

**EMERGENCE  
OF  
ARUNACHAL  
PRADESH  
AS A STATE**

**Chandrika Singh**



Arunachal Pradesh (previously known as N.E.F.A.), inhabited by numerous heterogeneous tribes and sub-tribes, has always excited the curiosity of the world historians and scholars. Till recently the British regarded the territory as a land of leeches, mosquitoes and beasts occupied by Abors (barbarians).

It is the only hill territory of India which touches the boundaries of China, Tibet, Burma and Bhutan. Emergence of China as a great power in Asia and its occupation of Tibet led to its increased interference in the territory of Arunachal Pradesh. This has increased the strategic importance of the state many times. Arunachal Pradesh situated inside the Himalayan Mountain ranges provides a safety-valve against China and Burma. The construction of the Chinese national highway which runs through north Burma via Mishmi areas of Arunachal and ends in Nepal deserves a critical reappraisal of the whole political situation of the Himalayan borderland. The present work, in fact, is an exercise in this direction.

The work gives an exhaustive account of the history of the Arunachal people right from their origin to emergence of Arunachal Pradesh as a state under the democratic Republic of India. It also presents the working of democratic processes in Arunachal Pradesh and the political and cultural behaviour, activities and responses to the constitutional democratic system of India.

The author has conducted a sincere and painstaking research to bring post-Independence facts of the land to light by producing this authoritative and scholarly work. It embodies the fruits of several years of the research carried out in the area based on the personal survey of the land and the rapport with its people.

Dr. Chandrika Singh (b. 1944) took his M.A. degree in Political Science from the Magadh University in 1971 and his Ph. D. degree from the same university in 1979. He joined the Sao Chang (Govt.) College, Tuensang, Nagaland in 1975. Currently he is the Head, Department of Political Science of the College.

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CHANDRIKA SINGH



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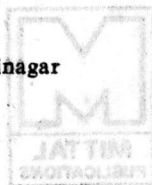
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To  
My Mother,  
**SMT. NAGESHWARI DEVI**

## *Preface*

Emergence of Arunachal Pradesh, as a full-fledged State of the Indian Republic, has great historical and political importance. The strategic significance of Arunachal Pradesh erstwhile known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), is several times greater than that of any other hill States of the North-East India because it alone touches the boundary lines of Tibet, China, Burma and Bhutan. The Chinese interests in the territory of Arunachal Pradesh, their military activities in Tibet and alongside the Indian frontiers and the construction of a national highway which runs along the north Burma via Mishmi areas of Arunachal Pradesh to Nepal have further increased the strategic importance of the State, to a great extent. Since Arunachal Pradesh is located well inside the Himalayan mountain ramparts, this tiny State of the Indian Union provides a safety valve against the invasion from China and Burma. It is because of this fact that Arunachal Pradesh has always caused the curiosity in historians, scholars, politicians and rulers whether they were the Britishers or the Indians. Before the arrival of the British in this region, the Ahom rulers of Assam had left no stone unturned to establish their suzerainty over the hill people living in the Frontier areas. Somewhat they had succeeded also. The British rulers, too, when they came in contact with these people, applied their best efforts to win over the tribal people of the North-East Frontier and subjugated their lands to the British India. It was all because of the strategic importance of the areas. The history of Assam wears the testimony to the fact that the

Burmese rulers, even during the British period, made several invasions over the hill territories of Assam to annex them to Burma.

The independent India, no doubt inherited a stable Frontier on its north-Eastern corner but with the emergence of China as a great power in Asia and the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese introduced some destabilising factors in this region which necessitate reappraisal of the whole political situation of the Himalayan border. The study of the emergence of Arunachal Pradesh as a constituent State of the Indian Union is, in fact, an exercise in that direction.

Moreover, the territory of Arunachal Pradesh is occupied by a number of tribes and sub-tribes whose way of life and mode of behaviours are more heterogeneous. They differ not only in their religious faiths but also in social and customary beliefs with the result that the problem of social dissent and nation building in Arunachal Pradesh is a burning issue. Like other tribes and sub-tribes living in the North-Eastern Region of India the different tribal groups of Arunachal Pradesh which possess heterogeneous beliefs, dissimilar legendary and mythological tales, divergent dialects and customary practices, are not responsive to the call of social unification and political integration. Their prolonged isolation and separation from the plains people of India and their confinement to different ridges without any social intercourse with one another has deeply rooted the separatist tendency in their mind. As a result, the efforts hitherto made by the Government of India to integrate and assimilate these hill people with the mainstream of the Indian nationalism has not cut much ice so far.

In the changed context this study becomes all the more important as this will throw light not only on the hitherto unknown history of the Arunachal people but also on the problem of integration of the tribal people of the Arunachal Pradesh and their political behaviours and political attitude towards India.

Arunachal Pradesh became a constituent State of India through the process of evolution. Before 1912 there was neither NEFA nor Arunachal. After subjugation of the

different tracts of the North-East Frontier the British brought them under the districts of Assam Province such as Sadiya, Lakhimpure, Darrang etc. It was only in 1912 when the territories of present Arunachal Pradesh were brought under a separate administrative unit which was termed as the North-Eastern Frontier Tract. The tracts which it consisted were called Sadiya Tract, Lakhimpure Tract and Balipara Tract. The British declared these Tracts as the Backward Tracts under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919. Thereupon, the North-Eastern Frontier Tract was included in the Excluded Areas when the Government of India Act, 1935 came into being. The Governor of Assam was made responsible for administration of the North-Eastern Frontier Tracts. He alone had the authority to rule these Tracts. Neither the Legislature nor the Executive of Assam had power to interfere in the affairs of the Excluded Areas. This provision not only kept the tribal people of the Excluded Areas out of the contact with the plains people but also deprived them of learning democratic processes and of taking part in the political activities because no provision was made for their representation in the Central or State legislature on the basis of universal franchise.

