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Editorial

This is the first issue after the new editorial team has been formed. We hope not only to continue the good work done by the previous team but also enhance its visibility in the academic circle across the country. Every institutional journal (such as The NEHU Journal) is expected to reflect the spirit and ethos of the institution of which it is a part. NEHU was established with a specific objective of contributing to the socio-cultural and economic advancement of the NE region. The NEHU Journal seeks to do this by inviting theoretically well-informed and empirically rich articles that would not only deepen our understanding of socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of this region but also help in formulation of appropriate policies and programmes that could have a visible and concrete impact on the process of development of the north-east region. At the same time, it needs to be recognised that The NEHU Journal must make an effective intervention in the debates taking place elsewhere on different issues both at the national and global levels. Therefore articles which critically interrogate issues of wider epistemological significance would be highly welcome too.

Articles which appear in this issue cover wide-ranging topics that truly reflect the spirit of the journal. Pum Khan Pau examines the three colonial policies which effectively resulted in the fragmentation of the Zo population which inhabited the Chin-Lushai hills into three nations. What was always important to the British rule was 'administrative convenience' rather than the needs and interests of the local population in engaging with people, which was once again proved in the context of the Chin-Lushai hills. The author tried to point out the constant attempt on the part of the colonial masters to privilege their own interests at the cost of those of the local population. Md. Shah Noorur Rahman draws our attention to the organic syncretism that existed between Hindus and Muslims in the medieval India as reflected in music, literature, customs,

architecture and other socio-cultural spheres. This is an important lesson for the present times which are sought to be made deeply divisive on the basis of religion, culture and language. History can be an invaluable teacher provided we are willing to learn from it. Ibameai Hepsa Nongbri looks critically at the patriarchal roots of some of the religious texts such as Manusmriti etc. and how these have contributed to the subjugation of women in the ancient times. Those who are interested in the issue of gender would find this article particularly interesting. A. K. Nongkynrih has dealt with the importance of oral tradition in development communication. Proper nurturing of oral tradition is critically important for development planning. It contains valuable sociological insights which are crucial for ensuring development in the society. In their paper, Amitkumar Singh Akoijam and Mirinchonme Mahongnao look at the innovative practices in shifting cultivation that could be tried to make agriculture a more productive activity. This they do by looking at the documents, previous studies and reports and also by interviewing the members of tribes located in Nagaland and Manipur. They argue that in view of the unavailability of shifting cultivation due to geographical factors, one innovative idea could be that more cash crops should be grown using high-variety seeds. Jenny Jami argues that classification of income levels is usually arbitrary and does not reflect the socio-economic status of individuals in an authentic manner. Sunitibala Yumnam looks at the performances of Lai-Haraoba as philosophically grounded and having a reality of their own.

I wish to thank all the reviewers who have done a very good job of reviewing the articles in a relatively short span of time. I would continue to need their help. Colleagues and research scholars are encouraged to contribute well-researched articles to The NEHU Journal.

D. V. Kumar
Editor

Reconfigured frontier: British policy towards the Chin-Lushai Hills, 1881-1898

PUM KHAN PAU*

Abstract

The paper analyses three British policies toward the Chin-Lushai Hills in the late nineteenth century. Though initially the British considered these hill tracts only as a source of trouble and therefore followed a non-interventionist approach, it was after the fall of Upper Burma that they began to see its strategic importance and therefore changed their perspective. This paper examines three colonial policies all of which in one way or the other dealt with the Zo people who predominantly lived in the Chin-Lushai hill tracts. It argues that the common thread that passes through the three policies was an attempt to establish colonial rule in the frontier based on 'administrative convenience' at the expense of the interest of the local population. The paper also argues that colonial and postcolonial borders not only fragmented the indigenous Zo population into different nation-states, but also changed the contour of their history.

Keywords: colonialism, Zo, frontier, policy, amalgamation

Towards the end of the nineteenth century British policy towards the Indo-Burma frontier witnessed a marked shift from non-intervention to intervention, which was a clear departure from the conventional method they had been following since the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). What prompted such a change in colonial frontier policy was the annexation of Upper Burma in the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885-86) that finally led to

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the encirclement of Chin-Lushai hills by British territories. That this hill tracts were a common source of troubles in Arakan, Chittagong, Cachar, Upper Burma and Manipur is what colonial sources often cited as a necessary pretext to change their policy. Though there is no doubt that the hill tribes often carried out raids and depredations in the plains under British control, an indepth study of colonial records, however, would reveal that the underlying objective of the British to annex the Chin-Lushai hills was largely due to the need, they felt, to cut through the ‘unadministered’ hill tracts and connect Bengal and Burma. In other words, it may be said that after the fall of Upper Burma the British began to change their perspective and began to see the strategic importance of the Chin-Lushai hill tracts.

The paper does not intend to discuss details of colonial annexation of the Chin-Lushai Hills. Rather it seeks to deal with the development of administrative policies toward the Chin-Lushai hills from 1881 to 1898. The period is considered important because the development in colonial frontier policy during this time has greatly shaped the contours of the history of the Zo (Chin-Lushai-Kuki) people.¹The first part of the paper gives a brief introduction to early Zo contact with the British. The second part analyses Colonel James Johnstone’s proposal for the amalgamation of the Chin Hills with Manipur in 1881 and the reason for its failure; the third part examines the Chin-Lushai Conference of 1892 and its impact, and the fourth section analyses the drawing of borders leading to the reconfiguration of the Chin-Lushai Hills.

Early Contact

To put the case into perspective it is imperative to briefly discuss early Zo contact with the British in the adjoining areas of the Chin-Lushai hills. Perhaps, the south-western portion of the Chin-Lushai hills first came into contact with the British after the annexation of Chittagong in 1760. Trade route was opened with the hills of the Chittagong frontier which facilitated regular communication between the plain and the hill tribes known to the Bengali neighbours as

Koongki (Kuki). The annexation of Arakan after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) significantly established another hold of the British on the Chin frontier. Here the British again came into contact with the hill tribes who they saw on the other frontier. These hill tribes, referred to as Khumi, Khyeng, Mru and the like, sometimes caused disturbances in British territory. Early explorations and surveys of the hill tracts in the 1840s,² however, revealed that the real cause of disturbances originated from the far interior which was predominantly inhabited by the Shindus³, who also pushed the Lushais towards the north. According to colonial understanding, the Shindus were the source of trouble in both Arakan and Chittagong. However, since the Chittagong authorities knew little of the tribes all efforts to curb raids had been left to the Arakan authority.

