

**ASPECTS
OF**

**PADAM-
MINYONG**

CULTURE



SACHIN ROY

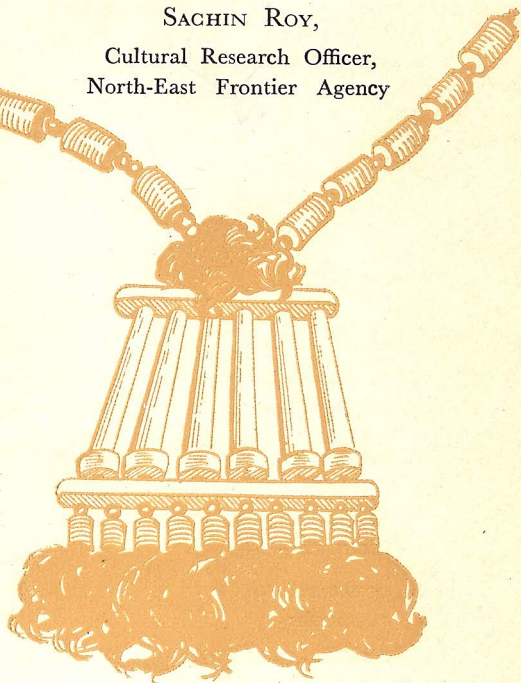
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ASPECTS OF
PADAM-
MINYONG
CULTURE

SACHIN ROY,
Cultural Research Officer,
North-East Frontier Agency

FOREWORD BY
VERRIER ELWIN
Adviser for Tribal Affairs



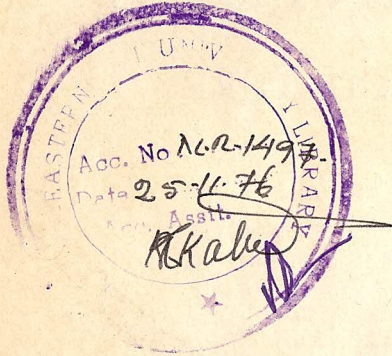
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Sim kitap sim

Shri Rokom Moyong
Shri Kalpan Dai
Shri Asam Borang
Shri Akam Megu

Buluke Igul lok motung. Sim teyong amin binam abing kidie sokke kitap monam legape bojerupe igulto.

Bulu supak tani among so duyimang, Donyi Polo ke ekumlo ginyokkai.

Delok legape Ngo sim bulukke aminpe bidung.

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FOREWORD

This is the first regular full-scale book to be written about any of the tribal groups of Siang. We have had reports on the Padams and Minyongs from the first quarter of the last century: Bedford and Wilcox visited them in 1825 and the inimitable Father Krick went to their country in 1853. He was followed by a long succession of explorers, soldiers and administrators, of whom the most notable was E. T. Dalton, then a young Captain of the Bengal Staff Corps, J. F. Needham who had the unique distinction of serving as a political officer for twenty-three years in Sadiya, and, during the present century, G. Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar, C. von Furer-Haimendorf and B. S. Guha. These, and many others have given us important notes and reports on what they saw, but rather curiously none of them worked up his material into a book. Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar's invaluable account of the 'Abors and Galongs' as they were just before the First World War, appeared among the *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, but has never been reprinted (though it should be) separately. A. Hamilton wrote a sort of travel book called *In Abor Jungles*, but only part of it concerns itself with Siang; W. B. Hore's *Report on the Abor Country* is a useful, but severely official document; C. von Furer-Haimendorf's memorable article in *Anthropos* on the religious beliefs and ritual practices of the Minyongs is buried among a hundred other documents printed in that great journal. Dr B. S. Guha and his party of scholars from the Department of Anthropology of the Government of India have published many papers on these tribes in both popular and learned journals. But here for the first time is a *book*, accessible not only to scholars but to the general public, which describes in a scientific but readable form the customs and ideas of a singular people living in one of the most beautiful parts of India.