The political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh got real pace after Independence of India. In 1954 the Government of India took decisive step to consolidate the territory of Arunachal and put it under better administrative arrangements by passing the North-Eastern Frontier Area (Administration) Regulation which designated the hitherto known North-East Frontier Tract as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). It consisted of the Division like Balipara, Tirap, Kameng, Siang, Subansiri, Lohit and Tuensang Frontier Division. Thereafter, in 1965, the another Regulation known as the North-East Frontier (Administration) Regulation was passed by the Indian Parliament which made further political and administrative adjustments in the territories of the NEFA. Different Divisions of the NEFA were designated as districts and put under the control of Deputy Commissioners. These districts also were divided into several administrative units and sub-units for the convenience of administration.

To introduce democratic norms in Arunachal Pradesh the Government of India passed the Panchayat Raj Regulation, 1967 which provided for the people of Arunachal first time to exercise the right to franchise for the composition of village Panchayats. It also provided for the composition of the Zila Parishads, Anchal Samitis and Agency Council on the basis of democratic process. In fact, it was this Panchayat Raj Act which rooted the seed of democratic processes in the NEFA. The process led the NEFA towards the culmination of Union Territory. The Government of India passed the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 which gave birth to the Union Territory of Arunachal on January 20, 1972 separating NEFA from Assam. The Act made provision for the representation of the Arunachal people in the Union Parliament. By 1975 the process of the democratic Government in Arunachal got maturity with the result that the so called Pradesh Council was converted into a Pradesh legislature and the Body of Councillors which was acting as the de facto Cabinet was converted into the Council of Ministers. The people of Arunachal Pradesh went to the polls first time in 1980 when the general elections were held for the composition of the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory. Their long cherished goal was fulfilled in 1986 by granting them the full-fledged state.

Today Arunachal Pradesh with its separate identity, with its own legislature and a representative Government has become a part and parcel of the Indian Republic. This hill State has its representatives in the Lok Sabha as well as in the Rajya Sabha. Two Assembly elections have taken place in Arunachal Pradesh and people have openly taken part in the political activities without any fear and compulsion. This reflects the democratic culture of the people of Arunachal. No doubt, the Congress (I) is the dominant political party of the State, but a few regional political parties have also emerged. It is thus obvious that the Arunachal people have deep understanding of the democratic processes and the democratic norms are allowed to have a free play in this Hill State of India. Today Arunachal Pradesh is on the threshold of material prosperity and economic development. A number

of steps have been taken up to change the economic face of this State. There is consistent effort to provide maximum job opportunities to the youth of Arunachal Pradesh. Many problems are there, no doubt, but the people and their leaders are making sincere and hard efforts to solve these with the cooperation of the Government of India.

The present work has been undertaken just because no major and upto-date study of the political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh has been made so far. As a result many facts and events which took place in Arunachal especially in the post-independent era have not been brought to the light. The books written by the British administrators, philologists, anthropologists and Christian Missionaries, no doubt throw some light on the religious belief, social practices and customary life of the people of Arunachal but in these works adequate attention has not been paid to the study of the political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh. I have made the sincere efforts to fill in the gap in this regard. The present work is mostly based on the Government records, the Constituent Assembly Debates, the Rajya Sabha Debates and the Lok Sabha Debates. Bengal proceedings and Foreign Political Proceedings have also been consulted. Some of the facts are based on the personal survey of the areas and personal contact and interview with the people and leaders of Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, I have taken much help from the different news papers, leading journals and magazines of the country. I hope the readers of this book will find it useful and interesting. The satisfaction of the readers will be the test of my success.

Lastly, I would like to express my indebtedness to my all friends and colleagues, and all those who helped me by passing on information, facts, events etc., about Arunachal Pradesh and its people to make my work authentic, illustrative and upto-date.

**CHANDRIKA SINGH**

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## *The Land and People of Arunachal Pradesh*

Arunachal Pradesh, the 24th State of the Indian Republic, is situated in the North-Eastern Frontier of India. The regions of this frontier are mostly hilly and covered with densest forests. It has great strategic significance. The countries which lie across the boundaries of this area are Burma, Tibet, China and Bangladesh. On the north of the region there is the territory of Bhutan which is occupied by the semi-Mongloid tribes. With the exception of a narrow stripe of land, twenty to thirty miles at the foot-hills, known as Duar and the central plateaus, the whole area is covered with the offshoots of the Eastern Himalayas. Arunachal Pradesh which was previously known as the North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) lies in the southern slope of the Himalayan mountainous ranges. Roughly from  $92^{\circ} 40'$  to  $95^{\circ} 30'$  East Longitude constitutes the territory of Arunachal Pradesh where a number of hill tribes live together.

Like other parts of the North-Eastern Frontier Arunachal Pradesh is also a wild mountainous range. It is bounded by Bhutan on the west, Tibet and China on the north, Assam on

south and Burma on the east. Except a few places such as Pasi-ghat and Along there is hardly any plains territory. The entire tract of the State is covered with dense ever green forest which presents very colourful and picturesque natural sight. Some of the peaks of Arunachal Pradesh are covered with deep gorges. There are several rivers in the State which rise from the highest northern snowy peaks and ultimately merge into Brahmaputra, the mightiest river of India. Dihong, Dibang, Padam, Subansiri etc. are the important rivers of Arunachal which originate from the northern snowy ranges of the Himalayas.

