present Vijaynagore, c. 1226.⁸³

Thus, it seems that the present tribes of the North-East Frontier in Arunachal had entered into their present homes at different times and from different directions. The Sherdukpens, Nishis and Adis had come from across the McMahon Line from Tibet and settled over territories displacing the tribes who were already living there. The

Mishmis, Khamptis and Singphos had migrated to Assam from the Irrawady-Salwen valley, commonly known among the tribes as Khampti-long or Bor Khampti country, over hundreds of years before the coming of the British into Assam in 1824-26. They thus neither came from the upper waters of the Yang-tse-Kiang and Ho-ang-Ho, nor were they of common origin as stated by Grierson and Hesselmayr.

TRIBAL LANGUAGES

The languages spoken by the tribes of the North-East Frontier reveal diversity of origin rather than confirm the unity of origin. The Tibeto-Burman family is the most important of the group of Indo-Chinese languages spoken by the tribes of the region, but it is by no means the only group that is found among the people here. The Mompas, the Sherdukpens (extra Bhutan-Bhutias), the Khambas and the Membas (immigrants from Khams) speak languages of the Tibeto-Himalayan group of the Tibeto-Burman family;⁸⁴ the Akas, the Nishis, the Tagins, the Bangros, the Sulungs, the Mijis, the Bangnies, the Adis and the Mishmis speak languages of the North Assam group of the Tibeto-Burman family;⁸⁵ the Khamptis speak a language of the Tai group of the Chinese-Siamese family;⁸⁶ the Singphos speak a language of the Kachin group of the Tibeto-Burman family;⁸⁷ and the Noctes, the Tangsas and the Wanchos (Nagas) speak languages of the Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman family.⁸⁸ Thus, there are at least two families and four groups of languages prevalent in the area. Of these again the Mompas and the Khamptis speak languages which possess some literature, the one in Tai and the other in Tibetan language; the rest of the languages are practically dialects and they have neither scripts nor any literature. The Tai language has nothing in common with the rest of the languages; it is closely related to the Chinese language and is a distinct family as compared with the Tibeto-Burman forms of speech. The languages of North Assam group, however, provide a link between the Tibetan spoken in the north beyond and the

Bodo group of languages spoken below in the valley of the Brahmaputra. Similarly, the Kachin group and Naga groups are links between the Tibeto-Himalayan and Tai languages of South-East Asia.⁸⁹

But the physical features of the tribes of the North-East Frontier offer striking similarities. The Mompas, Sherdukpens and Akas have yellowish brown Mongolian faces. Their women are pale-yellow and have a reddish tinge on their cheeks. Their nose is flat and eyes black and straight.⁹⁰ The Nishis are a very well-built and muscular people with a decidedly Mongolian cast of face. There is no beard on men's faces and their hairs are straight.⁹¹ The Adis are of short stature but stockily built. Their complexion is yellow, eyes straight and black. The face is generally flat, the forehead broad. The nose is upturned with wide nostrils but many boast almost aquiline noses.⁹² The Mishmis are a small but hardy race with a Tartar cast of features. Their eyes are blackish brown but straight. The nose is flat but not very broad; many possess aquiline noses. The Idus are sallow in complexion whereas the Taraon and the Mijus are reddish. But all possess handsome features.⁹³ The features of the Singphos are of the Mongolian type: "very oblique eyes and eyebrows, mouths wide, cheek-bones high and very heavy square jawbones. Their complexion, never ruddy, varies from a tawny yellow or olive to a dark brown."⁹⁴ The physique of the Tangsas, Noctes and Wanchos is stockily built as is the case with other Mongolian tribes, and their complexion comprises every shade of brown. But a remarkable feature in them is the deficiency of hair on the face.⁹⁵

TRIBAL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

The myriad tribes of the North-East Frontier may be conveniently classified into three cultural groups, as V. Elwin has done. The first group includes the tribes who follow the Buddhist religion or have been influenced by Buddhism. The Mompas and Sherdukpens of Kameng, the Khambas and Membas of Subansiri and Siang and the Khaptis of Lohit

follow Buddhism; the Buguns and Akas of Kameng, the Dhammain of Subansiri and the Singphos of Lohit and Tirap have been influenced considerably by Buddhism. Common artistic pursuits, including making of wooden masks, are distinctive feature of this group. The second group consists of the Nishis, the Adis, the Mishmis and sundry tribes inhabiting the hills stretching from Se La in Kameng through the greater parts of upper Subansiri, Siang and Lohit districts. These tribes have varying traditions but are culturally united by their attachment to weaving, absence of wood-carving and a degree of excellence in fine works of cane and bamboo. The last group is confined to the present Tirap district of the North-East Frontier and are composed of the Noctes, Tangsas and Wanchos of Tirap.⁹⁶ All these tribes have still wide contacts with their brethren across the Patkai in Burma and have been influenced to a great extent by them. They inter-marry with the Burmese tribes and do their hair and dress in imitation of them. They also are experts in wood-carving and personal decorations.