Shri Sachin Roy had a brilliant academic career at the Calcutta University where he had the advantage of studying under Professor K. P. Chattopadhyaya. From 1945 to early

1956 he worked with Dr B. S. Guha, the doyen of Indian anthropologists, in the Department of Anthropology. He has been in the North-East Frontier Agency for the past four years. Even before that he had toured widely in the Siang Frontier Division, the home of the people he has come to love and has been privileged to study, and in 1948 went with Mr P. L. S. James right across the Division to Gelling on the actual frontier. It cannot have been an easy expedition, for when I followed in his footsteps ten years later it was still an arduous, though infinitely rewarding, journey. As a member of the NEFA administration, Shri Roy has become acquainted not only with anthropological, but administrative and development problems (he wrote, for example, a useful evaluation report on the Pasi-ghat Community Project), and his book therefore has a practical and human foundation which gives it special value.

As long ago as 1938, Mahatma Gandhi, describing his dream of India, said that he had pictured to himself 'an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third-class or even a first-class copy of the dying civilization of the West.' More recently the Prime Minister has echoed his words, with specific reference to the tribes, in his famous directive that we should help them 'to develop on the lines of their own tradition and genius' and that we should not make them a second-rate copy of ourselves. If we are to do this we must know what that genius, what that tradition, is. Otherwise we may confine ourselves to a mere preservation of the more colourful and exotic aspects of tribal culture and be tempted to isolate them as a picturesque enclave in the rather drab and conventional modern world. Shri Sachin Roy's book provides a valuable antidote to this. He is excited, as we all must be, by the beauty of the tribal textiles, by their exuberant dancing, their songs, their games. But he realises that there is something more than this, and his study of political life, material culture and social organization is of importance for the administrator as well as of interest to the scholar. The planners in Delhi are disturbed about the kind of architecture that is being introduced into the rural areas all over India, the use of materials that are not available locally, the ugliness that is infecting the lovely countryside.

They are also worried, in their desire to promote cottage industries, by the fact that many good things are disappearing from the tribal scene. They now realize that the introduction of new methods of village self-government of a pattern suited to the highly-developed areas are less useful in the hills and forests, and are looking for something simpler and based on the democratic institutions of the past. Shri Sachin Roy provides a wealth of material to help towards the solution of these problems, and in fact we need human and scientific books such as his for the tribes (there are nearly thirty million of them) all over India.

Above all, Shri Sachin Roy has studied the problems of change, perhaps the most important subject for sociological research in modern India. There can be no question of isolating the tribes today: in an independent and rapidly advancing India, this just will not do. But as the tribal people come forward into the rushing stream of modern life, with its different economy, its technological superiority, they are often bewildered and afraid. It is the task of the sociologist to study how this transition can be related to their capacity so that they may raise their standard of living, come out of their shell, and develop a full integration with the people of the plains without losing those fine qualities which can make so unique a contribution to 'the rich and varied tapestry of India.'

VERRIER ELWIN

Shillong: 11.3.60

P R E F A C E

It would, I think, be true to say that this book has come about in spite of myself as will be evident from the circumstances stated below. My first contact with the Adis of the Siang Frontier Division of what is now known as the North-East Frontier Agency dates back to 1948 when I first went to their land as one of a team of anthropologists commissioned to study this wonderful people from different anthropological angles. My own assignment was the somatometry of the Adis who then used to be known to the outside world as Abors. A detailed report on my findings now awaits separate publication.

While so engaged, it was inevitable for me to come into contact with the larger aspects of their cultural and social life, and it was of no small interest to observe this singular people going about their unique mode of living. What constituted their uniqueness was, to all intent and purposes, their self-contained social structure, ensuring an efficient and smooth conduct of their social relations. As my admiration grew, I felt encouraged to keep notes of the salient features of the Adi society for my own edification, as far as my chief preoccupation permitted any leisure to me but, at no stage, did it occur to me to dress up my random notes in book form. Some years later, I was called to join the post of the Cultural Research Officer under the N. E. F. Agency and I was given an assignment very different from that of my first. This time, it was to conduct researches into the social and cultural life of the Agency people. My first impulse was naturally to fall back upon my notes for whatever they were worth, as they came very handy, and I actually found them of considerable use to start with. All these circumstances put together, it was as though luck favoured me with opportunities to renew my acquaintance with the Adis, get to know them better, compare and verify notes I had taken earlier, and assemble further data on Adi life.

I need hardly say that my office also made it possible for me to read all available published material on the Adis. It was

also my good fortune to be permitted access to much unpublished material scattered through many tour-notes and tour-diaries of Government officials which often proved store-houses of information.