It was the natural beauty and strategic importance of the North-Eastern Frontier of India which had attracted the British. During the British rule in India several British anthropologists, sociologists and visitors who were very much interested in the lives of the tribes living in the areas made anthropological and social researches which brought in the light a number of facts about cultural life and social behaviour of the tribal people. Giving a beautiful description of the land of Arunachal Pradesh, G. Dunbar who had personally visited the territory wrote that "It would be difficult to find more tremendous inhabited country than the home of the Abors (a major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh) and their neighbours. A close succession of thickly wooded mountains, their sides as steep as the roof or the walls of a house, rise higher and higher northwards to the main snowy range. Upto the furthest limits of the Indian monsoon these high lands are drenched under very nearly the torrential rainfall in the world. . . . One of the greatest rivers in Asia thunders in its deepest gorges on the long journey from Tibet, through a labyrinth of mountains echoing with streams, down to the wide expanses of Assam Valley and out into the Bay of Bengal."<sup>2</sup> Dunbar further wrote that "The razor-edged foot-hills are covered with dense sub-tropical forests where orchids grown on the branches above and the thick undergrowth is infested with leeches. . . . Midway between the foot-hills and the main snowy range there is a narrow valley where flourishing villages are set amidst their fields. This is the heart of the tribal country. It is beyond

the influence of Assam with its Indian and western form of civilization and it is too far for south to be affected by the religious ideas and customs of Tibet.”<sup>3</sup>

The rolling mountains of Arunachal, its enchanting valleys, swift flowing streams and evergreen forests speak of the scenic beauty of the land. The peaks of Arunachal Pradesh vary in height from 350 meters to more than 3,000 meters above sea level. Most of its high peaks are covered with snow all round the year. So far the seasons are concerned, it faces mostly two seasons—winter and rain. Rain starts as early as April and continues upto October. The rainfall is almost equitably distributed throughout Arunachal Pradesh and the average temperature in winter falls as low as 3° centigrade. During winter the temperature of the higher peaks of Arunachal goes down the zero degree centigrade with the result that the inhabitants of the area have to face chilly cold. The soil of the land, except snowy part, is acidic, rich in organic matters but poor in phosphate and potash.<sup>4</sup> Nearly 96 per cent of population of Arunachal Pradesh is engaged in agriculture. Irrigated area forms about 26 per cent of the total cultivated area of about 1,33,430 hectares. New forests are being cleared. The chief agricultural products of the land are rice, maize, kauni, onion, potato, millet, garlic, chilli, soyabeans, sugarcane and a variety of vegetables. In addition to these orange, pineapple, papaya, bears, banana and other jungly fruits are also grown there. There are two types of cultivation—terrace and jhuming or shifting. A total area of 56,270 hectares of the land have been brought under jhuming cultivation.”<sup>5</sup> About 61,000 sq. km. of the territory is covered with forests which is the important source of revenue of the State. Arunachal Pradesh is very rich in forest products such as bamboo and timber. Different varieties of wild animals like elephants, tigers, deers, monkey, leopard etc. are found in the forests of the State. Though no minerals have been found in Arunachal, the Geological Survey of India expects that some varieties of minerals like coal etc. may be available.

Arunachal Pradesh has a total area of 83743 sq. km. As per the census report of 1971, the population of the

State was 46751.<sup>10</sup> In the census of 1981 the population of Arunachal Pradesh reached upto 631839. The area is inhabited by nearly 110 hill tribes and sub-tribes who are scattered in 2,943 villages and 4 big towns. Nearly 40 dialects are spoken by these tribes. The density of population was 6 per square mile in 1971. Now it has increased to 8 per square mile. The literacy of the people is 20.9 percent. The distance of the international boundary between Arunachal and Burma is 525 kilometers and between Arunachal and China is 1,175 kilometers. At present the areas of the State have been divided into ten administrative districts. Itanagar is the capital of Arunachal Pradesh.

### Districts of Arunachal Pradesh

<i>Name of Districts</i>	<i>Population (1981 census)</i>	<i>Area (sq. km.)</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>
West Kameng	63,302	9,594	Bomdila
East Kameng	42,736	4,134	Seppa
Lower Subansiri	1,12,650	13,010	Ziro
Upper Subansiri	39,410	7,032	Daparijo
West Siang	74,164	12,006	Along
Tirap	128,650	7,024	Khonsa
East Siang	70,451	6,512	Pasi-Ghat
Dibang Valley	30,978	13,029	Anini
Lohit	69,498	11,402	Tezu
Towang	Not available		

### The People and their Customs

As stated above there are numerous tribes in Arunachal which pose the problem of social dissents and political integration of the country. The mode of life and way of behaviour of these tribes and sub-tribes are heterogeneous. They differ not only in their religious faiths but also in social and customary beliefs. The major tribes of the State are Bhutia, Daphala, Miri, Adi (Abor), Mishmi, Kampti, Singpho Nishi, Tagin, Apatani, Wancho etc.<sup>7</sup> All the tribes belong to

the Scheduled Tribes. According to census of 1981 Scheduled Tribes forms 79 per cent of the population as against an average of 7 per cent for whole of India. For the convenience of the study, these tribes may be put under three communities. The first community comprises the people of larger cultural traditions who are Sherdukepens, Monpas, Khampos of the Kameng district. They are largely integral part of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural tradition but their affiliation is with the Burmese Buddhist cultural tradition. The second community is in the Tirap district which was made of the areas taken from Assam. That is why the culture of these people has similarity with Vaishvanism of Assam and the culture of Burma. The tribes who come under the second category are mainly the Noctes and

#### Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as Per Census of 1971

<i>Name of Tribes</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Percentage of Population</i>
Abor (Adi)	99372	2.25
Akas	2347	0.50
Apatani	12888	2.75
Bongro	1085	0.22
Hill Miri	8175	1.74
Khampti	4078	0.87
Miji	3549	0.75
Mishing	3359	0.71
Monpa	28209	6.03
NISHI Mishi (Daphla)	80325	17.18
Nocte	23165	4.95
Sherdukpen	1639	0.35
Singpho	1566	0.33
Sullung	4250	0.90
Tagin	20377	4.35
Wan̄chu	28650	6.12

*Source* : D.N. Majumdar, "An Appraisal of the Tribal Situation in North-East India", *India's North:East*, Pankaj Thakur (ed.), Tinsukia, 1982, p. 127.

