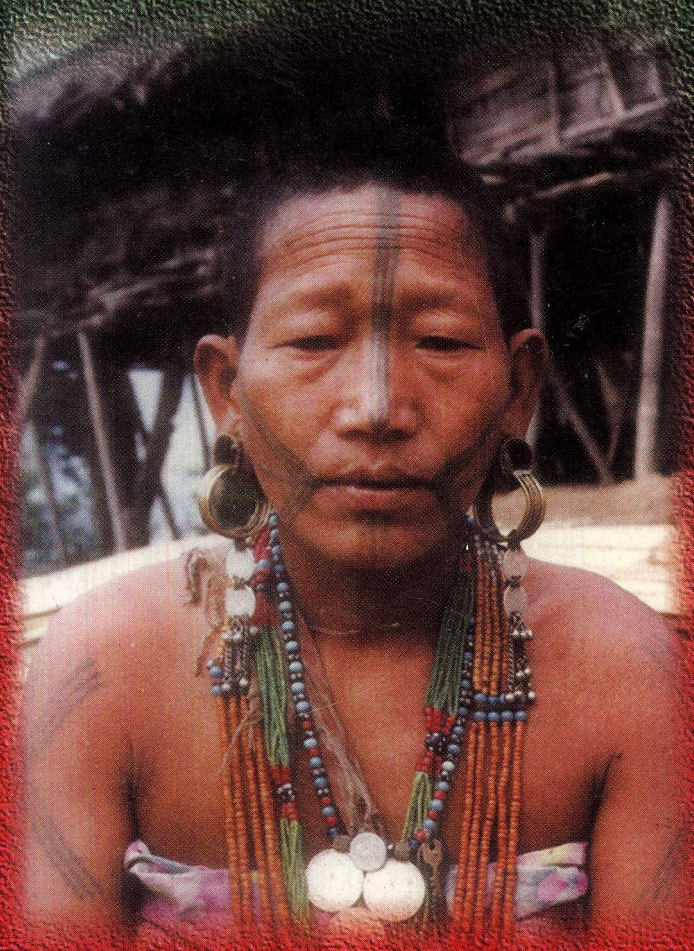


SLAVERY IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH



Amrendra Kumar Thakur

A Mittal Publication

The book, *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, by Dr. Amrendra Kumar Thakur, makes a radical departure from what exists in the historiography of the tribal societies of India. By analysing the emergence of private property and existence of social stratification among the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh the author questions the validity of the myths of 'egalitarianism' and 'non-hierarchism' among the tribes. Laying methodological stress on identifying and analysing in a historical perspective as well as in relation to its different socio-cultural, economic and geographical perspectives the book attempts to provide an alternative perspective of study of tribal societies of North-east India, Burma and Tibet.

The empirical material which is examined in depth in this book relates to diverse themes : origin of slavery, position of slaves and abolition of slavery. The introduction provides an overview of historiography as well as of the major perspectives of slavery, serfdom, bonded labour, etc. The analysis in the book is illumined by a rare sensitivity to the nature of class formation and class values as well as to the material conditions of society and family. Meticulously researched and lucidly presented the book is significant for the theoretical, methodological and empirical engagements it offers. It should prove to be of interest to students and researchers of the social and economic history of the tribal societies especially of Arunachal Pradesh.

Rs. 350



DR. AMRENDRA KUMAR THAKUR (b. 1962), Lecturer, Department of History, Tirap Government College, Deomali, Arunachal Pradesh, has been teaching in Government Colleges of Arunachal Pradesh for more than a decade. Formerly, he was associated with College of Commerce, Patna, teaching upto the post-graduate standard. He has contributed more than three dozen papers in regional and national seminars, annual conferences of historians and journals of repute. He has eight scholarly books to his credit as the author, co-author, chief editor and member of editorial board. He was the member of the Executive Committee of the Indian History Congress for three years (2000-2002) and The North-East India History Association for two years (2000-2001). Presently, he is the President of the Arunachal Pradesh College Teachers' Association.

ISBN 81-7099-900-6

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AMRENDRA KUMAR THAKUR

Foreword by
Ram Sharan Sharma

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MITTAL PUBLICATIONS

NEW DELHI-110059 [INDIA]



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146

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"This Publication is financially supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. The responsibility for the facts stated and opinions expressed or conclusions reached is entirely that of the author and not of the I.C.S.S.R.

"The I.C.S.S.R. consultant to this research work was Prof. B.K. Roy Burman"

First Edition 2003

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ISBN 81-7099-900-6

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Editorial Office:

H-13, Bali Nagar,
New Delhi - 110015
Phones: 25163610, 2543136

Showroom:

4594/9, Daryaganj,
New Delhi - 110002
Phone: 23250398

Published and printed by Naurang Rai for Mittal Publications,
A-110, Mohan Garden, New Delhi-110059, India.
Tel.: 25351493, 25351976 Telefax: 91-11-25351521
E-Mail : mittalp@ndf.vsnl.net.in Gram : Mittalbox
website : www.mittalpublications.com

Dedicated to

Dr V.C.P. Chaudhary and Dr R.A. Thakur
*The generous hands behind my benign work
who left for heavenly abode
before the completion of the same*

FOREWORD

The present project report is prepared by Dr Amrendra Kr Thakur with the support of the Indian Council of Social Science Research. Though its thrust area is tribal Arunachal Pradesh the author does not ignore slavery in the world context. He reviews the findings of historians on the nature of slavery in ancient India and also highlights its role in the mode of production.