In the north the annexation of Cachar in 1832 brought the British into close proximity to the Kuki settlements. Two years later, the British political agency was established in Manipur that paved the way for Anglo-Kuki relations, on the one hand, and contact with the Kamhau/Sukte, on the other. British policy towards the Kukis in Manipur remained relatively friendly till the Anglo-Manipur War in 1891. During this period the British gave preferential treatment to the Kuki, as clearly reflected in Colonel McCulloch's organization of the 'sepoy village' and the employment of Kuki irregulars in many of British military campaigns, against other hill tribes, particularly against the Nagas.

In fact, it was the policy of the Government of Bengal to avoid military expeditions into these 'unhealthy hill tracts' which was clearly stated by Sir John Peter Grant the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in 1858. Grant observed that, 'In addition to the extreme unhealthiness of the climate there would be great difficulty in distinguishing between those who are in the habit of committing these periodical depredations and those who are favourable and friendly to our rule'.⁴ Very little was therefore known about the relationship between the British and the hill tribes except that raids were reported occasionally and a few expeditions had been

sent against the Zo during the first half of the nineteenth century. In order to deal with the Zo tribes and check their disturbances a separate administrative unit had been created in both Chittagong Hill Tract and Northern Arakan Hill Tract in the 1860s. But as mentioned above, the British could not afford to leave the Chin-Lushai hills 'unadministered' anymore in the late 1880s as they had realized the strategic importance of the hill tracts. Its results can be seen in the changing perception of colonial officers who began to see the Chin-Lushai hills and its adjoining areas as a common factor. The following sections will discuss three colonial proposals/policies and its failure/success.

James Johnstone's proposal for the amalgamation of Manipur and the Chin Hills

The idea to amalgamate Manipur and the Chin Hills under one administration was conceived by James Johnstone, the Political Agent of Manipur (1877-1886), in the late nineteenth century. It was an attempt to curb raids once and for all and establish peace and tranquility in the frontier area. But before dealing with this, it is imperative to highlight the nature of Manipur relations with the Chin Hills. The nature of Meitei⁵ relations with the Kamhaus, a powerful tribe of the northern Chin Hills, was predominantly unfriendly and often violent during the nineteenth century. It is remarkable to note that in every stage of its development in Meitei-Kamhau relations, the British played important role directly or indirectly. Their role was, however, limited initially, as J. Clerk stated: 'The Political Agent is dependent on the will and pleasure of the Maharaja for everything. His very (sic) word and movement are known to the Maharaja. He is in fact a British Officer under Manipur surveillance'.⁶ The Political Agents assumed a more dominant role in the domestic affairs of the state after 1850s. This was largely due to the policy of the Government of India to give more responsibility to the Political Agent on the one hand and the strong personalities of the incumbents on the other. The internal squabbles in Manipur were an added fillip.⁷ The establishment of

‘sepoy village’ in the southern frontier was thus an outcome of the policy adopted by the British under Colonel William McCulloch.

In fact, the hostile nature of Meitei-Kamhau relations was never one sided and the Kamhaus and allied tribes should not be construed as the sole perpetrators in this regard. The Maharaja of Manipur, particularly Chandrakirti Singh, had on many occasions carried out direct or indirect campaigns against the Kamhaus. A case in point is an abortive military campaign against the Kamhau in 1857 which left Chandrakirti Singh completely humiliated due to the loss of many of his soldiers and a good number of guns.⁸ Having aware of this Colonel Mowbray Thompson during his short assignment was able to convince the Meitei and the Kamhaus to come to a settlement. It was undoubtedly a major breakthrough in the process of building peace. However, the resumption of hostilities shortly after which in itself clearly revealed the limitation of the Political Agent’s to enforce the treaty effectively.

The fall out of all these developments was James Johnstone’s recommendation for a military solution. Though it appeared as an act of sheer desperation, one could, however, infer from the tone that peace and stability would only come after the Meitei and the Kamhaus were brought under direct British administration.

It must be noted that the Government of India’s policy towards the northeast frontier tribes during this period was ‘one of absolute non-interference’. This was clearly stated in the Foreign Department’s letter dated 30 January 1873 which noted that,

His Excellency in Council sees no objection to the Maharaja of Manipur building stockades within his frontier and taking other reasonable precautions for frontier defence...and not to vex the tribes beyond the border, or give provocation for their attacking Manipur territory... hostilities with tribes beyond his boundary may involve him in difficulties with Burmah.⁹

In 1881, perpetuating frontier problems in Manipur convinced the Political Agent James Johnstone to recommend for absorption

of the Kamhau-Sukte country in northern Chin Hills into Manipur, which was a clear departure from the conventional non-interventionist policy. Johnstone's proposal stated:

Whatever may be the defects of the Maharaja's Government, it is for better than the fearful state of anarchy and barbarism in which these people live, and the subjection of the Sootes to his rule would not only seem the valleys of Manipur, Kubo and Kule from their outrages but in time would have allowed us to join hands with the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and would have thus shut in the Lushai tribes on all sides, and enabled us to take them in flank, thus conducing much to the peace of all the tract of country lying between Cachar and Chittagong.¹⁰

Johnstone was prepared to recommend the Maharaja undertaking it. He further added, 'The cost to us would be small, and through him we should be able more effectually to coerce the Eastern Lushais, if at any time necessary, as they with their western brethren would then be completely hemmed in between us and our feudatories'. He was quite sure that if this policy is carefully pursued 'we may hope during the next twenty-five years to acquire without bloodshed, such an influence as may result at no distant date in the substitution of peaceful acts for war and rapine in these vast and unknown wilds'.¹¹

In May 1882, Johnstone and his family left for England. He returned alone in October 1884, after the demise of his wife, to finally bid farewell to Manipur.¹² Till then his proposal remained unfulfilled. But in 1888, Johnstone, who was in England, revived his proposal only to be nailed by Fitzpatrick, the Chief Commissioner of Assam. Fitzpatrick's view, especially with regard to the proposal for reorganisation of the Manipur levy was that, 'the Manipur troops, except that they have fire-arms of some sort in their hands, are, from a military point of view, not one atom better than the Nagas or Kukis, or any other of the neighbouring savage tribes you choose to name'.¹³ What also prompted Fitzpatrick to strongly reject Johnstone's proposal was that he did not have faith in the Raja of Manipur to administer the Chin Hills. The Raja, he said, was only

a *primus inter pares*, weakened and left unfit to govern anything or anybody by the internal political problems of Manipur. He thus said,