Wanchos. The former is inclined towards Vaishnavism while the latter follows the Burmese culture. Besides these two communities other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh can be put under the third category who are living in other districts—Lohit, Tirap and Subansiri. These tribes have different culture and faith.

The multiplicity of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and their heterogeneous characters are due to the fact that these people migrated to this part in different groups and they remained confined to their respective ridges and mountainous terrains.<sup>8</sup> Since they remained in isolation for several centuries and did not allow any interference in their tribal life by any other groups, all of them developed their separate and independent way of living. When they came in close contact with the British by nineteenth century, the western Missionaries influenced several tribes of the areas with the result that the Christianity appeared as a great religious force not only in Arunachal Pradesh but also all over the hilly areas of Assam. These Missionaries left no stone unturned to change the social and cultural outlook of the hill people.<sup>9</sup>

⟨ It will be more convenient to have the deeper social and political knowledge of Arunachal Pradesh and its people if some details of the major Arunachal tribes are given. One of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is Abor which has been divided into a number of clans and sub-clans such as Manyong, Padam, Galong, Simong, Pangi, Pasi, Daba etc. The Abors occupy the territory between the ranges of the hills forming the eastern boundary of the Miris and the Sessiri river which divides them from Mishmis. ⟩ Geographically they fall between the eastern watershed of the Dihong river and the western drainage of the Subansiri river. On either side of the river Dihong different clans have their settlement. The right side is occupied by the Pasi and Meyongs while the left by the Pado, Siboo, Maybo and Gooliwar Abors.<sup>10</sup> The land of the Abors is covered with vast stretches of dense jungles and it has deep barren valleys, patches of alluvial plains and many ranges. The lower rising of the mountain is seven thousand feet while the higher ones, snow-clad and wooded from base to summit, exceeds

ten thousand feet. The British knew the Abors as 'remote savage' because they used to live in very remote areas and they were utterly uncivilized. The British record maintained that "They (Abors) are in a manner insolent and rude beyond all other tribes of this Frontier."<sup>11</sup> Describing their living conditions A. Hamilton, an authority of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, noted that "They (Abors) live off the smaller wild life of the jungles, and favour frogs, lizards, snakes, rats, dogs, monkeys, cats and mice. An animal that has died a natural death is as acceptable to them as the best butcher's meat, while the flesh of the tiger is reckoned particularly good for men though it is denied to women on account of its supposed passion-rousing qualities."<sup>12</sup> He further wrote that "Both sexes are inveterate smokers. They begin, when they are four or five years old and never leave off the practice until they die. They inhale the smoke. They have no other use for water, for they consider dirt an antidote to cold. . . . Both sexes tattoo, the man bearing across on the forehead between the eyebrows; the woman a smaller cross in the hollow of the upper lip immediately under the nose."<sup>13</sup>

In fact the Abors are of the Mangoloid descent. Their complexion is saffron or brown and they possess good physique. Their average height is six feet. They are physically strong, active and smart, mentally bold and brave. The dialects spoken by the Abors bear the testimony of the mixture of the Tibetan tongue. Their customs and manners still bear the sign of the primitive age. The British officials called them warlike tribes, because they boldly used to put resistance and bravely fight with the British when the latter interfered in their internal affairs. Their main weapons are spear, dao and bomboos made arrows and bow. For the purpose of protection the Abors largely use punjees or pieces of bomboos hardened to the toughness of steel by being placed in hot ashes. They are, in fact, warriors. Describing about their bravery, A. Hamilton wrote that the Abors "are very independent and quarrelsome. They had come to regard themselves as the rulers of this far distant corner of India from

the fact that so many of the Miri and Mishmi tribes had submitted to their exaction."<sup>14</sup>

An Abor village is an entirely independent unit from the administrative point of view over which the Ganm Burah or the village headman exercises absolute authority. The houses are made of wood, bomboos and thatch. In the heart of a village is the 'Moshup' a spacious building, where the villagers attend to discuss the business of the community. It is also utilised by the unmarried youths where they sleep in the night with a duty to protect the villages in case a sudden attack is made by the enemies. However, the tribal feuds are frequent and bitter among the Abors.

The Abors who live on the east bank of the river Dihang upto the Dibong river are called Bor Abors or Great Abors. It is believed that the Pasi and Meyong Abors are the offshoots of the Bor Abors. Those who occupy the right bank of the Dihang are known as Pasi-Meyong. The real habitat of the Abors is the lofty mountain ranges which vary from 8,000 to 13,000 feet high between Assam and Tibet. Birendra Chandra Chakravorty maintains that "their (Abors) supper-abundant population, for the want of room and land, have overflowed into the valley of Assam through the gorge of the Dihang, and spread east and west to the lower ranges of hills on the outskirts of the plains."<sup>15</sup> It is also a fact that the "Abors claimed an absolute overlordship on the plain Miris and an inalienable right to all the fish and gold in the Dihang river."<sup>16</sup>