The tribal society is generally considered egalitarian. But tribal Arunachal shows slavery and other forms of servitude. Here slavery appears in the context of colonial polity and economy when the money market makes its impact on the tribal society. The tribal chiefs together with British administrators and, particularly, the tea planters need sufficient labour power to carry on production and administration. The tribal chiefs, who emerged as the owner of the community land, took to raids for procuring labourers for *jhum* cultivation. On the other hand planters and others took advantage of the miserable condition of the common tribals to purchase them. An animal known as *mithuna* was also used in purchase transactions.

The slaves in Arunachal did not outnumber the free tribemen though their number was not negligible. They were more in the nature of serfs or bonded labourers than permanent hereditary slaves. In lieu of compensation the owners could be persuaded to free their slaves. Because of lack of conditions for rehabilitation the slaves were unwilling to be free. Though British attempts to emancipate slaves began in the early 19th century, it did not make much progress under their rule. In post-independence years the problem was taken up seriously and conditions were created in which the freed slaves could be rehabilitated.

Dr Amrendra Kumar Thakur has worked hard and consulted almost all available relevant sources to analyse the various forms of servility in the tribal society of Arunachal. The study is a significant contribution to social anthropology and also to the policy formulation to tackle the problems of various types of servitude found in the tribal population of the subcontinent. Dr Thakur deserves congratulations for all that he has presented in this report.

RAM SHARAN SHARMA

PREFACE

Although the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have attracted large number of scholars, to European eyes tribal people were nothing but queer and exotic. The necessity of colonial administration, nevertheless, made the bureaucrats study the life and culture of people fairly intensively. But because of mental preoccupation with the alien subject population, particularly those under colonial subjugation, by and large, appeared to them only as savage. Lacking the experiences of heterogeneous realities the very approach to the study of alien tribes became an exercise in cultural isolates. After independence, we inherited not only concepts, techniques, theories and methods of study but also topics of study from our colonial rulers, which is adequately reflected in the subsequent studies. The writings were also not devoid of the inadequacies of the ethnographic studies conducted by and large exclusively under the influence of the British tradition.

With the growing accessibility to the tribal areas of the interior during the post-independence period the nature of contact with the tribes met with considerable qualitative improvement. The new socio-political climate grew and initiated a revolutionary change in the social science research in India with special reference to the studies of tribes and tribal areas of India. Now a significant trend has been the shift from generalised description of tribes to problem oriented specialised studies. Rather than being portrayed by an outsider as a museum specimen the scholars now are providing an insider's view of reality. Instead of encouraging research on esoteric aspects of tribal life the systematic investigation of relevant elements of their life are on the cards. All these are to provide a true picture of their past

free from any bias and prejudices. These are also to correct the distortions of facts and misrepresentation of reality in the writings of the outsiders.

In the beginning, some of my friends were not happy with my pursuit on the subject of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh. It was not at all because of personal or professional rivalry but mainly because of ideological commitment and difference in the approaches to study of the subject. To some of them slavery was a long closed chapter not only in Arunachal Pradesh but also in other parts of India; for others the institution for study should be periodically divided into the ancient, medieval and modern; for yet others the institution of slavery among tribal societies an unheard historical phenomenon in India. To discuss a common problem in such a diversified land without knowing the dialects etc. were the other problematic areas pointed out to me. To me such aspects proved subsidiary, however, they have got fair treatment in my study, opening a wide field of historical research.

The study of the institution of slavery in ancient India was undertaken some years ago and seeks to examine the vicissitude through which it passed over a number of centuries. To me the slavery in Arunachal Pradesh was an essential part of a scientific attempt to study the history of Arunachal Pradesh because of its contribution to the material foundation of the society. Not only the institution of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh but a fresh investigation, into the institutions of bondage and unfree labour of the past of the northeast India and the other areas are essential to understand the pre-colonial societies of this region of India. This field of research is not very popular among scholars. Here, I have dealt principally with domestic and agrestic slavery but institution like serfdom and un-free labour have also been analysed. These offer a variety of interesting facts and perplexing problems. The institution of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh received sanctions from tribal eschatology and the British Government as well as Indian Government after independence, while determined to put down inhuman practices, was extremely reluctant to interfere with the social and religious customs of the people and traditional economic

structure. To the best of my knowledge no preconceived notions or time-honoured opinions have been allowed to interfere with the collection or interpretation of facts. With a view to objectivity, prevalent divergent historiographical interpretations have been analysed systematically and the subjects of this book have been treated from a fresh viewpoint. I have reached my conclusion on the basis of the information available to me.

The work was submitted as a minor project report under the I.C.S.S.R. New Delhi, in 1999. A number of changes have been introduced in the course of its publication into book form. All these are to include the suggestions of the scholars of the field, who were kind enough to advise on the earlier drafts. Owing to the nature of the work the collections from newspapers have been dropped from the preface, and the chapters on the origin and position have been thoroughly revised and enlarged. New materials have also been included in the chapter on the abolition of slavery along with the division of chapter under sub-titles. Hence, significant alteration has been done in the conclusion too. In the report form, the appendix dealing with the League of Nations Draft Slavery Convention, 1926 has only the collections on the North East Frontier Agency, now the slavery and other institutions of serfdom or bondage of the entire North East India have been reproduced. To make the work a comprehensive one, two more tables dealing with the rehabilitation of slaves and other economically backward classes have been included here. Now, the bibliography is more exhaustive and the primary unpublished sources are more specific.