The Government of a newly-acquired barbarous country no doubt requires no elaborate system of administration; but it needs a cool head, a true heart, and a strong hand, none of which are to be found in Manipur; and if it came choosing between the two, I would rather simply give the Chins a sound thrashing, place outposts along their frontier, and leave them to their own devices till we are ready to take them in hand, than make them over to Manipur.¹⁴

The former Deputy Commissioner of Assam, Robert Blair McCabe, strongly backed Fitzpatrick's view. He said '... no greater mistake could be made, philanthropically or politically, than to carry such a plan into execution.' He continued, 'I would rather see a punitive expedition conducted and outposts placed along the frontier, leaving the Chins to their own barbarous devices, than place the country in the so-called civilizing control of the Manipuris.'¹⁵

In spite of his strong objection to the proposal, the Chief Commissioner of Assam also cautioned that in the event of the adoption of Johnstone's proposal, the Chin country should be either transferred to Assam, or that the political control of Manipur should be transferred to the Chief Commissioner of Burma. This clearly shows that Fitzpatrick was not ready to hand over the Chin country to Manipur.

However, at the end of the day it was the opinion of the civil and military officers which was given due weightage when the Governor General took a final call who in a *Note* dated 29 October 1889, stated that, 'The Military department and the Commander in Chief also agreed that Sir J. Johnstone's proposals are impracticable, and Sir Mortimer Durand was of the same opinion. Probably therefore, this part of the question may be dropped.'¹⁶ A proposal that could have had inadvertently brought the Zo people together under a single administration was scuttled due to administrative and military considerations.

Annexation and the Chin-Lushai Conference, 1892

The annexation of the Zo people did not come from Manipur but from Burma, Assam and Bengal respectively after a concerted military campaign had been launched against the Chin-Lushai Hills in 1899-90. Popularly known as the Chin-Lushai Expeditions, the military campaigns succeeded to subdue Zo resistance. The hill tracts were divided into three administrative units, Chin Hills, South Lushai Hills and North Lushai Hills, which presented itself a problem for its future administration. Since the entire Chin-Lushai hills was peopled by the same ethnic community, the question of administering them as one unit and under one administration had in the meanwhile presented itself. The Government of India's Military Department was considering the question 'whether any remedy should be applied in order to obviate the disadvantage of Lushai-land and the Chin hills falling under three separate civil administrations and three separate military commands'.¹⁷ In September 1891, Major General Sir Edwin Collen, the Military Secretary to the Government of India, submitted a detailed note on 'The Military Situation in Eastern India and Burma' in which he suggested a conference between the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Chief Commissioner of Chittagong and General Officer Commanding, Presidency District to discuss this problem.¹⁸ Collen's note and his suggestion for a conference was later endorsed by Sir Frederick Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief (India) who had been in the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 and knew the Lushai hills at first hand.¹⁹ He also raised the importance of the inclusion of the Chief Commissioner of Burma to represent the situation in the Chin Hills. The Viceroy Lord Lansdowne immediately noted that he too had felt that it would be necessary to put an end to the state of things under which the management of the Chin-Lushai tract fell partly to Bengal, partly to Assam and partly to Burma. He approved of the proposed conference and added that Burma's Chief Commissioner Sir Alexander Mackenzie should also be invited to attend.²⁰

The Chin-Lushai Conference opened in Calcutta on 25 January 1892 under the president-ship of Sir Charles Alfred Elliott, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. It dealt with a variety of connected questions on the future, civil and military, of the Chin-Lushai hills. On 29 January the Conference closed with the adoption of five Resolutions. The first resolution stated that the majority were of the opinion that it was very desirable that the whole Chin-Lushai hills should be brought under one administration, preferably under the Chief Commissioner of Assam. In view of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's determined opposition to the idea, the Conference in its second resolution decided that this step should not be taken immediately. At any rate, it could not be effected before the difficulties of communications and of supplies and transport were sorted out and all operations in the Chin-Lushai hills concluded.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie's Minute not only left the Conference inconclusive as regards the main issue that it was convened to resolve, but gave strength to the officers of the Chin Hills to oppose any surrender of territory to Assam. He argued:

Of course it is inconvenient that three different Local Governments and one Native State (i.e. Manipur) should be concerned in the management of the same great block of hills. But it is a mistake to treat the tribes inhabiting these hills as though they were one and the same people. Ethnologically they may be so, but politically they are a congeries of independent, and even hostile communities, looking out of their hills towards the plains from which they severally draw their surplus of salt and (hitherto) of slaves.²¹

While he considered that the policy to be followed in dealing with the Chin-Lushai hills should be identical, Mackenzie disagreed with the perception that the local conditions were identical in the Chin and Lushai hills. One instance of difference was over the issue of tribute or revenue. His officers in the Chin hills were of the view that the Bengal arrangements were unsuitable for the tribes under their control. The Bengal Government would have liked to extend

to the Chins the plan Robert Blair McCabe followed in the North Lushai Hills: of levying a certain quantity of rice from each house and ten days forced labour from each able-bodied man. Mackenzie quoted his Chin Political Officer saying that levying dues in grain would cause unnecessary hardships to villages lying out a distance from the posts. Moreover, grain was not so plentiful in the villages on the Burma side and that the settlements there were permanent while their cultivation was often ten to fifty miles distant. With respect to *corvee* (forced labour) he remarked that supervising and turning such labour to useful account would be difficult. On such grounds he ruled out removing the Chin hills from Burma. Only the Arakan Hill Tracts could be amalgamated under one jurisdiction with the North and South Lushai Hills.

The ethnic commonality of the Chins in the Chin Hills and the Lushais in the Lushai Hills was not doubted by Burma officers. Local officer of the Chin Hills asserted their position not on ethnic differences but on the nature of the prevailing relationship between Burma and Chin Hills. Reports of Lushai officers on administrative problems cited by Charles Elliot could not be discounted as well. The two views on the opposite side of the border were based entirely on local administrative perspective; and not even a slightest attention was given on the ethnic commonality. The final recommendations of the Conference seemed to suggest that it was summoned only for the purpose of settling administrative issues to serve colonial interest. Thus, Burma promptly sent these views to the Government of India.

The final assent to the resolutions of the Conference was only to be given by the Viceroy's Council. Opinions within the Council seemed to have been divided when the recommendations of the Conference were being discussed during May-June that year by the Government of India. The Viceroy Lord Lansdowne was of the views that,

It has always seemed to me possible that eventually the new district thus created might include everything to the west of the

Myittha Valley and of the valley which runs northward from it towards the frontier of Manipur.