A note of caution is, however, necessary against treating this book as an exhaustive and adequate account of the Adis as a whole, comprising as they do, several groups, sub-tribes, moieties, clans and sub-clans. This book confines itself to the study of the social and cultural life of the Padams and Minyongs, two sub-tribes under the bigger family of the Adis who inhabit the eastern part of the Siang Frontier Division. Even as it is, this book can hardly claim to be a comprehensive account of all the aspects of their life. The possibility always remains that some important aspects which should not have been missed, have actually been overlooked. Further researches will in all probability continue to throw fresh light on hitherto unrevealed aspects of Adi culture.

I wish to acknowledge my deep debt of gratitude to Dr B. S. Guha, in the first instance, under whose guidance I had my first initiation into the land of the Adis, then almost unknown to the outside world; and next to Mr P. L. S. James, the then Political Officer of the Siang Frontier Division, to whom I owe a great deal. In 1948, I had the inspiring experience of travelling with him right across the Adi country, to Gelling on the very frontier of India.

I cherish with gratitude the memory of Rokom Moyong, Kalpan Dai, Assam Borang and Akam Megu, the most renowned Miris of the old school, full of traditional lore and history of the tribe. It is to be regretted that this class of men is fast dying out. I was particularly fortunate in having them as my interpreters and it was due to them that I was able to establish some rapport with the people. It is sad to think that they are no longer in the land of the living. In humble acknowledgement of my debt, I dedicate this fruit of our joint effort to their memory.

I should not forget the friendliness and exuberant welcome and spontaneous help I received from other interpreters and elders of the villages I visited in the course of my itineraries. I treasure the nickname *payong*—given to me by them, and

it was a pleasant surprise to me to discover in my last tour in 1958 that I was still remembered by it, not only by old men who had known me before, but even by young boys and girls, who apparently learnt it from their elders.

It was a rare privilege for me to work under the inspiring influence of Shri K. L. Mehta, i.c.s., former Adviser to the Governor of Assam, whose interest in the cause of tribal welfare is today very widely acknowledged in the country. Himself a student of anthropology, he always took active and keen interest in my research work.

I can never hope to measure in words my indebtedness to Dr Verrier Elwin. It will not be too much to say that I have breathed in the atmosphere of his scholarship which continues to inspire and sustain me in all my scholastic endeavours. If I may be permitted to use a metaphor, I may perhaps correctly say that Dr Verrier Elwin has always been to me what Mentor was to Telemachus.

I am also very grateful to Shri D. M. Sen, Legal Adviser to the NEFA Administration, for his help on problems relating to the Adi political and judicial institutions; to Shri N. Sengupta, former Financial Adviser for NEFA, whose profound knowledge of art has been of great help to me; to Shri R. Yusuf Ali, whose affection for the Adis is matched only by his knowledge of them; to Shri S. C. Ray, former Director of Agriculture in NEFA, who made helpful suggestions on his own subject; and especially to Shri Daying Ering, himself a Minyong, who is now an Assistant Political Officer at Damroh. As an educated Adi who has maintained a keen interest in his own tradition, he was in a position to be of exceptional help to me.

I have at all times had the cooperation of my colleagues in the Research Department of NEFA. Shri B. Sastri, Philologist, has given me sustained and intimate collaboration and every part of this book has benefited from his assistance. He has always been by my side and plodded with me through the entire work in giving it concrete shape, as a friend, philosopher and guide. The Historical Research Officer, Shri L. N. Chakravarty, helped me in discovering references in the old literature and tour diaries; the Librarian, Shri J. N. Chowdhury was equally of constant assistance in helping me to get books. Shri

N. K. Syam Chowdhury, the office-in-charge of the Shillong Station, Department of Anthropology, clarified various points in the Adis' social structure.

Above all, my wife, Srimati Nilima Roy, has not only been a spiritual support to me, but has also enriched my book with valuable contributions of her own on various aspects of the material culture of the Adis.

The writing of this book required typing and retyping and in this Shri M. L. Lama, Stenographer, and Shri L. Jyrwa, Typist, have shown a degree of enthusiasm and hearty spirit of co-operation which has lightened the boredom and the dull hours of mechanical transcription.

SACHIN ROY

Shillong: 4.5.59.