It is my sincere duty to express my indebtedness to my colleagues at Bomdila and Deomali, various scholars, other individuals and institutions for the help received at every stage in the preparation of this book. The Indian Council of Social Science Research not only financed my research project but also provided publication grant for the same. I am thankful to the I.C.S.S.R., New Delhi and its North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong for the financial assistance and allowing the extension of time very liberally. I am also thankful to the Principals of colleges, who generously

provided me the facilities and encouragements for post-doctoral researches. I submitted the report from the Government College, Bomdila, but could make the copy ready for press only from Tirap Government College, Deomali. Not as the ritual but as a sincere recognition of their help, I once again extend my gratitude to the individuals who helped me in the preparation of this study. The repetitions of names have been avoided here, but their contributions to the cause of researches on marginals cannot be easily forgotten. However, I extend my sincere thanks to Professor A.C. Sinha, Shillong, Professor S. Dutta, A. Tayeng, Dr B.B. Pandey, Itanagar, Professors Rajeshwar Pd Singh and Vijay Kr Thakur, Patna, Dr P.K. Shukla, T.P. Shrivastava, Sanjeev Ranjan, Bharati Ranjan, and Dhananjaya Kr. Singh, New Delhi for their opinions and comments on the earlier drafts of the book. I am also obliged to Dr B. K. Roy Burman, whose comments on my work, as the I.C.S.S.R. referee, really encouraged me a lot and provided some new dimensions to my researches. Above all these, discussion with Professor Ram Sharan Sharma and some modifications, out of it, in the draft have been quite overwhelming to me. I am grateful to him for allowing me a long discussion, despite being unwell, and introducing the book to the academic and business worlds through the foreword. The responsibility for opinions expressed herein and for any errors that may be found are, however, solely mine.

My thanks are also due to the members of the staff of the National Library (Calcutta), National Archives Record Room and Library, I.C.H.R. Library, I.C.S.S.R. Library, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University Library (New Delhi), Maulana Azad Library, Libraries of the Department of History and the Academic Staff College, Aligarh Muslim University (Aligarh), Khuda Bakhsa Khan Library (Patna) and the State Archives, Central Library and Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of Arunachal Pradesh (Itanagar), and the Directorate of Information and Public Relations and Directorate of Labour, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh (Naharlagun) and the libraries of Government College Bomdila, Tirap Government College, Deomali, and of some other Institutions.

It is needless to express my sense of gratitude to members of my family, without their ungrudging and constant encouragement, the work could not have been successfully performed. My parents, daughter Neelakshi, son Chinmaya and wife Preeti followed the course of this work with interest and a growing exasperation. Their support at all times has been critical. The playful activities of Chinmaya and Neelakshi were refreshing to my fatigued mood while preparing the book. I once more extend my gratitude to my friends Shri B.N. Jha, Shri T.P. Shrivastava and Shri Rajesh Kumar and their family members for helping me in various ways at every stage in the monograph. The handling of the matter on computer would not have been done, without genuine concerns and efficiencies of Binod Kr Saha and Pranjal Gogoi at Deomali. Finally, the work could not have come out without active persuasions and timely action by K.M. Mittal. I owe a lot to them.

AMRENDRA KUMAR THAKUR

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ABBREVIATIONS

E. P. W.	The Economic and Political Weekly
Development	Development: Seeds of Change
M. E. R.	The Mysore Economic Review
P. N. E. I. H. A.	The Proceedings of North East India History Association
J. S. E. S.	Journal of Social and Economic Studies
Soc. Acn.	Social Action
South A.	South Asia
I. H. R.	The Indian Historical Review
A. H. R.	American Historical Review
I. E. S. H. R.	Indian Economic and Social History Review
I. S. S. J.	International Social - Science Journal
W. G.	Westminster Gazette
J. E. H.	The Journal of Economic History
I. Q.	The Islamic Quarterly
E. H. R.	The Economic History Review
I. C.	Islamic Culture
M. A. S.	Modern Asian Studies
Soc. Ch.	Society & Change
I. J. Soc. W.	The Indian Journal of Social Work
Sol. Bul.	Sociological Bulletin
I. H. Q.	The Indian Historical Quarterly
B. P. P.	Bengal Past and Present
J. I. A. S.	Journal of Indian Anthropological Society
Q. R. H. S.	Quarterly Review of Historical Studies
U. Asia	United Asia

Soc. Res.	Social Research
J. S. H.	Journal of Social History
S. S.	Social Scientist
P. I. H. C.	The Proceedings of Indian History Congress
D. Q.	Dialogue Quarterly
J.N.E.I. C. S. R.	Journal for the North East India Council for Social Science Research

1

INTRODUCTION

A. SLAVERY AND SIMILAR PRACTICES

Slavery

Slavery or servitude is a process, which permits a person or a group to compel involuntary labour of another person or group. The process is a dynamic one and has assumed different forms in different socio-economic and political set-ups over the long period of human history. It is a universal social evil having its origin in remote past and it has its proponents and defendants all over the world. The element of force or compulsion is ingrained in the system of slavery. By tactical application of intelligence, a minority of people could easily suppress a numerically superior group. In the words of Toynbee, "Slavery is a non-voluntary system of personal relations resting wholly upon force."¹

Before the convention on slavery under the aegis of the League of Nations in 1926 slavery had been defined variously on the basis of the legislative enactments of various nations and underlying philosophies therein. In the opinion of L.T. Hobhouse, "The slave ... is a man whom law and custom regard as the property of another. In extreme cases he is wholly without rights, a pure chattel. In other cases he may be protected in certain cases but so may an ox or an ass. As long as he is for all ordinary purposes completely at his master's disposal, rendering to his master the fruits of his work under orders, rewarded at his master's judgement, he may ... fairly be called a slave."²