However, he was not prepared to rush into this larger question and suggested the relatively modest proposal of attaching the North and South Lushai hills along with a part of the Arakan Hill Tracts to Assam. But, he added, 'I should myself prefer to place it upon record that whatever steps are now taken, are taken in the belief that they lead in the direction to which I have pointed above, and that, when communications have been improved, we look forward to a larger and more thorough measure of consolidation'.²² It was Sir Charles Crosthwaite, now a senior member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, who strongly defended Mackenzie's stand. As a former Chief Commissioner of Burma, Crosthwaite had wide knowledge about the Chin-Lushai tract and his views were understandably given due weight. 'The object of adding the Chin Hills to Assam,' Crosthwaite noted, 'is to unite all the hill tribes under one Commissioner; and if this could not be done, I presume there would be no advantage gained'. Naturally sympathetic to Burma he clearly explained why he was strongly against the idea of one administration:

I think it is seldom an advantage to separate administratively parts of a country which is by natural conditions related to, or dependent on, one another. The tract in question is so broad and extensive that there has been no through communication from Burma to Bengal. I think it is true that the tribes which raid on Burma and trade with Burmans do not make incursions into the plains on the western side and conversely. It is the interest of Burma to deal with these tribes which must visit the Burma villages on the plains, and will, if permitted, raid on Burma and harbour outlaws from that country. However loyal and zealous the officer placed in charge of the hills may be, the separation of these hills from Burma will inevitably render the Chin tribes less amenable and less disposed to obey the Burma officers to help them to pursue and recover criminals from the hills.²³

Crosthwaite therefore suggested that ‘Our action should be limited to placing the South Lushai country and the Arracan Hill Tracts under Assam...and that we should record no opinion in favour of removing the Eastern Chin tribes from the administration of Burma.’

The views expressed by Crosthwaite immediately gained the support of three other members of the Council. Sir Alexander Edward Miller admitted that ‘even if my preconceived opinions had been opposed to Sir C. Crosthwaite’s view, I should have felt bound to give way; his arguments are, I think, quite conclusive’.

Those who expressed opinions entirely in accordance with the Viceroy’s were distinguished military officers, the first an Army Chief and the second, the Military Member of the Viceroy’s Council. Their opinion seemed to be conditioned by the ongoing operations in the Chin-Lushai hills. Both therefore emphasized the importance of a single military command centrally located in the hills and, as a corollary to this, a single civil administration. Roberts once again pointed out:

Whenever we may decide to fix the boundary between the two Administrations, sometime must elapse before the semi-civilised tribes can be prevented from raiding across it, but it seems to me that the line of the Myittha Valley, as suggested by His Excellency the Viceroy, is likely to prove as satisfactory as any other from this point of view, while geographically and ethnologically it possess decided advantages.²⁴

In the end it was Crosthwaite’s opinion which prevailed. On 2 August 1892 the Government of India telegraphed to the Chief Commissioner at Rangoon: ‘Chin Hills remain under Burma for the present’.²⁵

Colonial border and reconfiguration of the Chin-Lushai Hills

The Government of India’s decision to separate the Chin Hills and the Lushai Hills was followed by re-mapping of the entire

frontier area. Thongchai Winichakul rightly says, 'the discourse of mapping was the paradigm within which both administrative and military operations worked and served'.²⁶

Perhaps, R.B. Pemberton was the first to map the Indo-Burma frontier in 1834.²⁷ Another map came out in 1862. But it was after the Chin-Lushai Conference in 1892 that the British re-mapped this entire area to suit their policy of 'administrative convenience' at the expense of the local peoples. The Chin Hills-Manipur Boundary Commission was appointed in 1893. The following year members of the Commission demarcated the Chin Hills-Manipur boundary by erecting eight stone pillars at select locations to mark the border. While the new border seemed to have defined the 'not so clearly defined' border in Pemberton's map, the arbitrary award of numerous villages, which paid tribute to the Kamhau chief of northern Chin Hills, to the kingdom of Manipur²⁸ was an appeasement policy of the British at the cost of the Zo people. The Lushai Hills-Chin Hills boundary was demarcated in 1901 with minor alterations in 1921 and 1922 respectively.

As a follow up of the recommendation of the Chin-Lushai Conference, the Second Chin-Lushai Conference was held at Lunglei in 1896 to discuss the amalgamation of North and South Lushai Hills, both of which were under Assam and Bengal respectively. It was attended by Alexander Porteous, Political Officer of North Lushai Hills; R. Sneyd Hutchinson, Superintendent of South Lushai Hills; H. N. Tuck, Political Officer, Chin Hills, and Captain G.H. Loch, Commandant, North Lushai Hills Military Police. The attendance of the Political Officer of the Chin Hills speak a lot about how colonial rulers continue to see the close affinity between the Chin and the Lushai people, despite their failure to unite them under one administrative unit. In this conference the members agreed upon the transfer of South Lushai Hills to Assam to be amalgamated with the North. Though the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir William Ward, agreed to take over the charge of the South Lushai Hills, he admitted 'It is not possible to maintain that

uniform and concerted action and persistent policies which are so necessary over this large and recently annexed territory...I have no doubt that amalgamation will be followed by improved efficiency in administration and by large reduction of expenditure.²⁹ With the approval of the Government of India, the Lushai Hills District was formed and it came under the administration of Assam with effect from 1 April 1898. Accordingly, Major John Shakespear took over as the new 'Superintendent of Lushai Hills'.

Conclusion

British frontier policy and reconfiguration of the Chin-Lushai Hills had far-reaching impact on the indigenous Zo people. Modern mapping and territoriality left Zo notions of geography, boundary, territorial sovereignty, and margins irrelevant because the demarcation of administrative borders and reconfiguration of territory were based solely on 'administrative convenience' rather than to serve the interest of the local population. R.D. Sack aptly says, 'Territoriality is spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area'.³⁰ What colonial map-making had achieved in reality was a 'reordering of indigenous space' by undermining the existing traditional notions. Reconfiguration of a territory also meant dissection of the people and reshaping their history and identity.