TRIBAL SOCIETY

Notwithstanding these cultural divisions, the tribes of the North-East Frontier have some common social features. The social organisation among them without any exception is patrilineal and the oldest male member is regarded as the guardian of the family; marriage is usually negotiated and the groom has to pay a bride-price to the guardian of his wife; members of the tribe marry within it but members of a clan outside it; polygamy is permitted but monogamy is the usual practice; polyandry is restricted to only some Adi tribes and is practically dying out; women in general enjoy a good deal of respect in society; slavery existed among all tribes throughout the British period. There is no casteism or racialism in any tribal community though social grades exist.⁹⁷

Each tribe of the North-East Frontier lived an exclusive

life of its own which the difficulties in communication and terrain had fostered to some extent. Each tribe, however, is divided into endogamous clans. The Nishis are divided into exogamous groups; clan divisions hardly exist among them.⁹⁸ The Adis are subdivided into exogamous clans which are further subdivided into smaller clans or families among which endogamy is strictly forbidden.⁹⁹ The Mishmis are endogamous and are divided into sects rather than clans.¹⁰⁰ The Khamptis, Singphos, Wanchos, Noctes and Tangsas are also divided into exogamous clans.¹⁰¹ Each clan breaks up into numerous families each of which consists of husband, wife and their children. A grown up son, when married, sets up a separate house unless he is the eldest and becomes a member of the village community which allocated a plot of land for his subsistence.¹⁰² Families of the same clan may live in separate villages over which there is one chief or Gam or Gaobura, as he is known now a days. The villages in the Apa Tani plateau and Wancho and Tangsa are the largest and houses are built close to each other. The Apa Tani villages accommodate even 100 families.¹⁰³ The smallest villages are seen in the Mishmi Hills where a village is practically the home of a single family.¹⁰⁴ Social habits and customs are peculiar to a particular tribe, but there are some basic similarities though there may be difference of details from group to group. Every tribe has club houses or dormitories where youths are trained in civic duties, tribal disputes are resolved in meetings of the village elders, youths sleep in the night. Tribal guests are accommodated in these Morangs.¹⁰⁵ The accommodation of the youths in the Morangs served some other useful purposes as well. If the village is in danger and the youths are required to be mobilised to face the emergency, then the youths from the Morang could be given instructions quickly. In the Tirap and Siang districts, these Morangs serve as meeting places for youths to select their marriage partners. Among the Tirap and Siang tribes, their were separate Morangs for girls.¹⁰⁶

The position of women in North-East tribal society is

respectable is not very high. The system of polygamy, particularly among Nishis and Mishmi tribes, no doubt has lowered their position, and sometimes wives are forsaken without being divorced. In spite of laxity in sex relationship, prostitution is practically unknown in the North-East frontier.¹⁰⁷ Ordinarily, women lead a busy life, helping the menfolk in all walks of life. They wake up early in the morning and prepare meals for the family. Taking their morning meal, they proceed to the fields carrying their noonday meal and drinks. They work in the fields and return home in the evening. Again, they cook the meal for the night. Women took part in folk-dance where it existed and the entertainment of the guests was their privilege.¹⁰⁸

Life of the People

The tribal people have a knack of celebrating festivals with a mounting crescendo of activity. Generally these festivals are connected with deaths, marriages and sowing and harvesting of crops. The Mompas of Kameng celebrate the Losar festival which is a kind of new year's festival on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.¹⁰⁹ The Adis celebrate Arau and Mopin festivals for a good harvest.¹¹⁰ The Khamptis and Singphos celebrate Buddhist festivals. But the tribes of Tirap usually celebrate the settlement of disputes with feast and drinks.¹¹¹ Individual dances are practically unknown among North-East Frontier tribes; but community dances are also unknown among the Nishis, Apa Tanis and Mishmis. The Mompas and Sherdukpens of Kameng are most skilful dancers. People in colourful make-up and gorgeous costumes perform dances representing the world theatre in various religious functions to teach moral lessons to the people.¹¹² The Adis and Hill Miris of Siang and the Wanchos and Noctes of Tirap perform community dances or folk dances during community feasts. During these occasions, people drink liquor in large quantities so as to become intoxicated.¹¹³

The staple food of the people in the North-East Frontier consists of rice, millet and wheat which are supplemented by

vegetables and forest produce. Fish and meat are consumed by all tribes, whether followers of Buddhism or of a tribal religion. Even Buddhist monks eat fish and meat but they do not catch and kill any fish or animal.¹¹⁴

[Tribal houses are made of bamboo, timber, leaves and grass. Stones and mud are used extensively in Kameng where houses are comparatively small. In other parts, the houses are long and are raised on posts of cleft timber. The Adi houses are raised about 5 feet from the ground and posts are not used.¹¹⁵ Four or five pieces of wood at an angle resting on the surface take the place of a post. Houses are constructed indiscriminately either on the top or side of hills, but the levels of the floors are maintained. The floors are of split bamboo not woven and walls are made of rough planks. For the roofs, palm thatch and wild plantain leaves are used. Roofs of the houses come down so low that externally the wall is not seen. But division of a house into compartments depends on social customs of the tribes and there is no distinction between individuals. The Wanchos and Noctes have two rooms in each house, one for the men and the other for women;¹¹⁶ the Mishmis have as many rooms as the number of wives of the master of the house;¹¹⁷ the Apa Tanis and Hill Miris have only one long room.¹¹⁸ The houses of the tribes are 18 to 20 feet wide and 100 feet long; the interior is divided into chambers for private use and reception, and at the front there is an open balcony, a prolongation of the floors beyond the eaves providing for an airy place for the family to sit or work or lounge in (this is not so in the case of the Khamptis, whose chiefs possess two houses contiguous to each other).¹¹⁹ Every house at the rear is provided with a veranda with a hole in the floor where the domestic stock is accommodated and these serve as scavengers. There are no sweepers and scavengers among the Frontier tribes.