However, Edward Westermarck does not concur with the

view that master's right of disposal of a slave is exclusive. In his opinion law or custom may grant certain amount of liberty to the slave. He emphasises on the compulsory nature of slave's relation to the master.³

Wharton's *Law Lexicon* defines slavery as 'the civil relation in which one person has absolute power over the liberty of another'.⁴ In *United States v Ingalls* {73 Fed. Sur. 16(1947)}, a slave was defined as 'a person who is wholly subject to the will of another, one who has no freedom of action and whose person and services are wholly under the control of another and is in a state of compulsory service to another'.⁵

However, the most comprehensive definition of slavery was given by H.J. Nieboer in whose opinion 'Slavery is the fact that one man is the property or possession of another beyond the limits of the family proper'.⁶

The Slavery Convention of 1926 sets forth in article 1, the definition of slavery accepted by the League of Nations which states that, "Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised".⁷

Other definitions of a slave proposed by the Anti-Slavery Society in 1973 are: "One who, working for another, is not free to withhold his labour"; or "One who is owned and thus has neither freedom nor rights".

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines slavery as being servitude, bondage. The condition of being entirely subject to, or dominated by some power or influence. A state of subjection or subordination comparable to that of being a slave".

The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* has grouped slavery and other slave-like practices in a single theme 'servitude' since it states "The feature common to all forms of servitude ... is the social sanction that permits one person or group to compel the involuntary labour of another person or group. In all cases the bonded individual- whether slave, serf, indentured servant or otherwise - is obliged to perform personal service for his lord or master under conditions that make him socially inferior and are restrictive of his freedom".⁸

The reason behind using this wider concept was the problem that old and evil practices frequently assumed new

guises over the time and space. The Working Group on Slavery in its report of the first session held in 1975 also showed its greatest concern over the complexities of the phenomenon of slavery.⁹ It viewed the pitfalls in the definitions of slavery given in the existing relevant conventions and generally agreed that the definition of slavery should be flexible enough to be applicable to any new form of slavery which might emerge in future. It was more so because the phenomenon of slavery is manifold and very often manifests itself indirectly since human nature is liable to find new ways to gain and maintain complete control over other people.¹⁰ Therefore, Mr. van Boven said at the 29th session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, of which he was then a member: "Slavery should ... not be studied from the standpoint of a static concept. Constant attention should be given to the ways in which the exploitation of man by man might develop."¹¹

Even F. Engels has also explained the phenomenon in much wider concept as "Slavery is the first form of exploitation, the form peculiar to the ancient world; it is succeeded by serfdom in the Middle Age, and wage labour in modern times."¹² The differences between the slave-labour system and the wage-labour has been further elaborated by Karl Marx in the following words: "Moreover, the actual movement of wages presents phenomena, which seem to prove that not the value of labour - power is paid, but the value of its function, of labour itself. The individual difference in the wages of different labourers who do the same kind of work. We find this individual difference, but are not deceived by it, in the system of slavery, where, frankly and openly, without any circumlocution, labour - power itself is sold. Only in the slave system, the advantage of a labour - power above the average, and the disadvantage of a labour - power below the average, affects the slave - owner; in the wage - labour system it affects the labourer himself, because his labour - power is, in the one case, sold to himself, in the other, by a third person."

For a comprehensive view of the theme the mention of the view of Max Weber is also important here. He argues "Those who have no property but who offer services are

differentiated just as much according to their kinds of services as according to the way in which they make use of these services, in a continuous or discontinuous relation to a recipient. But always this is the generic connotation of the concept of class: that the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment, which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. 'Class situation' is, in this sense, ultimately 'market situation'. The effect of naked possession *per se*, which among cattle breeders gives the non-owning slave or serf into the power of the cattle owner, is only a forerunner of real 'class' formation. However, in the cattle loan and in the naked severity of the law of debts in such community, for the first time mere 'possession' as such emerges as decisive for the fate of the individual. This is very much in contrast to the agricultural communities based on labour. The creditor-debtor relation becomes the basis of class situation' only in those cities where a 'credit market', however primitive, with rates of interest increasing according to the extent of dearth and a factual monopolization of credits, is developed by a plutocracy. Therewith 'class struggles' begin. Those men whose fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market, e.g. slaves, are not, however, a class in technical sense of the term. They are, rather, a 'status group'. Those men whose fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market, e.g. slaves, are not, however, a class in technical sense of the term. They are, rather, a 'status group'.¹³

If we look back into the concept of slavery during ancient period, we find great differences between the teachings of Christ and the opinions of the Greek philosophers.¹⁴ Plato and Aristotle had justified slavery (some people were slaves by nature); Christ's teaching of the brotherhood of man and of universal love was, in spite of the views later advanced by Aquinas, incompatible with the institution of slavery. The Greek philosophers, concerned only with the citizens, held very rigid views of the varying worthiness of different kinds of labour; and they regarded the menial occupations, with the exception of agriculture, as fit only for slaves. Plato, and to some extent, Aristotle derived from an aristocratic dislike

of the growth of commercialism and democracy. They dreamt of an ideal state designed to ensure the 'good life' for the free citizens only and having the boundaries of the existing city-state; Christ claimed to speak to, and for, all men. Christ looks forward: it demands a complete change in human relations.