From the end of the nineteenth century to 1935 British colonial state showed little interest in amalgamation of the entire Chin-Lushai Hills. Except for the formation of the Lushai Hills District, the British made no further attempt to bring the entire Chin-Lushai hills tract under a single administration after 1892. The creation of two hill districts, Chin Hills District and Lushai Hills, each under Burma and India respectively, was further cemented by the demarcation of administrative borders. The problem for the Zo people was only aggravated when the colonial 'administrative borders' were transformed into an international border. When British Burma was separated from British India in 1937, it did not cause any change

to the existing colonial ‘administrative borders’. Strikingly enough, postcolonial India and Burma recognized the ‘traditional’ line of the colonial period as the boundary between the two countries in 1967. In this entire process of territorial reconfiguration and redrawing of maps colonial and postcolonial states showed little concern for the ethnic commonality of the Zo and their interests.

In light of the above discussion, it may be safely said that colonial’s frontier policy was only driven by administrative and military considerations. Accordingly, borders were drawn to suit this purpose which, as a result, undermined the interest of the local populations. Border not only divided the same ethnic Zo people, it also turned them towards different directions and made them to become trans-border community in the postcolonial times. Apart from its political division border also left serious implications on the socio-economic and cultural lives of the people. It created ‘borders of mind’, ‘otherness’, ‘differences’, ‘cultural bumping’ etc. The psychological effect of border is beyond one’s measure, which I do not seek to address here. To sum up, it may be argued that Zo predicament today in terms of socio-cultural and political differences could have been better shaped in line with their common ethnic identity had it not been for the ‘unsuccessful’ colonial frontier policy in the late nineteenth century.

Endnotes

- ¹ I use the term ‘Zo’ to refer to the people known in colonial parlance as Chin, Kuki and Lushai. Today, Zo people are predominantly found in Chin state (Myanmar), Mizoram, Manipur and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.
- ² The earliest expedition was undertaken by Lieutenant Albert Fytche and Lieutenant Arthur Phayre in 1841-42 against the Walleng clan of the Khumi. This was followed by Hopkinsons’ in 1847-48 where he went up to Dalekmai and discovered that the real cause of the trouble was coming from the Shindu country. He therefore recommended that the only way to prevent Shindu pressure was to subjugate them and take control over their country.
- ³ Shindu or Shendu is an Arakanese term which seems to have covered all the Haka Chin tribes and the Lakhers.

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- ⁴ Mackenzie, Alexander, 1995. *The North East Frontier of India* (New Delhi), p.340.
- ⁵ Dominant inhabitants of the Manipur valley.
- ⁶ Quoted in Roy, Jyotirmoy, 1958. *History of Manipur* (Imphal), p. 100.
- ⁷ Singh, N. Joy Kumar, 1991. 'Political Agency, 1835-1890,' in Lal Dena (ed.), *History of Modern Manipur (1826-1949)* (New Delhi), p.33; also see Roy, *History of Manipur*, pp.85-86.
- ⁸ Chandrakirti Singh's abortive military expedition against the Kamhaus in 1856, his policy to restrain the Kamhaus on the sideline of the Lushai Expedition (1871-72) and the expedition against Mualpi in 1874 were sufficient to evoke strong response from the Kamhaus.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 173.
- ¹⁰ National Archive of India (NAI), *Administration Report of the Manipur Political Agency 1878-79*.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Singh, 'Political Agency', p. 46.
- ¹³ NAI, Foreign External-A Proceeding (FEAP), November 1889, No.127. 'Note by the Chief Commissioner on Colonel Sir J Johnstone's proposal regarding the Chin Country.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., No. 127.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., No 128.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., No.125.
- ¹⁷ NAI, FEAP, September 1892, No.12; Major-General E. H. H. Collen to the Quarter Master General, 5 November 1891.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., Nos.9-62; 'The Military Situation in Eastern India and Burma', 4 September 1891.
- ¹⁹ For details see Roberts, Frederick 1897. *Forty One Years in India*, 2 Vols. (London).
- ²⁰
- ²¹ NAI, FEAP, September 1892, No. 28.
- ²²
- ²³ NAI, FEAP, September 1892, Note, 8 June 1892; Crosthwaite further added: 'all the eastern side of the hills must look to Burma for supplies,

reinforcements, and for the maintenance of communications with the civilized country below and for postal and telegraph lines. If the government of Burma has no responsibility for this tract and no interest in it, the officers employed in it will not get much attention paid to their wants. I am arguing on the assumption that the tract will be under the Assam Administration. If it is put under the Burman Administration, the same arguments will apply from Assam point of view even with greater force as the interests involved on the Assam border are more important.

‘It may be said that when all the roads are made and a settled government has been for years established, these objectives will disappear. It may be so. But that time is so distant that it is not within the limits of a practical discussion.’

- ²⁴ Ibid., Note by Roberts, 16 June, and Note by Brackenbury, 18 June.
- ²⁵ See, Pau, Pum Khan, 2007. ‘Administrative rivalries on a frontier: Problem of the Chin-Lushai Hills, *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 34, no. 1 (January).
- ²⁶ Winichakul, Thongchai, 1994. *Siam mapped*, (Chiangmai: University of Hawaii press) p. 130.
- ²⁷ R. B. Pemberton, ‘Reports on the Eastern Frontiers of British India: Manipur, Assam, Arakan & c.’, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 8 (1838).
- ²⁸ NAI, FEAP 1893, nos. 80-88.
- ²⁹ NAI, FEAP, July 1895, Nos. 122-145.
- ³⁰ Sack, R. D., 1986. *Human territoriality: Its theory and history* (Cambridge) p. 20.

The Dilemma of Classification of Income Levels in Social Research

JENNY JAMI*

Abstract

Income is a widely used parameter in social researches. Most community studies generally collect information on the household income for better understanding of the socio-economic status of the people. Income is usually classified as low, middle and high where thresholds were selected depending on the population under study. Thus, classification of income levels is mostly arbitrary. The present paper attempts to examine the discrepancies in results that may arise due to differential classification of income levels. For the purpose of the study, analysis of a fieldwork-based data set of 708 individuals (20 – 70 years) from 470 households based on different income classifications and various socio-demographic, behavioral and nutritional indicators were used. It is observed that varying classification of income levels may not influence the interpretation of results in case of discrete or continuous variables, however, it is found to skew the direction of interpretation of results to a considerable extent in categorical variables.

