

Arunachal Pradesh



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**Around the Hills and Dales of
Arunachal Pradesh**

Krishna Haldipur

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Around the Hills and Dales of Arunachal Pradesh

If this book has some originality it is due to the extent to which I have drawn on my experience of living closely and moving extensively in the hills and having seen the people, talked to them and participated in their festivals. At the same time, I have collected much of the material from various sources, especially the work done by the Research Department of the Government of Assam, and acknowledging these on a separate page. The editorial has been a source of strength and courage in undertaking this task.

Krishna Haldipur

I shall be failing in a great measure if I do not express my gratitude to the following persons who have helped me in various ways: Shri T.P. Gupta, Shri M. K. Das and Shri S. K. Das, New Delhi, for going through the manuscript and correcting inaccuracies; Shri T.P. Khanna, Shillong, for his invaluable and painstaking suggestions; Shri F.B. Das, Shillong, for his help in the preparation of the map, especially for the matter covered in the first part of the book; Shri A.B. Joshi of Kendriya Vidyalaya for giving practical suggestions regarding words and concepts used; Shri S. Lahari, Dibrugarh, for his help in the load of typing; Shri B.K. Mandal, for his help in the load of typing and retyping the material; Shri P.S. Mazumdar, Assam, for his help in the load of typing and retyping the material.

It would be a great pleasure to me if my book is read by the people of the North-East region, with whom I have had the opportunity to come in contact as early as 1957. Their response will be a great encouragement and a breath of fresh air for me as one who had felt that he had been in a state of isolation and that his work had been of little value. I am deeply indebted to the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, for its help in the publication.



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Preface

If this book has some originality it is to the extent that it is based on my experience of living closely and moving extensively in the area, having seen the people, talked to them and participated in some of their festivals. At the same time, for corroboration, I had to refer to material from various sources, especially monographs and some other work done by the Research Department of Arunachal Government. I am acknowledging these on a separate page under Bibliography. This material has been a source of strength, to lend me credibility and confidence in undertaking this task.

I shall be failing in my duty, as well as propriety, if I do not express my gratitude to the following persons for rendering spontaneous help. I have in mind : Shri I.P. Gupta, Shri P.P. Srivastava, Miss Neeru Nanda and Smt. Anila Gupta, New Delhi, for going through relevant portions and correcting inaccuracies; Shri T.P. Khaund, Shillong for going through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions; Shri T.R. Das and Smt. Kamala Das, Shillong, for helping out with maps and diagrams, especially for the matter covered in the first part of the book; Shri A.B. Joshi of Kendriya Vidyalaya for giving practical suggestions, regarding words and concepts used; Shri S. Lahiri, Itanagar, for sharing the load of typing; Shri B.K. Mandal for neatly and patiently typing and retyping the material; Shri P.S. Mohan, Anand, for typing out the revised draft.

It would be ungrateful on my part not to remember my debt to the people of the North-East region with whom I had the good fortune to come in contact as early 1954. Their vigour, their zest, their carefree attitude, coupled with admirable loyalty and integrity were like a breath of fresh air for us who had till then been groping in the darkness of sophistication and ostensible display of munificence in the so-called civilized sections of urban areas.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. B.D. Sharma, Vice-Chancellor, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, for his keen interest and the pains taken to circulate the draft among experts and have it processed for publication.

Last but not the least, I am to thank my husband Shri R.N. Haldipur, for his encouragement and guidance and for going through the typescript thoroughly ; also our son Vivek for going through the material and giving suggestions regarding presentation of the material—over and above bearing with my temper tantrums.

Krishna Haldipur

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North-Eastern India and Arunachal Pradesh

It was the month of March when Sange Dorji, Pempo Khrime, Sonam Tsering, Nabam Tato, Tei Pollu and others, led by Karowa reached Calcutta. This was the first halt in their holiday excursion around the country. The hustle and bustle, the dazzling lights and hooting horns—not to speak of the limitless sea of human faces—were in themselves an education. It was a new experience for all those who had never left their hill-homes before.

The heat was stifling and they felt it all the more uncomfortable because of the clothes they were wearing. This being a unique occasion for them, their parents had given some of them their festive best—pretty shirts of stiff brocade with a high neck and warm tight-fitting trousers, ankle-boots of woollen cloth, and brocade caps with fur-lined ear-flaps adorning their young heads.