Though addressed to all the "Christianity is completely innocent of the gradual dying out of ancient slavery; it was itself actively involved in the slave system for centuries under the Roman Empire and never interfered later with slave-trading by Christians - not with that of the Germans in the north, nor with that of the Venetians in the Mediterranean, nor with the later trade in Negroes."¹⁵

Serfdom

During the 1956 Convention of United Nations at Geneva, serfdom was defined as "The condition or status of a tenant who is by law, custom or agreement bound to live and labour on land belonging to another person and render some determinate service to such other person, whether for reward or not, and is not free to change his status."¹⁶ Here again it is the services rendered by the serf to his lord, with the inability to move away or liberate himself, on which the definition concentrates.

There are some elements of comparable importance between the slave and serf. First, the services that have to be provided by the serf are nearly always limited. Secondly the serf, his being in effect 'bound to soil', cannot be sold away from the land he works, and therefore, can marry and enjoy a family life. In these respects serf is better off than slave.¹⁷ The vast majority of serfs were peasants. This means that they obtained their subsistence from a plot of land. Serfs provided his own food and clothing. This was the essential feature differentiating serfs from slaves.¹⁸ The distinction between the two was also pointed out by the Anti-Slavery Society while the committee of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations was preparing the preliminary draft of the convention in January 1956. The Society considers the inclusion of serfdom among the practices analogous to slavery as "unfortunate"; "Yet serfdom is not slavery; it is a status

intermediate between slavery and complete freedom". The members of the Society in their favour also cite the opinion of J.K. Ingram. To quote Ingram (serfdom) "... an intermediate step which has not always, been sufficiently discriminated from slavery, though the confusion between the two leads to endless misconception we mean serfdom." Discussing the nature of serfdom, H.J. Nieboer has also expressed the same. He writes, "As soon as the forced labourer is no longer entirely at the disposal of the lord, the latter being entitled to fixed services only, such a state of things is called serfdom but not slavery."¹⁹

However, the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* has to add some more interesting facts regarding serfdom: "In fact, ... serfs almost everywhere very often could be bought and sold without land and frequently were subject to almost unlimited discipline from their masters.... He (serf) was, however, dependent peasant; this meant that a substantial proportion of the surplus product of his holding was taken by his overlord. Alternatively, or additionally, the lord used the serf's labour for the cultivation of the portion of his land that was not held by the tenants. The payment of rent in money, in kind, or in labour was not, however, the only or even the essential sign of serf's dependence.... The essential additional mark of serfdom was lack of freedom of movement of the peasant family and restrictions on the free disposal of its property." The exploitation of serfs by masters, as unfree labourer has also been highlighted by some other scholars.²⁰ To an unbiased historian the observations regarding serfdom is significant enough to be quoted here. It states "The serf had no rights, no privileges and no family name; he was rated equally with the cattle that browsed upon the meadow and the deer that bounded through the glen. He wore a peculiar dress, and had his head shaven bare, as an ever-present reminder of his social inferiority; his evidence was not accepted against a freeman in the Court of Justice. Marriage could not be contracted amongst the servile classes, who were simply regarded as cattle or stock, and joined or separated, as it suited the interest and convenience of the masters."²¹

F. Engels has also explained the terms clearly,²² "Slavery is the first form of exploitation, the form peculiar to the ancient world; it is succeeded by serfdom in the Middle Age, and wage labour in modern times." Providing evidences from Germany, northern France and England he further writes, "Lastly they were able to develop and make universal the mildest form of servitude (serfdom) ... which even in the Roman Empire increasingly displaced slavery; a form of servitude which, as Fourier first stressed, gives to the bondsmen the means of their gradual liberation as a class; a form of servitude which thus stands high above slavery, where the only possibility is the immediate release, without any transitional stage, of individual slaves, whereas the medieval serfs gradually won their liberation as a class. Elaborating upon the relationship between the toiling mass and the state Engels writes "Because the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but because it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict between these classes, it is as a rule the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of state, becomes also the politically dominant class and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. Thus the ancient state was, above all, the state of slave - owners for holding down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is an instrument for exploiting wage labour by capital."

Eric Roll has also scientifically summed up the serfdom as a system.²³ He writes, "The essence of medieval society lies in the class division between lords and serfs which was derived from the structure of the *latifundia* of later - day Rome. The growing scarcity of slaves had led to a change in the method of administration of the large estates, though landed property itself still retained its attraction. Instead of working these estates themselves by means of large numbers of slaves, the landlords would rent out holding apart from their own domain to free tenants or to slaves, receiving a rent in kind and money and having their domain cultivated by the tenants. In the fourth century, the free tenant was tied to the estate, and the beginning was made of a new system of bondage,

which in time effectively replaced ancient slavery. A similar condition in India has been observed by R.S. Sharma that seems quite relevant to be mentioned. According to Sharma, from the 6th century A.D. onwards artisans, peasants and sharecroppers attached to the land were specially instructed to stick to the soil to serve masters without any break.²⁴

Bonded Labour

The landmark judgement²⁵ on bonded labour system is important enough to begin with the brief discussion on this practice. It states "The system of bonded labour has been prevalent in various parts of the country since long prior to the attainment of political freedom and it constitutes an ugly and shameful feature of our national life. This system based on exploitation by a few socially and economically powerful persons trading on the misery and suffering of large numbers of men and holding them in bondage is a relic of a feudal hierarchical society which hypocritically proclaims the divinity of man but treats large masses of people belonging to the lower rungs of the social ladder or economically impoverished segments of society as dirt and chattel. This system under which one person can be bonded to provide labour to another for years and years until an alleged debt is supposed to be wiped out which never seems to happen during the life time of the bonded labourer, is totally incompatible with the new egalitarian socio-economic order which we have promised to build and it is not only an affront to basic human dignity but also constitutes a gross and revolting violation of constitutional values."