Slavery

As mentioned above, slavery as an institution existed in the North-East Frontier all through the British period; slaves

were objects of merchandise liable to be bought and sold. The unyielding and unproductive terrain of the Himalayas was perhaps conducive to slavery; it was strengthened by tribal beliefs and the superstition that a person would get after his death as many slaves as he commanded in this world. People fell into slavery for many reasons. War captives might be sold as slaves in accordance with the custom existing in India from primitive times. The children of slaves became slaves automatically. Sometimes people committing offences against the community were condemned to slavery. The tribal people, however, treated their slaves quite well and their hardships were not as severe as depicted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The position of the slaves in the tribal community is well described in a letter of the Chief Secretary of the Chief Commissioner of Assam : "Word (slave) connotes nothing more than a very mild form of servitude. The so-called slaves in the unadministered areas usually live in the house of the family for which they work, though occasionally they have separate houses of their own. Their clothing, food, house accommodation and general domestic equipment do not differ in any way from that of the ordinary hillman. They not infrequently possess private property which they obtain by trading during the months of the year when they are not required to work in the fields or in the case of women, by weaving clothes and rugs. A slave, in the event of the death of all the males inherits his master's property including his house. A master during his life time often sets up a slave in a separate house, finds him a wife, and gives him livestock and fields for his support, allowing him to live an independent life. It is true that slaves receive no actual cash wages, but money is exceedingly scarce in the hills and is used very little by the hillmen in their ordinary transactions. The slaves live in the same style as other hillmen and take as well as they do and it might, therefore, not unreasonably be urged that the wages which they receive in kind are as good as any servant can expect in such a quarter of the world. Moreover, there seem to be good grounds for holding that in the

immense majority of cases, these so-called slaves remain with their masters of their own accord. No physical restrictions are placed upon their liberty and there is nothing to prevent them, if they wish to do so, from coming down and settling in the plains. In spite of this, the number of slaves who actually leave their master is very small."¹²⁰

Political Organisation

The tribes of the North-East Frontier know no kingdom or king; but each tribe or clan or village has its own head styled as Gam or Gaonbura, that is the village head, who is sometimes known as Sat Raja, as is the case with the Mompas and Sherdukpens, or Raja as the case with the Aka chiefs.¹²¹ But the management of the internal affairs of the village or clan and its relations with the neighbours is vested in the village council which consists of the elders of the village. In such a village council, all members have equal powers and each such council is independent of all external influences.¹²²

The most conspicuous of these village councils is the Adi Kebang. Its members, known as Kebang Abus, are chosen for their experience, ability and capacity to present and decide cases according to the traditional customs and conventions of the tribe. The Kebang controls the entire village activities and punishes those who deviate from the right path. The allocation of plots out of the *jhum* land of the tribe to each family, including plots for residential houses, and settlement of the village disputes—are all discussed and decided in the meetings of the Kebang. In settling disputes the view points of both the parties are taken into account after a careful hearing. Inter-village disputes are composed in the meetings of the inter-village council known as Bangos. All villages are divided into several groups for this purpose. The Bangos are composed of all the Gams of the member villages and such other members as have distinguished themselves in Kebang meetings and a secretary. Money collected in Bangos as fines

are spent for the welfare of the village under the Bango. The inter-Bango disputes are settled in the meeting of the institution known as Bogum Bokang which is temporarily created for a particular case with members of all the Bangos and some distinguished persons who do not have any interest in the dispute and are impartial.¹²³

Though the composition and functioning of the village councils differ from tribe to tribe, it is the main administrative, judicial and political institution throughout the North-East Frontier. Among some tribes, like the Wanchos, and the Noctes of Tirap, the Khamptis and the Singphos of Lohit, the Akas (Hrussos) of Kameng, the chief of the tribe or clan is hereditary and possesses more power and influence over their tribesmen. The Dafla chiefs are less influential as they are divided into innumerable petty divisions.¹²⁴ But the Tagin chiefs seem to be little more influential than their fellow Daflas.¹²⁵ Among these tribes, inter-village disputes and political decisions are within the jurisdictions of the chiefs.

But the Mompa and the Sherdukpen set-up is a little different. There were chiefs known as the Sat Rajas who were subordinate to the Governor of Tawang. In between the Governor of Tawang and the Sat Rajas of the different regions, there were some Gellings who were appointed by the Governor of Tawang for three years.¹²⁶ Under the Sat Rajas operated the village councils (Tsorgens) in different areas. The villagers elected the village council for a term to manage the affairs of the village according to the tradition of the tribe. But inter-village disputes and political decisions lay in charge of the Sat Rajas and their superior, that is, the Tawang Deo.¹²⁷

ECONOMY

AGRICULTURE

The economic life of a country is largely conditioned by its

physical and topographical features. Man tries to adapt himself in his natural surroundings with his technological equipment and social resources. The tribes of the North-East Frontier testify to the truth of this natural law. The mountains of this region are of younger age and break up into soil easily. The rainfall is heavy except in the north-east of the Kameng district with an average of more than 100 inches per annum. This has made the economy of the hills jhum-agricultural, which is supplemented by hunting and fishing. Generally, by the end of the winter an area is selected for cultivation and the jungle is cleared and fire is set to burn the dry bushes and trees that are felled. Before the onset of the rainy season, the soil is prepared with primitive implements, e.g. dao, axe, iron-hoe, pointed bamboo, and seeds of various crops are sown in the same plot. Seeds are often placed in separate holes with pointed bamboo but broadcasting of seeds is not uncommon. Different crops are reaped at different seasons from the same field. A clearing is used for two or three years and when its fertility is lost, it is abandoned and a new site is selected.¹²⁸

Wet-rice cultivation and terrace cultivation are also prevalent among some tribes. The Mompas, the Khambas, the Membas practice terrace cultivation, wet-rice cultivation is popular among the Apa Tanis of Subansiri and the Wanchos, Noctes and Tangsas of Tirap and the Khamptis and Singphos of the Lohit district. The Mompas, Khambas and Membas plough their fields with yak or mithun and the tribes practising wet-rice cultivation employ cattle for ploughing their fields like the people of the plains.¹²⁹

All tribes grow paddy, maize, millet, and vegetable of different varieties. The most popular and widely grown vegetable is *aram* which is grown in abundance all over the hills and is a common item of food of many people. The Adis and Mishmis grow tobacco; cotton and some barley are raised in some places.¹³⁰ The Wanchos and Noctes grow tapioca and cotton.¹³¹ The domestic animals are pig, cow and mithun; the Mompas, the Khambas and Membas keep horses and are very

fond of them. But the mithun is, by far the most important and valuable domestic animal and usually the yardstick of wealth of the rich.¹³² Fowl are found almost in every household along with pigs.