The Akas are another major tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh who dwell in the areas between the Bhutias and the Daphlas in the district of Kameng. Roughly the Akas' territory lies between the parallels of 27° and 28° north latitude and between 92° and 93° east longitudes.<sup>17</sup> They also belong to two different groups—Hazarikhawas and Kapachor. The Hazarikhawas meant 'eaters of thousand hearth' while the Kapachor meant 'who lurked amid the cotton plants.'<sup>18</sup> The Hazarikhawa Akas had their traditional right to collect an annual 'Posa' from the plains bordering upon their hills. Posa was, in fact, a type of levy laid down on the Assamese people living along the areas of the Akas. According to this traditional right the Hazarikhawa Akas were authorised to get

from each family some useful materials such as cotton shawl munga thread, cotton thread, rice etc. while the latter was bound "to serve these hill-men with their requirement of persona lservice and produce in lieu of a remission of two-thirds of the land tax."<sup>19</sup> The Posa was, however, not an illegal exaction dependent in amount upon the capacity of the different hordes. Under the Ahom rulers it was "a well ascertained revenue payment on account of which a corresponding remission was made in the State demand upon the Ryot."<sup>20</sup> Every Chief of every tribe had the well ascertained areas for collecting posas from the plains people. Though, in the beginning, there was hardly any dispute for collection of posas, in the course of time the right to posa became the bone of contention which ultimately resulted in civil wars and invasions "which had killed or carried away a larger number of pykes (Assamese ryots) earmarked for services of these mountaneers."<sup>21</sup> This further resulted in emigration of the pykes into the safer areas under the direct supervision of the British authorities. It were the British authorities who conducted negotiation with the tribal Chiefs with a view to fixing a certain amount of money or quantity of various articles to be paid to them. The latter were not allowed under any circumstance to proceed beyond a defined line of control to collect their posas.<sup>22</sup> Thus the Hazarikhawa Akas were rightly known as the 'eaters of thousand hearths.' The Kapachor Akas used to commit theft in to the plains of Assam for cotton. That is why they were called as Kapachors.

The Akas believe that they shifted to the present tract from the south-east of the Assam Valley. Their dialects have more assimilation with the tribes bordering Manipur rather than their neighbours, the Daphlas or Bhutias. It appears that they had really migrated from the north-east Valley of Assam to the tract which they presently occupy. As per the belief of the Akas the major cause of their migration from the bank of the Giladhari river where they had originally settled, was their expulsion from the land by Kirshana and Balram.<sup>23</sup> The Hazarikhawa Akas still claim that they were of the noble origin and they are the descents of the royal family.<sup>24</sup> Like

the Abors the Akas, too, had got the right to *posa* during the period of the Ahom rule in Assam which was ultimately recognised by the British when they came in their contact. Even today among the Akas the rich families occupy the highest degree of honour and dignity.

The Aka's territory is about 4,000 to 6,000 feet above the sea level. The area has great reputation for violence and audacity. Capt. Maxwell, the Political Officer of the Akas field during the British Raj, observed that if all the savage races of the North-Frontier of Assam Province were compared, the Akas had been meant more contumacious and troublesome.<sup>25</sup> They used to commit raids on the plains people of Assam for collection of *posas* by force and to plunder them. They had also established commercial relations with the Assamese and the Bhutias.

The Akas believed in the theory of Chieftain and their Chiefs had absolute authority to rule over their respective groups. Like the Abor tribe the Akas also are quite healthy and handsome. They are great fighters. Their way of living is still based on customary laws and traditional beliefs. They are hard workers. By nature they are egoistic.

In the district of Subansiri there live another tribal people who are known as Daphlas. The range of the Daphlas area is about sixty miles from east to west and forty miles from north to south. The hill ranges are 2,000 to 7,000 feet high which are full of dense forests. The Daphlas are separated from the Akas on the west and the Miris on the east and north. Like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh the Daphlas also have several clans. The persons living on the border of the Darrang district of Assam are known as Paschim (western) Daphlas while those who inhabit the district of North Lakhimpur border are called the Tagin Daphlas. Some of them also known as Nishis and Ankas or Apatang. Like the Abors the Daphlas, too, prefer tattoo and like the Akas they are demon worshippers and believe in the existence of gods and evils. The base of their life is still the customary practices.

↳ To the north-east of the Daphlas the tribes which live are popularly known as Miris and Abors. The Miri people occupy the plains and lower hill along the north banks of the river

Brahmaputra. There are hill Miris also who live in the west of the Dirjmoo. The hill Miris are divided into several clans.<sup>26</sup> Roughly they may be grouped in four chief clans. Firstly, the Ghasis who live in the east of the Subansiri River. The second group is known as Saraks who live on the right bank of the Subansiri. The third group is known as the Panibotia while the fourth one is called the Tarpotias. The latter two groups occupy the area further to the west. The Miri hills are more rugged than the Daphla hills. The upper Miri hills are still unapproachable due to thick forests, deep gorges and sharp ascendings. The Lhokaptra Miris who occupy the northern Miri hills are still living in remote corner and very little has been known about their way of living and behaviours. The villages of these areas are small and scattered. They have no affinity to one another. They are still shrouded in backwardness. About their origin nothing definitely is known. However, they claim that they had relations with the Chutiyas of Assam when they latter had conquered Lakhimpur.<sup>27</sup> Hamilton believes that the hill Miris are really Abor emigrants from the Dihang Valley. He maintains that "As an ethnic unity, they are believed to be members of the Tibeto-Burman family and are said to have settled originally in the hills to the North Lakhimpur, between the Daphla and Abor territory."<sup>28</sup> V. Elvin is also of the view that the Daphlas are the members of the Tibeto-Burman family.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the physical construction and faces of these tribes have similarity with that of the Mangolians. However, the Miris living near the plains of Assam along the border side call themselves Hindus and speak Assamese. It is because of their long association with the plains people of Assam. They are very fond of eating pork and drinking rice beer. Those who are not Hindus are Animists who have faith in the existence of souls or spirits. They perform some type of ceremonies to satisfy the demons who, as per their belief, are the "creators of all evils. So far their social administrative pattern is concerned, in the words of Robinson "The Daphlas maintained among themselves an oligarchical form of Government and acknowledged the authority from two to three, to thirty to forty in each clan."<sup>30</sup>