The Supreme Court has given a very broad, liberal and expansive interpretation of the definition without, however, altering it and rather retaining the essential spirit of it. In the system the debtor and creditor represent two diametrically opposite sections of society. The debtor is poor, weak and resourceless whereas the creditor is rich, strong, influential and resourceful. If the debtor is rendering certain services to the creditor free of cost i.e. without any remuneration, he is not doing it out of charity or catholicity but out of some economic consideration for the creditor. Denial of wage or payment of a wage less than at the minimum rates notified

by the Government in respect of a schedule, employment or less than the rates obtaining in the market is the first consequence of this unequal exchange relationship. There could be many more other consequences such as: (a) denial of the freedom of movement in any part of the territory of India, (b) denial of the choice of alternative avenues of employment, (c) forfeiture of the right to earn a reasonable price on one's labour or the product of such labour, (d) landlessness was used to create the conditions for the exploitation of this class. These consequences may exist individually or collectively. But existence of a creditor-debtor relationship and the debtor mortgaging his services or the services of any of his family member or the whole family for any length of time verbally or in writing with one of the consequences as depicted above, is enough to determine the existence of the bonded labour system.

Though in 1976 the Government of India legally abolished bonded labour in all its forms and freed every bonded labourer from any obligation either to render "bonded labour" or to repay any "bonded debt", much more is to be done for the actual abolition of the system and emancipation of the bonded labour. The servitude of bonded labour has become institutionalised in different ways in different regions but the type of relationship is essentially the same everywhere. These labourers are known by different names in different parts of India, such as: Hali (Gujarat), Izhva or Cheruma, Puleva, Holiya, Peadiyal, Panniann, Pathiran (Tamil Nadu), Bhagela and Jassigulla (Andhra Pradesh), Harawal and Borasalia (Central Indian States), Jeetha (Karnataka), Kamiya and Janour (Bihar), Gothi (Orissa), Coolie and Begar (Garhwal Hills).²⁶

Indentured Labour

Here it is important to mention that despite the ideological difference on the aspects of formation of bonded labour system in India between Gyan Prakash and Peter Robb, it is well accepted that the Indenture (Labour) system, devised by the British colonial rulers was a successor to the system of slavery, that had been abolished in 1843. This labour system was a disguised form of slavery." Economic conditions in India were not very conducive to growth; because of the stagnation in

economy, repeated famines and the Revolt of 1857, a large number of Indian labourers were forced to seek alternative employment. This they found by enlisting themselves as indentured labour and consequently were transported from India to the British, Danish, Dutch and French colonies all over the world as well as to different parts of India. The labourers popularly known as "coolies" were helpless subjects to mental, physical, cultural and economic exploitations and were treated as chattels by the recruiting agencies.²⁷ This system was mainly to cater to the needs of the colonial administrators and planters in India and abroad.

This brief discussion on slavery and similar practices would help us in a great way to understand the problem in a comprehensive manner. This is because, we have in Arunachal Pradesh some practices similar to serfdom too and a recent survey by the district administration of a district has identified more than three thousand five hundred bonded labourers for rehabilitation. They are in these servile conditions for generations and are often termed as "slaves", "virtual serfs" and "bonded labour". Hence in this study, we have not studied slavery from a static point of view and through alien idealism but in the ways in which the exploitation of man by man had developed as a socio-cultural, economic and political reality. "One kind of ownership of production goods consists in rights over the labour of others. The most extremely concentrated and exclusive of such rights are found in slavery, but the essential principle remains in serfdom, peonage, encomienda, and indenture. Naturally this kind of ownership has the significance for stratification, because it necessarily entails an unequal relationship."²⁸ The study has been done after utilising certain categories of sources, which are discussed in details in the next section.

B. ANALYSIS OF SOURCES

When the new generation of Indian historians have started reassessing past with a scientific and unbiased attitude, it has become imperative for the reconstruction of the real history of the Indian people that systematic efforts be made to prepare the detailed regional history on the basis of various sources through a scientific analysis. Only then the real picture of the

past Indian society will emerge which will be both authentic and objective. The regional history is not a separate entity but a part of the national history. It provides the base for the structure of national history. Its ultimate aim is to explain the regional historical sources, regional variations in historical developments and proper reconstruction of the history of marginalia. The idea of the topography of region, extensive field work, local observations, wide surveys and intimate conversation with its inhabitants are essential requirements for the perfect study of the regional history.²⁹ Without pursuing this method the picture of the past Indian society will remain incomplete and to some extent confused. Efforts are being made in this direction but a lot is to be done.³⁰ It is with such ideals that the present monograph has been prepared on "Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh". In this context it seems important to note that historians working on the regional history have also ignored both the regional diversity and the distinct features of different periods and regions of Arunachal Pradesh.

While preparing this study altogether five categories of sources have been consulted and utilised: (i) Unpublished Official Records preserved in the records room of the National Archives of India, New Delhi and the State Archives, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar; (ii) Published Papers and Reports, preserved at the Library of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, National Library, Calcutta, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi and the State Archives, Itanagar, (iii) Modern Literature in form of books and articles in different journals; (iv) Oral Tradition and Field Studies; and (v) Archaeological evidences.