Land is said to be more important to an Indian farmer than his wife and there is no exception in case of the North-East Frontier tribes. Land is the bedrock of the tribal economy in the hills and it is the mainstay of their subsistence. On land, the tribes grow their food and rear their herds, and from the forests around their villages they gather their housing materials like timber, bamboo and grass and collect firewood and fuel and go for hunting. Since the tribal people live on hill sides and cultivated the hill sides which are subject to erosion and land slides, the importance of land is more keenly felt.

There are three kinds of ownerships of land : personal land, clan-land and village-land. The land which is held in individual ownership and is inherited through the father is personal land; the land which is utilised by different villages of a particular clan for burial or grazing purposes is clan-land; the land on the fringes of villages where there are forests providing the villagers with firewood, roots and herbs as also hunting or fishing is the village-land property. The Apa Tanis and the Mompas who practice permanent or terrace cultivation have strong attachment to personal lands. The individual's status in society is determined by his possession of land. But the burial ground and the pasture are in all cases the property of the clan or the tribe. The forests on the periphery of each village is the property of the village.¹³³ The tribes who practise jhumming hold the agricultural land in common and the village council allocates to each individual family a plot of land for its use in each clearing.¹³⁴ The family enjoys it as private property till it moves away for a fresh site.

TRADE

Almost all the tribes grow all that are necessary for them and

yet barter or trade is quite familiar. The Mishmis and the Khamptis are inveterate traders;¹³⁵ the Akas and the Mompas carry on extensive trade and act as middlemen for their neighbours;¹³⁶ the Adis trade with their brethren living behind them. What the tribes do not produce and require to procure from outside is salt. A small quantity of clothes, utensils and agricultural implements and some ornamental beads were the other items that they purchased at the fairs or from traders or businessmen are gold, yak-tails, wool and woollen blankets, ponny, sheep, dogs musk, ginger, Mishmiteeta, wax, honey, chillies, spices, madder, walnuts, rock-salt and oranges. Rubber and elephant tusk were at one time objects of a prosperous and lucrative trade.¹³⁷ But the introduction of synthetic rubber and indiscriminate tapping of rubber trees brought the rubber traffic to an end, and the government's policy of wild life preservation has stopped elephant catching.

INDUSTRY

Industry in the modern sense practically did not exist among the tribal people of the North-East Frontier. But cottage industry to produce the household requirements existed almost among all tribes. Marketable surplus of cottage industry products consisted of wooden-musks and utensils, carpet and tribal dresses, painting and religious scrolls called "thang-kas." In addition, there were a little handmade paper from the Mompas tribe,¹³⁸ cotton blanket of artistic design called "Jom" from the Adis,¹³⁹ coats and houses from the Mishmis,¹⁴⁰ and at one time artistic jewellery inlaid with stones from the Khampti tribes.¹⁴¹ The Nishis produce fine hats from cane and bamboo but they did not have a market.¹⁴²

FAIRS

Inside the hills there are practically no daily or weekly bazars or marts where the tribal people may sell their products and purchase their requirements excepting some

trading shops set up in the later period by tradesmen who, with official licence, went for business inside the Inner Line. In the foothills, outside the Inner Line, there were some weekly marts where people from inside the hills went from time to time for marketing purposes. But the best time and occasion for purchase among the tribal community were the fairs that were regularly held among the foothills either inside the Inner Line, as was the case with the Sadiya fair, or outside the Inner Line as at Udalguri or Daimara in the Darrang district of Assam.¹⁴³ It was at these fairs that the government also paid the *Posa* or stipend payable to the tribes who with the money thus obtained purchased their requirements from the fairs. Here at these fairs again the tribal people sold their surplus products and purchased their annual requirements and cattle.¹⁴⁴

Fair is a conspicuous institution in an agricultural economy. Usually after the end of the agricultural season, *i.e.*, after harvesting, people take stock of last season's balance and plan for next year. They sell what they can afford to forego and purchase what they think necessary for the coming year. Alexander Mackenzie writes that the whole amount paid to the Bhutias, after they were put off the Duars, was spent by them for purchases at the Udalguri fair. The Government Report on fairs gives the export and import figures of 1885 at Udalguri as Rs. 90,380 and Rs. 1,20,792 respectively.¹⁴⁵ As early as 1837, the Government of India instructed the Bengal Government to arrange a fair and make it a rendezvous for the tribal chiefs. Rabijit Choudhury writes : "It (fair) was advertised among the ryots and different chiefs of the Singphos, Khampti and Abor and Mishmi tribes through interpreters. A sports ground was prepared and accommodation was arranged for the visitors ... The total expenditure in getting up the fair and in feeding the tribal visitors was Rs. 1,000 only, double the amount originally assessed."¹⁴⁶

Cross-country trade which continued from time immemorial between India and her neighbours could not be

revived during the British period. Only trade between Tibet and India *via* Tawang continued to be carried on a limited scale. Trade between the Chinese province of Yunan and Assam *via* Upper Burma and Szechuan and Assam *via* the Mishmi hills fell gradually to extinction due to government antipathy. "The India Office did not favour a route through Burma to Western China."¹⁴⁷ But during the years of British rule, there were several attempts to restore the trade between India and China *via* the Mishmi hills and even survey and exploratory teams were successfully sent through the hills. Cooper's journey through the Mishmi hills to Western China roused much interest and people looked with attention for its results. A rail line with Western China *via* Mishmi hills also was mooted. In 1908, Sir Thomas Holdrich advocated a railroad from Sadiya to Szechuan and Noel Williamson, the Assistant Political Officer of Sadiya, also supported the idea.¹⁴⁸ After 1910, strategic considerations negated the proposal of rail link with China through Sadiya. Yet the Mishmis of Lohit, the Adis of Siang and the Tagins of Subansiri along the McMahon Line continued to have trade with the Tibetan merchants till almost the end of British rule in India.¹⁴⁹