Their counterparts from Orissa and Madhya Pradesh were staring at them out of curiosity. It took some time for them to establish a rapport, which eventually they did and then a volley of questions and cross-questions ensued. Sange and Pempo were hard put to explain the reasons for their being so heavily clad and for not wearing light cotton garments. Being young, all they could say was that they wore what their elders gave them and the elders knew best. Bright and sharp, Pempo used the usual technique of repartee to avoid having to answer uncomfortable questions.

As luck would have it, the very next autumn during the Puja break, an excursion was arranged for young students from different States of North and South India. Thus, Gopalakrishnan, Vibhuprasanna, Jamal Gilani, Kshitij Joseph, Prasad Jain and five others under the leadership of Prashant Naidu found themselves on the Tinsukia Mail. They reached Bongaingaon in the morning where by prior arrangement, a bus was waiting to take them to Tezpur, a flourishing district town in Assam. From here their onward journey into the Kameng district of Arunachal

started. Nima Tashi, their guide was waiting to welcome them. After the long train journey, they were longing for a bath and rest. Arrangements had been made at Parvatinagar Rest Home for them. As they sat on the veranda sipping hot tea, Nima gave them the background. Though the whole of Arunachal is predominantly hilly, Kameng district especially can be described as lying in the lap of the Himalayas.

The well-known Sanskrit poet Kalidas has paid a fitting tribute to the majesty and grandeur of the Himalayas. The lines are:

Astiuttarasyam dishi devatatma
Himalayo nama nagadhirajah,
Purvaparo toyanidhivagahya,
Sthitahprithivyam iva manadandah.

The divine-souled king among the mountains stands in the northern direction. He has, as it were, had a holy dip in the oceans, both on the east and west and now stands as a measuring stick of the earth.

The Himalayas are regarded as sacred and are intimately connected with the life, folklore and folk-music of our country. The sages, poets and thinkers have been inspired by these mountains. The sacred shrines and places of pilgrimage of the Hindus and Buddhists are found here. "Both religions?" inquired Gopalakrishnan. "Which are these?" "These are Amarnath (in Kashmir) Bishno Devi in Jammu, Kedarnath and Badrinath in U.P., Dharamsala, Simla Devi, Tara Devi in Himachal Pradesh, Parsuram Kund, Malinithan and Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh," Nima explained.

Besides being the abiding factor in the culture and heritage of India, Himalayas have also been the source of India's great rivers, Ganges, Jamuna, Brahmaputra, which have been vitally influencing the life and economy of the people of the North and North-eastern area. Its formidable, impassable central ridge has been a protection from icy-cold winds and blizzards which sweep the Pamir plateau and other cold deserts lying to the north of the country. It stood also as a sentinel of the territorial security as long as the old methods of warfare were used. While the rugged character of the terrain acted as a check on the movement of persons, in big groups, there were a few passes and valleys which were used as trekking routes by pilgrims and traders. Guru Padmasambhava born in the present Himachal, trekked along the Tarai through Sikkim to Tibet and back through Nepal to spread the message of Buddhism across our northern frontiers. The Himalayas have to be looked upon as more than a mere geographical feature, being symbolic of the unity and strength, they have exerted an integrating influence on the social structure in India. "You are telling us only about the Himalayas and not about Arunachal Pradesh and the North-East which we are eager to know—" the whole group exclaimed in unison.

Nima smiled and continued. Arunachal Pradesh (or NEFA, as it had been known earlier) stretches from the eternal snows of the Himalayas

The Book

The lands of the North-Eastern frontiers of India, nestling among green hills and snow-capped mountains, are a world apart and have remained so. However efforts made in the post-Independence era have brought the people of these far-flung realms of India into the mainstream of the nation's affairs in a significant manner. The creation of the state of Arunachal Pradesh was one of them.

Mrs Krishna Haldipur, in this book, makes a pioneering attempt to open for us the doors of this mysterious and remote land, taking the reader through its wonderful sights and historical and contemporary vicissitudes. The absorbing narrative of the book takes the reader on a guided tour of Arunachal Pradesh, providing an irresistible view of the life and environment of the North-East. Seen through the eyes of a group of students journeying through the state, the people, places and folklore of this exotic land come alive in all their vivid colours. The narrative is supplemented by several maps and photographs.