Keywords: Income, middle class, categorical variables, continuous variables

Introduction

Income is one of the most important indicators of socio-economic status of an individual or a population. Given its widespread importance, it is one of the most frequently used

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parameters in many studies, especially in the humanities and social science researches. On an International scale, the World Bank (Fantom & Serajuddin, 2016) classifies countries as low income, lower middle income, upper middle income, and high income based on the gross national income (GNI). However, for smaller scale studies of income distribution such as region-based or community-based studies, the household income is generally considered for categorizing income levels where the median values often provide generalized cut-off points (Noss, 2013; United Nations, 2011; Desai *et al.*, 2010; McNeil, 1998). While it may be convenient to classify the income levels as low and high through the median value, such a classification is rendered impractical with the emergence of the middle class. Defining the middle class is crucial not only in itself but also because it sets the thresholds for the high and low income groups. However, it is often difficult to decide on the identity of the middle class (Elwell, 2014; Meyer & Birdsall, 2012). As Elwell (2014) explains, “how far the middle class stretches above and below the median is the question” (p. 4). These factors add to the knowledge that the actual dynamics involved in income classification are complicated where the criteria employed for income classification is seen to differ across and within countries, states or regions. In most cases, income levels are often found to be arbitrarily classified based on means, medians, percentiles, quartiles or quintiles (United Nations, 2011). However, there is no international framework for micro-level household income statistics (United Nations, 2011). It is also further observed that the rationale for setting threshold levels for income is often unclear (Elwell, 2014; Veit-Wilson, 1998). This is a serious limitation as such classification of income levels often renders comparability in income data difficult or may also even lead to inaccurate reporting of results (United Nations, 2011). With these considerations, the present paper seeks to examine discrepancies in results that may arise due to differential classification of income levels.

Methods:

Income is often found to be associated with socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, region, marital status, family size, education and occupation (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007; Jagsi *et al.*, 2013; Chetty *et al.*, 2016; Pradhan *et al.*, 2000; Madalozzo, 2008; Chen & Yang, 2016; Blanden & Gregg, 2004). It is also found to be associated with behavioral patterns such as physical activity, drinking and smoking (Wang *et al.*, 2018; Kari *et al.*, 2015; Kim and So, 2014; Lemstra *et al.*, 2009; Auld, 2005) as well as with health and nutritional status of populations (Abraham *et al.*, 2017; Godoy *et al.*, 2005; Kennedy *et al.*, 1998). Thus, for the purpose of the present paper, a cross-sectional study was conducted among the Lotha Naga adults in Wokha Town of Nagaland and analysis of the urban-based data set of 708 adult individuals (20 – 70 years) from 470 households based on different income classifications and various socio-demographic, behavioral and nutritional indicators were used. Data on these variables were collected directly from the participants through structured interviews. Socio-demographic data included gender, age groups, place of birth, marital status, family size, education, income and occupation. Gender was classified as male and female. Age is classified into five groups with equal class intervals. Place of birth was categorized as urban and rural. Marital status included unmarried, married or divorced/separated/widowed (DSW) categories. Family size was classified as small (≥ 4), medium (5-6) or large (≥ 7) based on the total number of family members. Education was classified as illiterate, primary, secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate and above (InSCED, 2014). Occupation was arbitrarily divided into eight categories – Government employee, non-government employee, self-employed, agriculturist or labourer, student, homemaker, retired service employees and unemployed. Behavioral data included levels of physical activity (IPAQ, 2005), alcohol and tobacco use as well as aspects of health and morbidity (NSSO, 2004). Anthropometric measurements such as weight, height, waist circumference, hip circumference, biceps, triceps, sub-scapular and supra-iliac were measured directly from

the individuals using standard techniques (Weiner and Lourie, 1981; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; WHO, 2011) and accordingly, nutritional indicators such as body mass index, fat mass index, fat free mass index, conicity index, waist-hip ratio and waist-height ratio were calculated.

Income levels were classified based on commonly used summary measures of income level i.e., median, percentiles, quartiles and quintiles (UN, 2011) of the per capita monthly income of the households. For the analysis, these were arbitrarily classified as:

1. Income levels (Median): Income was classified into two categories - low and high, using the median as the threshold value.
2. Income levels (Percentiles): Based on percentiles, income was categorized into three groups i.e., low (below 50th percentile), middle (50th – 75th percentile) and high (above 75th percentile).
3. Income levels (Quartiles): Income was classified into four income groups viz., Low, Lower Middle, Upper Middle and High Income Group based on quartiles of the per capita monthly income of the households.
4. Income levels (Quintiles): In this case, distribution of per capita household monthly income was based on quintiles. Accordingly, income was classified as poor (lowest quintile), low income (second), middle income (third), upper-middle income (fourth) and high income (highest).

Pearson's chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the association between the different income levels with each of the socio-demographic and behavioral variables and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed separately for the anthropometric measurements and income levels to examine whether each of these variables differed based on their income levels. SPSS software was used for all computational purposes.

Results:

The income distribution of respondents based on different classification methods are shown in **Table 1**. It was observed that when income was classified through the median values, about 54.24% of the participants were grouped under the low income group (LIG) while 45.76% were classified under the high income group (HIG). When classification was based on percentiles, it was observed that income levels under low, middle and high income groups were 45.76%, 29.38%, 24.86% respectively. Based on quartiles, it is observed that the percentage of participants were higher for upper middle income group (29.38%) followed by lower middle group (24.72%), high income group (24.86%) and low income group (21.05%). The percentage of participants under first, second, third, fourth and fifth quintiles were found to be 17.80%, 16.67%, 23.45%, 21.75% and 20.34% respectively. A comparison of the results on relationships between income levels and few selected variables (nominal or ordinal scale) based on different income classifications are shown in **Table 2**. It is observed that family size, education and occupation showed highly significant χ^2 values at all income levels which indicate that if income is significantly very highly related to a variable ($p < 0.0001$), the results would mostly yield similar interpretations irrespective of the income categorization. Conversely, it was found that no significant χ^2 values were seen in marital status, alcohol and tobacco use, hospitalization and treatment behavior for all the income levels indicating that it may be possible to screen variables that are truly not associated with income using any of the classification. Interpretation of results gets tricky when variables are found to be associated at the significance levels (α) of 0.05 or 0.01. In the present analysis, it is observed that it showed uniform interpretations of results for place of birth, however, varying results are seen in some of the other variables depending on the method of income classification. For instance, if the study considers income levels based on quartiles or quintiles, it can be interpreted that gender, age groups and levels of physical activity are found to be significantly related to income.