Trade between Tibet and India *via* Tawang continued throughout the British period and at the annual fairs held at Udalguri and Baimara the Tibetan merchants continued to trade with the merchants of India. Being unsuccessful in establishing trade contacts through Ladakh and Leh, the East India Company's Government tried to open Tibet to British trade through Eastern Himalayas. In 1840's, the Commissioner of Assam advocated opening up of regular trade with Tibet through Tawang.¹⁵⁰ He held that the tribes who inhabited those tracts and had commercial intercourse with both the plains of the Brahmaputra valley and Tibet would welcome such development and co-operate with the government with the prospect of more profit. He requested to send members of the Boundary Commission then in Tibet back to India *via* Tawang or alternatively to give him

permission to send an envoy to Lhasa by the same route from Assam.¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, the British Government did not take any step to implement the idea though the issue was discussed time and again. The specification of the Inner Line on the Darrang frontier again put a barrier on Indian traders to trade freely with Tibet and the hills leading to Lhasa.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

MIXTURE OF RELIGIONS

To satisfy his mental and spiritual hunger, man has through the ages built up a spiritual world from which he derives guidance for every-day life. The people of the North-East Frontier are no exception; they also have developed a supernatural world to brighten the stark realities of life. They believe in a world of good and evil spirits hovering in the air about them and on the earth below, and long to appease enmity or enlist the aid of these secret powers by sacrifice.

Unfortunately, the European officers on whose reports we have to depend mainly for our information on the North-East Frontier during the British regime have not left any favourable account of the religious practices of the tribal people. "In no field are our old records more imperfect than in that of religion", observes Elwin.¹⁵² The general attitude of the European writers towards the tribal religion is that the tribes did not have any religion at all, or that it was a mixture of all the various idolatries and superstitions.¹⁵³

But a careful study of the religious practices of the tribal people show that in building the spiritual world the people of the frontiers have been influenced by the religious practices of their neighbours and have adapted some of their practices or beliefs to their requirements. The Mompas, the Khambas and Membas profess the Mahayana form of Buddhism.¹⁵⁴ Khamptis follow Hinayana Buddhism which they brought with them from Khampti Long, while others worship the Hindu goddess Devi or Durga.¹⁵⁵ The Singphos who have

accommodated the religious practices of their neighbours follow Buddhism and Brahmanism and have decorated their temples with images of different gods and goddesses.¹⁵⁶ Some Noctes of Tirap profess the Mahapurushia form of Vaishnavism propogated by Srimanta Sankardeva in Assam, while the Wanchos and Tangsas of Tirap follow their tribal religion.¹⁵⁷

The people who have been influenced by the religion of their neighbours have also built temples or sanctuaries like their neighbours. In the Buddhist region of Kameng, every village has a Gompa or temple and every house has its own chapel and altar with a statue of the Buddha. The Buddhist monastery of Tawang, which accommodates a magnificent statue of the Buddha, is the largest of its kind in India.¹⁵⁸ During the Buddha Purnima, the Mompas celebrate the Losar festival in a spectacular manner with the accompaniment of musical instruments, like clarionet — made of silver, brass and wood, reed-pipes, horns, shells cymbals, drums and gongs. There are many shrines and temples in Khamba and Memba villages of Subansiri.¹⁵⁹

But still a considerable number of people of the North-East Frontier follow what may be called tribal religion or the so-called animism which is a sort of primitive religion to be found anywhere in the tribal societies. The characteristics of primitive religion, as Will Durant has observed, "are an animistic fear and worship of spirits lurking anywhere, a poetic reverence for the impressive forms and reproductive powers of earth, and an awed adoration of a heaven whose energising sunlight and fertilising rains are parts of the sky."¹⁶⁰ This definition of animism is corroborated by Prof. E.O.James who writes : "The doctrine of animism represents a complex attempt to interpret the material and spiritual aspects of the phenomenal world by revolving the universe into a fundamental dualism of Body and Soul."¹⁶¹

The Adis of Siang, the Akas and Khowas of Kameng, the Nishis of Subansiri, the Mishmis of Lohit and the Wanchos and Tangsas of Tirap believe in a number of heavenly spirits

and offer sacrifices to propitiate them. The Akas regard the sun and the moon as the male and female god and goddess respectively who have the powers of peace and prosperity, and they offer sacrifices to enlist their support.¹⁶² The Nishis regard moon as male and sun as female deity and trace their descent from their union.¹⁶³ The Adis of Siang and the Mishmis of Lohit regard Donyi-Polo or the Sun-Moon god as the supreme reality and offer sacrifices for his favours.¹⁶⁴ The Wanchos believe in Rang, the benevolent god of the skies, who cares for men and beasts, and Baurang, the Malevolent god of earth and destroyer of living creatures, and offer sacrifices to appease them.¹⁶⁵

The remarkable feature of the tribal religion as practised in the North-East Frontier is the absence of shrine or temple, as also of image worship. Nor is any organised clergy or priesthood dependent on religious performances as distinct from the rest of the community to be found among the tribes except some religious functionaries like the Epak Miris and the Nyibo¹⁶⁶ of Adi society and the Tumsawa of Singphos¹⁶⁷ and the Opa or Nampa Aja, Rampa and the Rammi of the Wancho society.¹⁶⁸ Women usually do not take part in religious functions; worship among them means prayer and offering sacrifices. Sacrifice is followed by community feast and wine is consumed on the occasion of offering sacrifices.¹⁶⁹