Regarding the relevance of different sources it would be naturally difficult to pronounce any final judgement. To construct a historical account of slavery of Arunachal Pradesh all of them are important and, in fact, should be treated as complementary to one another. Any account based on any single primary source could hardly be complete and authentic. These sources should not be tapped in isolation, but utilised as supplementary to one another in the reconstruction of the history of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh.

For such an undertaking, one must have a forward looking and scientific approach and must formulate theories substantiated by facts. This approach to the handling of sources can alone carry conviction regarding the theories and other basic postulates of the institution of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh. Facts collected from one source should be corroborated by the evidences of other sources and conclusions based on such utilization of various sources would be factual, scientific and authentic. Such a check-up helps to eliminate and differentiate legendary, fictitious, imaginary and motivated portions from the content of the main sources and the remaining part holds well as the ultimate reliable historical truth. Studies made on such a model could alone present a comprehensive and balanced picture of the slavery in Arunachal Pradesh. In the present study all sincere efforts have been made to adopt above mentioned methodology for tapping and utilizing various sources in its preparation.

Here it is important to mention that altogether eighty-two dialects are spoken in Arunachal Pradesh, and no one can be expected to know all of them. I do not know the native dialects. This study, hence, is mainly based on sources in English. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the study is, therefore, necessarily incomplete. There may be certain historical questions, which cannot be adequately dealt with, unless various other Indian documents are consulted; but this does not seem to be the case with slavery in Arunachal Pradesh. The English sources consulted by me of pre and post independence periods are so numerous and so full of information that they cover practically the whole subject matter.

The unpublished official documents have made it possible to throw light on a number of points not touched upon in the published sources as yet and to give a comprehensive account of the intricate history of slavery from political, judicial and socio-economic points of views. The gamut of unofficial published records of various departments provides valuable information on the topic. They are not repetitive in nature but complementary to each other. The records may further be classified as: (a) Political Proceedings, (b) Secret Proceedings, (c) Correspondence with the Chief Commissioner, Assam,

(d) Foreign Department Consultations, and (e) Tribal Areas Consultations. Here it is important to mention that certain records preserved by the State Archives, Itanagar of which no copies are found in the National Archives, New Delhi are a valuable treasure of information.

Some information is also available in the 19th and 20th century (especially pre-independence period) accounts and tracts prepared at the instance of the British administrators. These were prepared for and related more specially to Bengal and Assam, and were therefore for the benefit of the administrators who wanted specific type of information from them. While these bits and pieces are very useful and welcome, there is still much scope for work along fresh lines on the basis of completely or comparatively tapped source materials and many untapped too. The following accounts deserve mention here: A. Mackenzie's *Memorandum on the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, 1869; *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, 1884; *Damant's Papers Relating to the Frontier Tribes of North-East Frontier*, 1855; *Selection of Papers (1825-46) Regarding the Hill Tracts Between Assam and Burma and on the Upper Brahmaputra*, 1873; R. Reid's *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam (1883-1941)*, 1942; L.W. Shakespear's *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and the North-East Frontier*, 1914; A. Hamilton's *In Abor Jungles*, 1912, R.B. Pemberton's *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, 1835; Capt. G. Beresford's *Notes on the North-East Frontier of Assam*, 1881; C.U. Aitchison *A Collection of Treatise, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries (Compiled) Vol - I*, 1892.

These sources of British period are truly known for plenitude of facts of criticism. Since they suffer from bias and distortions for partisan attitude, they should be handled with caution.³¹ Most of these were compiled by the functionaries of the British government and in many cases were creation of armed-chair historians. Above all, linguistic and cultural barriers further widened the gap between the rulers and the ruled. Notwithstanding such drawbacks, the usefulness of these official documents as the source material is immense indeed if used as complementary and supplementary to other sources.

Furthermore, I have consulted and quoted from the published works of a number of eminent scholars of social sciences, administrators turned ethnographers or historians and of other disciplines of post-independence period. These writings have made the crosschecking of the information contained in the Government Records and Papers possible. Here it is important to mention that the Chinese aggression brought significant changes in the historiography of Arunachal. "It not only baffled the planners and administrators but also the historians and other social-scientists. Arunachal became the cynosure of their inspiration and investigation, the cockpit of historical sources and hypothesis".³² In addition to the oft-quoted works on Arunachal of Verrier Elwin, C. von Furer-Haimendorf, L.N. Chakravorty, J.N. Choudhury, H.K. Barpujari, M.L. Bose, S.K. Bhuyan, L. Devi, (details given in the bibliography) the works of some other scholars are quite significant for an historical study on Arunachal Pradesh. Some of these works are Major S.R. Johari's *Where India, China and Burma Meet*, Calcutta, 1962; Sheelendra Kumar's *Law and Administration of Justice in Arunachal Pradesh*, Lucknow, 1982; Chandra Shekhar Panchani's *Arunachal Pradesh: Religion, Culture and Society*, D.P. Choudhary's *The North-East Frontier of India (1865-1914)*, Calcutta, 1978; P. Thankappan Nair's *Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh*, Guwahati, 1985; Nari K. Rustomji's *Imperilled Frontiers: India's North-East Borderlands*, New Delhi, 1983; B. Datta Ray's (edited) *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North-East India*, New Delhi, 1983; V. Elwin, B. Shastri and I. Simon's (edited) *Important Directives on Administration of NEFA*, Shillong, 1967; N.K. Barooah's *David Scott in North-East India (1802-31): A Study in British Paternalism*, New Delhi, 1970; Leo E. Rose and M.W. Fisher's *The North-East Frontier of India*, Barkley, 1967; D. D. Mali's *Revenue Administration in Assam*, Guwahati, 1985; S. K. Bhuyan's (ed.) *Tungkhungia, Buranji or History of Assam*, Oxford Uni. Press, 1933; Meena S. Barkataki's *British Administration in North-East India 1826-74*, Delhi, 1985. In addition to these works numerous articles and papers in various Indian and foreign journals and the Proceedings of the North East India History Association and Indian History Congress and other professional bodies are also very important