On the contrary, one would end up interpreting that there is no statistically significant relationship between income and gender, age groups or levels of physical activity if income levels are based on median or percentiles. Alternatively, it can be interpreted that there is a relation between income and type of hospital if income was based on quartiles, median and percentiles but not for quintiles. Self-reported morbidity was significantly related to income when classification was on the basis of quartiles, percentiles and quintiles but not for median. Income was found to be associated with treatment from government sources only when classification was based on quartiles. **Table 3** shows a comparison of the results on relationships between income levels and the selected variables (interval or ratio scale) based on different income classifications. It is observed that when the test variables are discrete or continuous, the results mostly yielded similar interpretations irrespective of the income categorization. Results that produced different interpretation are seen only for the variables- height and triceps which were found to be significantly related to income based on quartiles and quintiles but not for median and percentiles.

From the above comparisons, it can be observed that degree of association varies with change in the method of income classification. Also, while it is observed that varying classification of income levels may not influence the interpretation of results in case of discrete or continuous variables, however, it is found to skew the direction of interpretation of results to a considerable extent in nominal or ordinal data. This observation is especially crucial as categorical variables are mostly used in social researches. Though the probability of type 1 or type 2 errors cannot be ruled out in any of the classifications, the chances of making these errors might be reduced by identifying the correct operational classification.

Comments:

Given the widespread intricacies of varying socio-economic conditions such as the concentration of wealth, the cost of living,

economic disparities, etc. , it is difficult to decide on a standard method of classifying income levels that can be well fitted for general application, especially in field-work based social science researches. Despite these challenges, it would be very beneficial if some simple standards are set for classification of income across different settings. One such standard that probably can be used is the Gini coefficient¹ which is one of the most commonly used summary indicator of income dispersion. Given the assumptions underlying the Gini coefficient, it is postulated that the smaller the Gini coefficient the more equal the distribution of income (United Nations, 2011). Is it possible then, that this may be used to decide on the number of income categories assuming that if the Gini coefficient is less, fewer income categories are needed to bring out the differences in the population; in which case, can division of the population as low and high, depending on the median value be justified or if the income disparity is high, would more income divisions be needed to understand the extent to which it renders its influence? Whether such theoretical assumptions may lead to a robust standard is uncertain, however, these considerations may be able to provide us with a rationale that can be used to divide income categories. Nonetheless, the objective of this paper is not to suggest methods of income classification but to bring out discrepancies in results that may arise due to differential classification of income levels and to highlight the need to formulate acceptable criteria for income classification that may be statistically viable for interpreting results.

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¹ Gini coefficient for the present population is 0.377

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Table 1: Income distribution of respondents based on different classification methods

Income levels	Respondents					
	Male (n=354)		Female (n=354)		Total (n=708)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Income levels (Medians)						
Low Income Group	189	53.39	195	55.08	384	54.24
High Income Group	165	46.61	159	44.92	324	45.76
Income levels (Percentiles)						
Low Income Group	165	46.61	159	44.92	324	45.76
Middle Income Group	104	29.38	104	29.38	208	29.38
High Income Group	85	24.01	91	25.71	176	24.86
Income levels (Quartiles)						
Low Income Group	63	17.80	86	24.29	149	21.05
Lower Middle Income Group	102	28.81	73	20.62	175	24.72
Upper Middle Income Group	104	29.38	104	29.38	208	29.38
High Income Group	85	24.01	91	25.71	176	24.86
Income levels (Quintiles)						
Lowest	53	14.97	73	20.62	126	17.80
Second	65	18.36	53	14.97	118	16.67
Third	96	27.12	70	19.77	166	23.45
Fourth	69	19.49	85	24.01	154	21.75
Highest	71	20.06	73	20.62	144	20.34

Table 2: Comparison of Chi-square values based on different income groups

Nominal/Ordinal Variables	χ^2 values			
	Income levels (Median)	Income levels (Percentiles)	Income levels (Quartiles)	Income levels (Quintiles)
Gender	0.205	0.316	8.561*	10.157*
Age Groups	5.846	12.409	26.081**	31.237**
Place of birth	7.920**	8.360*	10.583**	14.007**
Marital Status	0.928	2.658	7.893	11.792
Family Size	1.406	33.894****	40.144****	44.356****
Education	38.802****	50.538****	56.680****	62.710****
Occupation	56.306****	73.464****	106.8****	123.7****
Levels of physical activity	5.102	6.567	13.171*	15.442*
Alcohol Use	0.718	1.065	2.488	3.061
Tobacco (smoking)	2.862	2.895	2.910	4.675
Tobacco (chewing)	3.897	2.895	3.992	4.185
Hospitalization	0.665	0.891	0.994	0.694
Type of hospital	9.684**	12.567**	13.424*	14.939
Self-reported morbidity	0.130	9.763**	9.815*	10.803*
Treatment on medical advice	0.570	2.297	5.790	4.828
Treatment from government sources	0.083	2.289	9.838*	8.763

*p< 0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001, ****p< 0.0001

Table 3: Comparison of ANOVA F- Statistics based on different income groups

Discrete/ Continuous Variables	ANOVA F- statistics			
	Income levels (Median)	Income levels (Percentiles)	Income levels (Quartiles)	Income levels (Quintiles)
Weight	7.459**	7.078***	5.591***	4.586***
Height	1.823	1.655	4.085**	4.086**
WaistCircumference	9.035**	8.008*****	5.697***	4.558***
Hip Circumference	9.069**	8.491*****	5.837***	4.727***
Biceps	14.056*****	11.074*****	7.576*****	5.353*****
Triceps	3.104	2.309	3.322*	3.259**
Sub-scapular	11.438***	7.228***	5.223***	4.740***
Supra-iliac	16.394*****	10.969*****	7.304*****	6.283*****
Sum of skinfolds	13.044*****	8.872*****	6.262*****	5.418*****
Body Mass Index	5.420*	5.044**	3.358*	2.986*
Fat Mass Index	9.306**	7.175***	5.010**	4.500***
Fat Free Mass Index	0.115	0.165	0.530	0.575
Conicity Index	6.054**	5.091**	3.652**	2.972*
Waist-Hip Ratio	3.340	2.497	2.045	1.839
Waist-Height Ratio	5.715*	4.995**	3.329*	3.038*
*p< 0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001, ****p< 0.0001				

The Challenges of Adopting Innovative Agricultural Practices under Shifting Cultivation in Northeast India