To the east and north of the Miri Hills the territory is

occupied by the Mishmi tribe which has a cluster of small communities sharing common culture but differing in their dialects. They may be grouped into four divisions—Midus or Chulikattas, Bebejiyas or Mithans, Taius or Digarus and Mejus. The Mejus who are also known as Chilikattas because they cut their hair round the below portion of their heads, are the most dominant and popular tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. They claim to be descended from the Abors and they do not inter-marry with the Bebejiyas. The Chulickatta Mishmi tribe have the following clans and sub-clans: Mepa, Menda, Migi, Lingi, Mili, Maikron, Poyia, Lingaru, Meton, Pulu, Mimi, Meenee, Elapran, Mendon, Mison, Miku, Mema, Mihun, Mitaiya, Melonga and Emohan. They have spread all over the Sino-Burma and Indo-Tibetan border areas of the Lohit district in the Dibong Valley.

The clans of the Bebejiya who claim to be the descendents of the Degarus are Miaga, Mison, Miaton, Mpe, Mderen, Minli, Mimi, Mikatson, Mongon, Michon, etc. The Mishmis who lived to the west of the Digaru river were called as Digaru tribes by the British.<sup>31</sup> Lapa, Prun, Manlo, Samle, Hago, Towa, Ro, Tumblu and Lameot are clans of the Mejus who have no objection to intermarry with the Digarus. They live in the north-east of the river Digaru. The Maro Mishmis are found to the south of the Brahmaputra in scattered settlement having affiliation with the Khampti and the Singpho tribes.

The territories occupied by the Mishmis are mountainous ranges upto 15,000 feet in height and divided by deep gorges and covered with thick jungles. Communication is still a big problem to approach the terrain. During the winter it faces heavy snowfall and from June to October there is heavy rainfall. The trade is poor and cultivation scanty. The tribesmen are of uncertain temperament. They are always involved in internal feuds. Like other hill tribes the Mishmis also have Mongolian physique. They still preserve the primitive manners in variety of ways. Their dresses and costumes have similarity with that of the Abors. Regarding their dress and ceremonial costumes Hamilton noted that "It comprises a

short sleeveless Tibetan Jacket and attenuated skirt made from the Rhea Nivea, which with other jungle nettles is made into a rough, tough and very fibrous cloth. The Chulikattas and the Bebejiyas follow identical fashions; but there are certain tribal differences of dress in the styles of the Digarus and Mejus, and peculiar to them. In their head-dress the Mishmis follow the mode of the frontier, for Abor, Miri and Mishmi alike wear cane helmets, ornamented on grand occasions with bearskin, feathers, or beads, and sufficiently strong to resist direct or glancing cuts by sword, dao or spear."<sup>32</sup> In regard to the weapons of the Mishmis, Hamilton further wrote that "In addition to their dhaos, the Mishmis carry the usual bow and quiver of poisoned arrows; in war time they sport a shield and spear."<sup>33</sup> The houses of the Mishmis are thatched, constructed from bamboos. Generally there are thirty to forty houses in a village. The villages of the Mishmis are smaller than the Miri's villages.

Polygamy was popular custom among the Mishmis. The sexual morality is not as strict among the hill tribes as it is in the plains of India. Before marriage the boys and girls have free option to meet each other and select their life partner. Thereupon, they take formal consent of their parents which is generally easily given. Regarding the divorce and remarriage among the Mishmis, Hamilton describes that divorce is an easy process. He mentions that "where reasons for divorce are supposed to exist one would think that they would be hard to define—the husband—not the wife, who has no right of petition, an object of dignity, decorated about the neck, arms and legs with bells and ornaments, to purify the women. The evil spirit, in the guise of a bird who lives in the armpits of erring wives, is caught, plucked alive and eaten raw, the women being cleansed immediately of her guilt. When the sorcerer has gone, the husband usually emphasised the character of the visitor by beating his wife before admitting her to the marital mat."<sup>34</sup> When death of a villager takes place, the whole village mourns by stopping their daily works. The dead body is buried not burnt. Dhaos, a sword, a bow and arrows are put in the coffin, but it is notable that the dead bodies of the wealthy Mishmis are burnt not buried

while those of the slaves are thrown into the river. Perhaps it is all based on their customary beliefs and practices. One of the practices which still exists among the Mishmis is unlimited authority of the village Chief over his people. Though the Chulikattas had their hereditary Chiefs, the authority of the latter was not absolute.<sup>35</sup> In other Mishmi clans the Chiefs have absolute authority.

The Khamti is the another major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh who occupy the territory south to the Mishmi area. The Khamtis represent the Shan culture of upper Burma. They migrated to this place from their original home which was near the sources of the Irawadi river. The Khamtis follow the Buddhist religion.<sup>36</sup> It is believed that they had left their original home by the latter part of the eighteenth century in search of better food and place. Lastly they settled in Tengapani in Assam. But by 1794 the continuous invasions of the Singphos compelled them to cross the river Brahmaputra and moved towards Sadiya where they succeeded in establishing their authority over Assamese Ryots.<sup>37</sup> Latter on the Khamtis also succeeded in subduing the Mishmis.<sup>38</sup>

The Khamtis like other hill tribes are various and apply better war strategy. In the words of H.K. Barpujari "As to the mode of warfare, most of the tribes avoided pitched battles in larger numbers and resorted to surprises and ambuscade. The Khamtis and the Singphos advanced at night towards the enemy's position. They would halt and listen, and in the event of imminent danger from any quarter, they threw themselves on the ground covering their bodies in defensive armour. On approach of the target of attack they would rise up and rush at the door of the stockade killing every one indiscriminately—men, women and children."<sup>39</sup> Observing the warriorship of the Khamtis the British Indian Government, after the cessation of hostilities with the Government in 1843, allowed them to settle above Sadiya as a buffer between the Assamese and the Mishmis. Later on, the Government installed a small force of 24 Khamti volunteers for the protection of the villages around Sadiya. In return of their services, they used to receive a small pay from the Government. These volunteers were supplied with arms and

ammunition. Only in 1886 they were disbanded by the Chief Commissioner of Assam and pensioned off because the Government no longer required their services due to establishment of army outposts in the required areas.