Emile Lasbax, in an article on *Rhythm of Sacrifice and Prayer*, has observed, "Primitive sacrifice is always an offering under one aspect or another; it is a sacrifice of the firstlings. The sentiment which inspires it is that the materials should never be used without some reserve; for it becomes an absolute master who has himself produced them to sacrifice them without some reserve. It should not be forgotten that their true creator is God, and therefore, it is equitable to offer Him the first fruit, which it has permitted to us to gather, in gratitude for this first gift. The sacrifice of man thus appears to be the exact counterpart of the creative work of God."¹⁷⁰

But the tribes of the North-East Frontier are practical people. Their attitude to religion might originally have been influenced by the sense of awe and reverence, but it is now based on the system of barter and purchase. So the sacrifices performed by them are mostly performed for worldly gains. The agricultural ceremonies and sacrifices are performed with a view to ensuring good growth of healthy crops and preventing disease and failure of crops.¹⁷¹ Other rites are performed either to keep away the evil spirits or to bring in prosperity.¹⁷² Thus, their sacrifices have nothing to do with the firstlings as suggested by Lasbax.

The world of the spirits is not confined to the forces above the earth alone; it extends to the world of the dead as well. Most of the tribes believe in a separate world of the dead. The Akas believe that the spirits of the dead go under the earth and proceed westward until they come to the place where the sun and the moon set; then they ascend to heaven. But the souls of those who die unnatural death and of the children too..... ascend direct to heaven without undergoing the pilgrimage under the earth.¹⁷³ The Nishis have similar notions about the dead, but they hold that there are villages under the earth for those who die a natural death and villages in heaven for those who die unnatural death and for the children's spirits.¹⁷⁴ The Misings and the Mishmis also ascribe an abode underneath for the spirits of the dead.¹⁷⁵

(Since the tribes believe in the existence of the spirits of the dead, they put in the graves of the dead some food, clothes, weapons and other items of daily use to aid the journey of the spirits.) The Adis place in one hand of the dead a small knife as an aid for getting food on the way to the spiritual home. A gourd of rice beer is tied under the grave and various garments of the deceased; any heads of mithum, etc. killed by him and used to feast the community are suspended on the posts nearby or under the shelter.¹⁷⁶ The Akas and Nishis hang a basket of rice, meat, beer, etc., near the grave of the departed.¹⁷⁷ The Mishmis put the corpse on a wooden couch, fully clothed and armed and with food,

money, utensils etc. under the grave.¹⁷⁸

In fact, the religious philosophy of the Arunachal tribes, be it Buddhist or Hindu or Animist, is based on a strong sense of history, a pride in the descent of the race from a great ancestor, and a belief in the value of sacrifice for the common good.¹⁷⁹ This is again founded on five cardinal tenets. First, the tribes believe in a supreme God who is just, benevolent and good. Their religion emphasises the spiritual realities behind the daily life. The tribes have faith in kind tutelary spirits and emphasise the spiritual cause of tragedy. Religion in North-East Frontier, as elsewhere, is closely associated with social ethics that unites the tribe in its discipline and promotes virtues like generosity, hospitality, truth, kindness and devotion to work. Finally, their religion gives them the power to reconcile themselves to the frequent emergencies of life.¹⁸⁰

The study of the Arunachal tribes, thus, reveals strange contrasts. Some of these tribes, like the Mompas and Sherdukpens of Kameng and the Khamptis of Lohit, together with the Khambas and Membas of Subansiri, possess a remarkable culture and an advanced form of religion in contrast to the rest who follow more or less their ancestral religion which is again typical of primitive society everywhere in the ancient world. In some areas, the tribes practise what may be called permanent cultivation on irrigated terraces and valleys, whereas in others, tribes follow jhuming or shifting cultivation. In some tribes, workmanship in cane and bamboo shows remarkable dexterity while in others it is practically unknown, but then they are far more dexterous in wood carving and painting. It is quite difficult to state categorically whether these people are Hindu or anything else, for the terms Hindu is so catholic and elaborate as to embrace not only the followers of Gautama Buddha and Mahavira, the great teacher of Jainism, but also the worshippers of snake and spirits, supposed to be the presiding deities of natural forces or calamities and diseases.

ORIGINS OF RELIGION AND CULTURE

But the recent excavations at the foothills of NEFA have brought to fore yet another problem. The ruins of Bhismarkanagar about thirty miles from Sadiya,¹⁸¹ the Tamreswari temple nearby and the ruins of a palace at Malinithan, a place near Likhabali in the Siang district, prove conclusively that these are of Hindu origin and construction.¹⁸² Besides, there are some relics of Hindu culture at Bhalukpong in the present Kameng district to the north-west of Tezpur; a Buddhist gompa or cave exists at Dirang in the Subansiri district, a stupa has been found at Vijaynagar in the Tirap district, and there is the Bhairav Kund on the western tip of Kameng district.¹⁸³ Parasuram Kund, a famous place of Hindu pilgrimage in the Lohit district, still attracts numerous Hindu pilgrims from all over India. How do we relate these sites to the present tribes?

A recollection of the traditions associated with these places may suggest some solution. In the sacred Vaishnava work, *Srimad Bhagavata*, there is a story that the king of Vidarbha, Bhismaka, had a beautiful daughter Rukmini by name. The king had arranged her marriage with a prince named Sisupala, the ruler of a kingdom in the neighbourhood; but Sri Krishna, the lord of Dwaraka, carried her away by a stratagem and married her.¹⁸⁴ The present Bhismaknagar on the river Kundil near Sadiya was known in ancient times as Vidarbha. The ruins are said to represent the palace of the king Bhismaka alluded to in the Bhagavata.¹⁸⁵ Excavations in 1967 brought to light a phallic stone representing lord Siva. The Chutias of Assam claim to be descendants of the same king. The copper temple near Bhismaknagar is also attributed to the Chutia kings of Vidarbha. The temple is the shrine of Kechai Gohaini which still now is revered by the Chutias and Cacharies of Assam. Two copper plates in Sanskrit have been restored from this place.¹⁸⁶