to be consulted for a systematic account on Arunachal Pradesh. In this regard the materials published in *Resarun*, *NEFA Information*, *Arunachal News* and *Arunachal Review* (Government Publications) are also quite informative. The work of one or the other great scholars on Arunachal Pradesh might have escaped my attention mainly because it was not available or could not be traced in the leading libraries to which I had my access. Here itself I want to mention that a classic on the history of Arunachal Pradesh is not necessarily a standard work on slavery, but a careful study of these would be mines of precious information.

Though the classical works on Arunachal Pradesh are very important sources for any historical inquiry on Arunachal Pradesh but they also need cautious use. Such is the case because the pitfalls in the writings of the British rule got adequately reflected in the subsequent writings. To European eyes, Tribal people had been nothing but queer and exotic.³³ The necessity of colonial administration, nevertheless, made the bureaucrats study the life and culture of these people fairly intensively. But because of mental preoccupation, the alien subject population, particularly those under colonial subjugation, by and large, appeared only as savages, primitive, barbarous etc. Lacking the experiences of heterogeneous realities the very approach to the study of alien tribes became an exercise on cultural isolates and the studies were the manifestations of the negative writing. Some of the modern works were not devoid of the inadequacies of the ethnographic studies conducted by and large exclusively under the influence of the British tradition. We inherited not only concepts, techniques, theories and methods of study but also topics of study. Now a significant trend has been the shift from generalised description of tribes to problem oriented specialised studies.³⁴ Rather than being portrayed by an outsider as museum specimen the scholars are providing an insiders view of reality. Instead of encouraging research on esoteric aspects of tribal life by outsiders the systematic investigation of relevant elements of their life are on the card. All these are to provide a true picture of their past free from any bias and prejudices. These are also to correct the distortions of facts and misrepresentation of reality in the

writings of the outsiders.³⁵ It may be a clarion call in favour of indigenization of a region.³⁶

Besides the literary sources, oral sources or the data collected through field studies have also been used while preparing this study. Though the use of oral data is discouraged by traditional historians in serious historical studies but observing their significance in the context of Arunachal Pradesh with special reference to slavery they have been used here for proper contextual setting. The authenticity of oral source has been doubted on the following lines.³⁷ "Oral history itself indulgently concerned with tangential issues"; "it is locked into the irrelevance of the small scale"; "Memory is notoriously unreliable and untrustworthy"; and "the form (of oral evidence) is not fixed, the chronology is frequently imprecise, the communication may frequently be unsupported" etc. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, oral source is a quite useful source for the historical reconstruction of Arunachal Pradesh because in Arunachal Pradesh where there is almost no native writing, oral traditions bear the brunt of historical reconstruction. In this regard myths of genesis, family histories of masters and slaves, proverbs etc. have provided significant insider's views of the continuity and change in the institution of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh. The oral data has given voice in an humble way, to those who are voiceless in the documentary records.³⁸ Here oral source is to correct and comprehend other sources and perspective just as much as literary sources correct and comprehend it.

It is important to note that the job of a historian is not only to explain why things happened in the past but also to explain historical continuity of the subject. And in the present monograph this methodology has been practiced. Observing this methodology in the project report of which this monograph is the revised version, some of my friends have suggested about the treatment of the subject of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh on the lines of historical-sociology than that on historical³⁹ only. However, to me, the report is mostly a historical account than anything else. To be more specific, the work is towards the reconstruction of social history of Arunachal Pradesh. However, to be frank enough, the effort

is less credited to the influence of the Postmodernism in the social science research than that of to the long tradition of objective researches on the marginals by historians.⁴⁰

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Some Opinions

The overview of different concepts of slavery is of a considerably high quality . . . The position of slaves in parts of Arunachal provides rich empirical data . . . The chapter on policies and programmes relating to abolition of slavery is a synthesis of ethno-sociology and social subaltern historiography.

Prof. B.K. Roy Burman, ICSSR Consultant

The work is the first, but comprehensive account of slavery in this peripheral and predominantly tribal region of India. . . I hope the description and data incorporated in the work will be a repository of information on slavery in Arunachal for serious scholars, administrators, students and general readers alike. . . The work shall be a valuable addition to our knowledge on slavery in the Eastern Himalayan region.

**Prof. S. Dutta, Head, Department of History,
Former Dean, Social Sciences, Arunachal University**

The study is a significant contribution to social Anthropology and also the policy formulation to tackle the problems of various types of servitude found in the tribal population of the sub-continent.

Prof. Ram Sharan Sharma

The work is the first of its kind on Arunachal Pradesh. Dr. Thakur's work makes us aware of the role of the abolition of the institution (of slavery). . . in the development of tea plantation and other political and economic activities in North-East India during the British period.

**A. Tayeng, Former Director of Research,
Government of Arunachal Pradesh**

He (the author) has successfully tried to study the institution of slavery beyond the Aryan area of influence taking the theoretical framework employed by scholars in the field to a distinct level so as to be responsive to the specialities of the context of the study.

**Dr. B.B. Pandey, Former Dy. Director and O.S.D.,
Dept. of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh**



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ISBN 81-7099-900-6



9178817019990031