In the Lohit district besides the Khamtis the Phakials are another hill tribe who settled on the bank of the Buri Dihang. It is believed that they also migrated to this area from the 'Shan country in separate batches of immigrants.'<sup>40</sup> They are almost indistinguishable in dress, manner and language from the Khamtis.

There is one more major tribes in the territory of Arunachal known as the Singpho. This tribe is quite similar to the Khamti tribe. Like the latter the Singphos, too, migrated to Assam from Upper Burma. It is the Patkai Range, a big mountainous system, which comes between Upper Burma and Assam. The land to the eastern part of the Patkai Range comes under the possession of the Burmese Government and the tribes who occupy the area (eastern portion of the Patkai Range) are known as the Burmese Krkhyen, Kakhyen or Kakos. Some of them are known as Shan and Kachin whose "original home was formerly located in the east of the Irrawadi extending to the confines of Yanna."<sup>41</sup> Hannay puts these into five groups—Tesan, Mirip, Lophae, Lotong and Myrung.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the Singphos of Arunachal are a section of the Teson group of the Burmese Kachin who had migrated to Assam and occupied the western part of the Patkai Range. Another section of the Burmese Kachin who settled finally in the western part of the Patkai hills are popularly known as the Kachin Nagas. In the course of time the Singphos were further subdivided into three classes—Tenghai, Meyho and Nimbrong. In the words of H.K. Barpujari "Admixture of the Singphos and the Assamese brought fourth Doaneahs, new tribe, who formed useful auxiliaries in warfare in the far eastern frontier." Thus it is obvious that the original home of the Kachin Nagas and the Singphos was in the greater Hukwang Valley of Burma lying immediately to the south east of the Patkai Range. It is important to note that most of the hill tribes of the North Eastern Region of India migrated to this part from the



Huwang Valley in different groups and in different times in search of better conditions of life.<sup>43</sup> It is also important to note that some of the tribes living in the Hukwang Valley were independent during the time of their migration to the North-Eastern Part of India. But when they had settled in the hilly areas of Assam, they accepted the sovereignty of the Assamese rulers.<sup>44</sup> The areas west to the Patkai hills are still the main hideouts of the hostile Nagas and the hostile Burmese tribes who are having hostility with the Governments of Nagaland and Burma.

The Singphos possess good physic and are hard workers. Though they follow the Buddhist religion, the remnants of the primitive religion are explicitly visible in their social and customary practices. According to Robinson the Singphos who drove away the Khamtis from the lands below the Patkai Hills and settled themselves on the bank of the Tengapani river are most humorous tribes bordering on Assam Valley.<sup>45</sup> The weapons of the Khamtis and the Singphos consist mainly of short and heavy daos, a long cross bow and arrows. The Singphos also use matchlocks of Tibetan or Chinese manufacture. For defensive armour "they use a head-dress of buffalo hide and a shield of 4 feet long and 18 inch wide."

Thus the Singphos are racially identical with the Kakus or Kachins of Burma. Originally they were all one. It was later on when they splited into two divisions—the eastern and the western. After split they were called as eastern Kakus and western TS' Sans. The Kaku division of the Burmese are found chiefly in Trans Namkin country while TS' Sans group is still available in the Hukwang Valley and between the river Irrawadi and Kandywen.<sup>46</sup> Those branches which migrated to India are popularly known as Singphos and Cachin Nagas who have still their affiliation to the Kachin and TS' Sans tribes living in the Hukwang Valley. That is why the Hukwan Valley is still the main centre of the hideouts of the hostile Nagas. It is believed that the Singphos who migrated to India and occupied the territory bounded by Lohit on the north, by Lantang hill range on the east, Patkai on the west and an imaginary line drawn south from Sadiya to Patkai, paid allegiance and tributes neither to Burma nor China. In

fact, before the arrival of the British to this part they formed a neutral ground between India and China.<sup>47</sup> It is notable that the territories occupied by the Singphos, especially those towards the south and the south-west, and those in the further west of Sadya are very rich in precious metals and amber mines of the Hukwang. In these areas the chief available metals are jade (a kind of green precious stone), slat and other precious stones as well as some minerals. That is why China is very much interested in these areas even from the British period. To the south-west of the Singpho area the territories are occupied by the various Naga tribes who are scattered roughly between 93° and 97° longitudes.