The next important site excavated is Malinithan. It is not at a great distance from Bhismaknagar. Local traditions say

that Krishna while going back to his home, Dwaraka, rested here with Rukmini, the daughter of Bhismaka, whom he had married, as the guest of Lord Siva and his consort Parvati. During their sojourn, Parvati had offered garlands of beautiful flowers from her garden. Lord Krishna, who was overwhelmed with the charm and beauty of these flowers, addressed Parvati as Malini or mistress of the garden. Since then the place was known as Malinithan or the abode of mistress of the garden. The *Kalikapurana* says that when the body of Sati, wife of Siva, was cut to pieces by Vishnu with his holy discus, her head fell somewhere on the Akasi Ganga. Some hold that the same river flowed once by the present site of Malinithan. The North-East Frontier Agency authorised L.N. Chakravarty, Deputy Director of Research (History), who had traced out the Sivalinga or the phallic stone at Bhismaknagar in 1968, to undertake the excavation of Malinithan. He has already exhumed over one hundred images of various gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon, Yaksas in dancing postures, figurines, sculptured panels, animal motifs such as those of bull, lion, elephant, etc., and some iron dowels or clamps used to hold building materials instead of mortar; some geometric and floral designs have also been discovered by him. An eight-foot high plinth of a temple, most beautifully and florally decorated, has also been unearthed. Images of Indra, seated on elephant, Kartikeya on a peacock and Ganesh have also been found, besides Sarawati and Nandi, the vehicle of Lord Siva. The excavations have proved conclusively that the ruins are of Hindu civilisation that flourished perhaps before the tenth century.¹⁸⁷

Moving westward up the hills one comes across the cave temple of Dirang associated with the Buddhist religion in Subansiri. But further west at the foot of hills below in the Kameng district at Bhalukpong there are the ruins of yet another palace with temple sites in and around it. This place is associated with the name of another Puranic king Bana. In the *Vishnu Purana*, we have a reference to king Bali whose

son Bana was contemporary of legendary Naraka of Kamakhya. The king Bana, who had a palace at Bhalukpong, had a very beautiful daughter Usha by name. Krishna's son Aniruddha was charmed by her beauty and she consented to marry him; the two lovers secretly escaped from the palace. Bana, enraged at this, chased the fugitives, but they were rescued by Krishna who had meanwhile arrived on the spot and defeated Bana's contingent.¹⁸⁸ Besides, the Bhairav Kund of this district is associated with the king Bana who was a devotee of Lord Siva.

Parasuram Kund, where the holy river Lohit, known as the Brahmaputra, descends on the plains, is regarded by the Hindus as a place of pilgrimage, and on Magh Bihu in the middle of January pious people and pilgrims from all over India came to take a dip in its holy waters. There is a story that Parasuram had killed his mother with an axe at the command of his father and had thus committed a great sin. His father told him to take a dip in the Brahmakund at the place now known as Parasuramkund which would absolve him of his ghastly sin. He did accordingly and was purified by this act.¹⁸⁹

Now the association of Hindu legends with these places, references to these places in the Puranas and Tantras, and excavations carried out so far prove beyond doubt that people of these places were influenced by Hindu religion and civilisation right from very ancient times. But when and how Hindu civilisation penetrated into Assam can only be conjectured, for no connected history of Assam in its religious and cultural aspects till the advent of Ahoms in 1226 A.D. is available. Then we have only accounts of Ahom warfare with the Assam valley chiefs with occasional references to some customs and costumes with artifices. The condition of Assam at the time of the Ahom incursion is not known in its all aspects. The remains of civilisation that have been unearthed are said to be remnants of the culture of the Chutia, Kalitas and Bhuyans, who have almost merged their identity with the rest of the people of the valley. The

problems of identity of the people with this civilisation can be solved in the light of "Sanskritisation" theory of Srinivas.¹⁹⁰ Then the claim of the Mishmis that they descended from Bhismaka, the legendary king of Kundil, and the tradition of the Akas who regard themselves as descendants of king Bana can be resolved.

An analysis of the culture and the people involved may help an understanding of the problem. The Chutias who are identified with the Kacharis of the south bank of the Brahmaputra are a people of the Mongolian stock without any doubt. Again, it is a proved fact that they had come to stay in the valley right from the beginning of the Christian era. The present state of their (Chutias) culture and living may lead to the conclusion that the culture which flourished at Bhismaknagar, Malinithan and Sonitpur (Tezpur) could not have been developed by them alone; there must have been some outside Aryan influence over them. But at the same time it is also clear that they continued to be the predominant people before the flood of C.A.D. 1750, and were gradually dispersed thence by the Ahoms and other people.

The Kalitas and Bhuyans were almost the same people and perhaps were pioneers of the Aryan elements in the Assamese population. If we accept the view of Gait that the Aryans penetrated into the Kirat country and established petty kingdoms we may assume that these Aryans established themselves among the Kirat people and in course of time became princes, as their counterparts did in the Malay peninsula and archipelago.¹⁹¹ S.K. Chatterjee also holds the same view.¹⁹² Thus, a new type of culture began to generate in the upper valleys of the Brahmaputra and it subsequently flourished at places like Bhismaknagar and Malinithan.

A critical appreciation of the stories relating to the origin of the ruling dynasties of the localities brings one to the conclusion that these kingdoms and culture were the results of the labours of the indigenous Kirat people who had immigrated from Mongolia in China to the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Aryan people who fused themselves with

these people. Stories of union of the native princes with Hindu gods in the guise of some kings or princes and queens with Brahmanas or some Aryan chiefs are frequently brought forth in tracing the origin of different powerful chiefs. Thus Gourinarayan, the celebrated Chutia king, is said to be an offspring of the union of Kuber in the guise of Bispal with his queen Rupabati.¹⁹³ Another powerful prince of Arimatta was born of Ramchandra's wife Chandraprova when she eloped with the Brahmaputra.¹⁹⁴

J.P. Wade narrates an account of origin of the Jaintia Raja in the following words: "Zointeh Rai had no children but solicited Takoor Ranee by pious exercise to bless him with a son. Devee in a dream visited him and informed him that destiny had determined that he should not have offspring, but that she would supersede his destiny as a recompense for his devotions at her altar and grant his request. She accordingly promised to be herself the child, and to be born of the princess, his wife.... In due course of time, a most beautiful child saw the light in his family. The king sought in vain a husband worthy of her and ultimately married the daughter to his confidential adviser Sundobur's son Sundahburra, a Brahmin."¹⁹⁵

In tracing the origin of Kacharis also the same author observes, "Deongdana had paid her assiduous devotion to Sioo to obtain the favour of a male child. The god appeared to her in a dream and directed her to receive a stranger who should visit her the ensuing day into her embraces, promising her a son who should become prince of that country". The two former races of princes are also said to have descended from the conquerer Bhim (an Aryan chief of the *Mahabharata*).¹⁹⁶ A similar origin is attributed to the Koch king Biswa Singh. His father Hurria Mundal had two wives, Leela and Heera. The latter was carrying some repast for her husband who was at work in the field. On the way, Mahadeo, assuming the form of Hurria, surprised her under a tree and devoured the repast and caressed her on the spot. In due course, a son was born of this union and he became the

founder of the kingdom of the Koches.¹⁹⁷

When we study these stories in the larger perspective of Hindu expansion from the 3rd century A.D. to the 12th century A.D. in the countries adjacent to India, particularly in Burma, Malay, Siam, Cambodia and the Malayan Archipelago, it is quite clear that some adventures from within India made their way into the valley of the Brahmaputra and, like their counterparts, in the South-East Asian countries, succeeded in establishing themselves as either rulers or advisers of the rulers in the region and thus laid the foundation of a new civilisation there. Maybe they were Kalitas and their successors (Bhuyans) who later on were expelled or absorbed by the Shan Ahoms and Khamptis after their incursion into the valley across the Patkai range.

But the problem of placing the present tribes of the North-East Frontier into line still remains. It appears that they came down from Tibetan territories when the Chutia kingdom began to decline and when these tribes originally one and the same came down on the Assam plains. But it may be conjectured that unless there was a major disturbance or upheaval in their original home they might not have migrated to their present homes. It is quite probable that when the Mongol leader Chengis Khan's descendant Godam, who was governor of the Kansu region of China, invaded Tibet in 1239 A.D. looting and killing everything before him, some tribes of the Khams region of Tibet descended on the southern slopes of the Himalayan ranges.¹⁹⁸ The Chutias faced the Ahoms from the south and the Tibetan hordes from the north. When the Ahoms gradually suppressed the Chutias of the north bank, these tribes further came down on the plains and established their sway over the helpless plains people. Further, the flood of the Dehing which submerged the plains of the Upper Assam valley for more than a fortnight in 1750 A.D. facilitated the tribal expansion and weakened the position of the people of the plains.¹⁹⁹ A section of the tribes, now known as Misings, came down to settle on the plains after the recession of the flood waters. Capt. Kennedy, who

accompanied the Aka promenade of 1913-14, records an interesting tradition which says that the Akas along with other hill tribes went in search of land; the Akas lost time in resting and drinking beer when others took possession of better lands.²⁰⁰

The Linguistic Survey of India has shown that the tribes living in the present frontier tracts speak a language of Tibeto-Burman family of North Assam group with the exception of the Khamptis, who speak a language of Chinese-Siamese family of Tai group. The Khamptis from the Bar Khampti land began to migrate to Assam from the 8th century and gradually pushing the Chutias occupied territories on the Lohit and Dehing; the Singphos came much later in the wake of the Burmese in 1822-23, or just before them, from Burma. Again, the Khamptis profess the Buddhist religion which they brought from their original home, the Bar Khampti country. The tribes of the central tracts follow tribal religion. Therefore, it seems quite clear that the tribes living west of the Khamptis of the Lohit district belong to a separate race and the tribes of the Abor hills or Subansiri district and the Khamptis and Singphos of Lohit had nothing to contribute to the Hindu civilisation that flourished in Bhismanagar and Malinithan. The tribes of the western district Kameng had not settled on the plains of Assam when these centres of Hindu religion and civilisation developed; they tended to come down when it had begun to decline.

A survey of the land, that is, the physical features and topography, of the North-East Frontier reveals that the natural frontier of North-Eastern India is the crest of the Eastern Himalayas and Patkai mountains which separate the Brahmaputra waterparting from the San Po and the Irrawady-Salwin watersheds. The study of the population shows that the population of the North-East Frontier is Mongoloid and is the pre-dominant ethnic element in the population of North-East India. A review of the culture of the North-East Frontier leads one to conclude that it is an admixture of Indian, Tibetan and Burmese elements, and through the North-East

India has absorbed tibeto-Burman cultural elements to enrich her variegated cultural profile.

It may be concluded, perhaps, without the risk of over simplification, that the Aryan civilisation which penetrated into the valley of the Brahmaputra before the beginning of the Christian era, continued to flourish through centuries of Ahom and British though there can be no denying the fact that the economy and culture of the hills on both sides of the valley influenced that growth. As a result of this mutual give-and-take, the economy and culture of both the hills and plains developed and prospered. As the San Po, originating from the Lake Manas, becomes the mighty Brahmaputra in the Assam plains, drawing the waters of innumerable tributaries coming down the hills, so also the economy and culture of the plains of Assam have flourished with the contributions of the hills. Again, as a powerful lamp radiates light and expels darkness around, the Hindu civilisation that flourished in the valley of the Brahmaputra enlightened the tribes living on the hills.

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