### **Origin of the Arunachali Tribes**

Like the other tribes of the North-East India the real origin of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is shrouded in mystery and doubt. The written history of these tribes before the arrival of the British to this part is not available. Since the cent per cent illiteracy prevailed among these tribes, they could not write the past history.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, they lived in such inhospitable mountainous terrains that the people from the plains could not establish any contact with them with the result that very little is known about the early history and origin of these tribes. What is known about them is based on the tribal tales, paleolithic tools recently discovered and anthropological research made by the anthropologists who personally visited and surveyed the area. But tales and researches do not present a clear picture about the origin of the hill tribes living in the North-Eastern Frontier of India. It were the British Anthropologists, administrators, surveyers and Missionaries who made some sincere efforts and attempts in the last century to discover the identities of these people. But what they discovered and noted about them are mostly concerned with the social, cultural and religious life of these hill people. However, some British authors and visitors who personally visited the area and established personal contact with the people threw some light on their origin and migration to this part. But they also produced different views about their origin. Some of them believe that the hill tribes

of the North-East India belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race. Some Indian scholars, too, believe that the tribes living in the hills of the North-East India primarily belonged to the Indo-Mongoloid group who had migrated to India in the tenth century B.C. and confined themselves to the tracts of the North-Eastern Region of India. They also believe that these tribes were originally known as Kiratas of India whose description is available in the ancient Indian literatures.<sup>49</sup> Dr. S.K. Chatterjee maintained that "The Kiratas were known to the Hindu world as a group of people whose original home was in the Himalayan slopes and in the mountains of East, in Assam particularly, who were yellow in colour and presented a distinct type of culture. They had spread all over the plains of Bengal upto the sea."<sup>50</sup>

The modern Anthropologists and scholars do not subscribe to the view presented by S.K. Chatterjee and other that the Kiratas were none else than the hill people of the North-East India. But it does not mean that the tales of Hindu epics are totally baseless and meaningless. It is a fact that Lord Krishna and Balarama as well as Pandavas had not only visited these areas but also established mutual and cordial relations with the people living in these areas. What is mostly required to substantiate the truth in this regard is to make close and thorough investigations and research to find out the truth mentioned in the Hindu epics in regard to the contact of the plains people of India with the hill tribes of North-East India in ancient period.

The Hindu mythologies and religious scriptures give some accounts of the relations of the ancient Hindu rules with the people of Arunachal. It is said that around Sadiya the territory was known as Vidarbha where Pandavas had made their temporary abode during the period of their exile. During this period they had established some relations with the hill people. The archaeological relics have been found in the areas (Lohit District) which substantiate the truth mentioned in the Hindu religious scriptures. The place Bhismakhagar of Lohit where the archaeological relics have been found indicates that it was the capital of King Bhishmak whose

daughter Rukmini who loved Lord Krishana was kidnapped by him when her brother Rukam denied her to marry the Lord. Again, the ruins of a fort at Bhalukpung on the right bank of the river Bharali in the Kameng district of Arunachal also throw some light on the mythological tales of the Hindus. The Akas still believe that the original home of their ancestor Bhuluk was at Bhalupung. Bhaluk was the grandson of King Bana Sur who was defeated by Lord Krishna at Tezpur. In the Lohit district there are ruins of copper temple known as Tameshwari (name of the Hindu Goddess) which was regarded as a place of great sanctity. There is also the Brahmkund at lower reaches of the Lohit district. It is believed that Parshurama, a renowned Rishi of India, had opened a passage through the hills with a single blow of his axe. The Brahmkund is still visited by the Hindu pilgrims.

Whether the hill tribes of the North-East India migrated to India either in the late B.C. or in the A.D. is a disputed fact. But the thing which is beyond dispute is that these tribes are the offshoots of the Indo-Mongoloid race who originally belonged to the non-Chinese Chian tribes of the central Asia who first came to the North-East border of China in late B.C. and later on they spread all over China, Indonesia, Philippines, Bhutan and Burma.<sup>51</sup> This is evident from the fact that the hill tribes of North-East India bear similarity with some tribal groups such as the Dyaks and the Koyans of the Indo-Chinese countries. Smith is also of the view that the social customs and culture of these Indian tribes resemble with those of the Daya and the Koyan—the tribal people of Indonesia and Philippines. Smith believes that the hill tribes of North-East India belong to the same blood which is found in the people of Burma and Bhutan.<sup>52</sup>

These different tribes of the North-East India gradually migrated to this part in different groups crossing the mighty Irrawadi and the Chindwin rivers of Burma and settled here occupying different hill terrains as per their preferences and conveniences. Some of the tribes such as Caren, Shan, Chin, Singpho, Khamti, Daphla etc. who had come from the western China first settled in Burma, Indonesia etc. Thereupon, some of them, facing inconveniences in the places of their

original settlements, migrated to the North-Eastern Frontier of India and finally confined themselves to the areas which they are presently occupying. Since the areas which they occupy was covered with dense forests and rugged hills, there could not be any communication between the people of the plains and the tribes living in these areas.<sup>53</sup> So these people, remaining in prolonged isolation and free from any interference from the plains people, established their respective tiny sovereign village States. Each of the tribes earmarked their territories by raising the boundary lines. Later on, they started terrace and jhum cultivation. "They established their rule on the basis of ancient Greek City State in the sense that a village state contained an organised political community."<sup>54</sup> The customary laws and traditions took the place of their code of conducts. As they were far from the modern civilization and confined to isolation, they never managed to "establish a single Sovereign State of all the tiny village states."<sup>55</sup> It is also a fact that due to their migration to the North-East India in separate groups and their confinement to the different ridges covered with dense jungles each group kept itself aloof from other with the result that variation took place in their respective cultures, behaviours, customs, dialects and beliefs.

A question may arise here as to why these tribal people migrated to this inhospitable and mountainous part of the land. No definite answer can be assigned to this question. However, it appears that these people migrated to this part in search of their livelihood or just to satisfy their sense of adventure. They could have settled in the plains also but the plains area had already been occupied. The only vacant space for them was the hill areas. Therefore, they occupied the area and settled comfortably without any disturbances. Though the arrival of the Ahoms in the plains of Assam and their firmly established rule disturbed the isolation of those tribes who were living on the lower portion of the hills, it could not bring much difference in their internal life. It was the contact of the British with these people which, in fact, brought about major changes in the traditional outlook and

in political and economic life of the tribal people of the North-East India.

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