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Abstract

Shifting cultivation is an organic type of agriculture which is characterized by a rotation of field rather than of crops, by a short period of cropping alternating with long fallow periods and by clearing it by means of slash and burn process. This paper highlights the main challenges of adopting innovative ideas that are embedded in local, culture-specific nature of knowledge, the institutional structure and informal innovations under shifting cultivation in northeast India. The innovation under shifting cultivation is different from the conventional method of agricultural practices. The methodology used in the study relies on both primary and secondary source of information. The study reviews the literature available in various policy documents, reports and previous studies related to shifting cultivation and interviews with certain indigenous people. In this study, we especially focus on Angami, Ao and Sema tribes of Nagaland and Tangkhul, Kuki, Mao, Monsang, Maring and Kabui tribes of Manipur. We found that local farmers developed their own, specific and holistic knowledge for modes of the practice. Besides the local farmer's knowledge

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and practices, the innovative ideas that are brought by scientists and other public-private collaborations are noteworthy and somehow modify the current practices of shifting cultivation in the region. Understanding the inevitability of the shifting cultivation owing to geographical location, we argue that more cash crops on a larger scale should be cultivated with an introduction of high yielding varieties of seeds.

Keywords: Shifting Cultivation; Northeast Region; Innovation; REDD mechanism; Cash Crops.

Introduction

It is estimated that about two million of the Indian population have cultivated an area of around 11 million hectares of land under shifting cultivation (Singh, J., et al. 2015). Such type of cultivation is a form of organic agriculture which is characterized by a rotation of field rather than of crops, by a short period of cropping alternating with long fallow periods and by clearing it by means of slash and burn process. In our country, it is mostly practiced in the hilly area of the northeast region, Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Generally, people in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur called it as “*Jhum cultivation*” (Nath et al., 2016). Such cultivation is locally known as ‘*Pam Lou*’ in Manipur. It is also known by different names in different regions like “*Slash and Burn Cultivation*” or “*Swidden or rotational cultivation*” (Dressler et al., 2015, Mertz et al., 2009, Mertz, 2009 and Padoch et al., 2007). It is practiced in many parts of the world, particularly in the wet tropical regions like South East Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In the northeastern region, out of the total area of 25.5 million hectares, about 2.7 million hectares is under the shifting cultivation (Dalong 2004). The region covers about 7.7% of the total geographical area of India, and it also produces only 1.5 % of the country’s total food grain production of the country (Saha et al. 2012; Mishra et al. 2017). The region is also considered as one of the main biodiversity

hotspots of the world due to its geographical position, the favorable climatic factors and richness of biodiversity (Choudhury et al. 2016). In this region, agriculture provides them a livelihood support to around 70 % of the total population of the region.

The main objective of this study is to explore the key challenges of adopting innovative ideas that are embedded in local, culture-specific nature of knowledge, the institutional structure and informal innovations within shifting cultivation in northeast India. The methodology used in the study is based on both primary and secondary data. The study reviews the literature available in various policy documents and previous studies related to shifting cultivation and interviews with certain indigenous people. The term innovation here refers to the finding of new ideas or methods or technique or process for better products that are beneficial for society, environment and economy. From the Schumpeterian theory of innovation, it is understood that innovation is the key to economic change and regional development. Moreover, invention, innovation and successful diffusion of new technologies are main drivers of modern economies (Schumpeter, 1939). Nevertheless, in the context of the agricultural innovation system, it is not only the use of technology, high yield varieties of seed, fertilizers and chemicals but also the informal knowledge of the indigenous people which is significant. In case of shifting cultivation, we are precisely looking at the innovative ideas or methods that are different from the commercial agricultural practices. At the same time, the specific and holistic mode of knowledge transfer (farmer to farmer within or outside the community) is also considered. The nature of knowledge in the shifting cultivation is locally developed not brought from outside. North (1990) defines institution as 'humanly devised constraints that structured human interaction. They are made up of formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions mean rules, laws, and constitutions but in case of informal institutions, they include norms of behavior, conventions, and self-imposed codes of conduct. In our study, we are particularly focusing on Nagaland and Manipur in the northeastern region. We will discuss some challenges

to adopt such practice in different communities particularly *Angami*, *Ao* and *Sematribes* in Nagaland and *Tangkhul*, *Kuki*, *Mao*, *Monsang*, *Maring* and *Kabui* tribes in Manipur.

Is it socially a great evil or just a myth?

Scholars have been debating on the issue of shifting cultivation, is it a sustainable or unsustainable agricultural practice? Since early nineteenth century, some policy makers have claimed that it is a wasteful practice or any great evil. By saying, it consists of destroying a large and valuable capital to produce miserable and temporal returns. That means it is considered to be a wasteful thing and that should be eliminated like any great evil (Malik, 2008). Deka and Sarmah (2010) state that the evil effects of shifting cultivation is devastating and far-reaching in degradation of environment and ecology of the region. Biswal and Kumar (2013) also describe that such practice does harm not only the environment but also incur negative impacts on the economy. Some of the evil effects are; it helps in drying up springs, results in soil erosion, responsible for causing floods, destroying valuable timber and damage of crops. Saikia and Bhaduri (2006) describes that the policy makers since the colonial period have looked at shifting cultivation as a prodigal child in the field of agriculture. Despite its deep-rooted history associated with local knowledge and customary values, the qualities embedded within are often underestimated in the policy framework of India since the days of the British Raj.

On the contrary, some researchers claim that such practice cannot be eliminated. It is not only the livelihood of the local people but also the cultural identity attached to the socio-economic life of the cultivators. Apart from the different views of the different policy makers from time to time about the good and bad of it, now the nature of knowledge, formal and informal innovations in this practice are interlinked and still go hand in hand. Some scholars have timely opened the humanist approach towards such agricultural practices.

The notion widely held that shifting cultivation is responsible in the main for large-scale soil erosion needs to be effectively dispelled. The correct approach to the problem lies in accepting it not as a necessary evil, but recognizing it as a way of life (Chaturvedi and Uppal, 1953).

It is a mistake to assume that shifting cultivation in itself is unscientific land use...In most of the interior areas where communication is not developed and sufficient land suitable for terracing is not available, shifting cultivation alone can be done for the present and as such, every effort should be made to improve the fertility of such land (Maithani, 2005).

Although some studies bring the ideas of shifting cultivation as a great evil which is considered to be eliminated, the researchers feel the necessity of such practices as it is embedded unfathomable in their culture and livelihood of the indigenous people. The geographical location of the northeast makes inevitable to engage in *jhum* which will be difficult to abandon in the near future. Instead, it is better to find a sustainable and lucrative method of shifting cultivation to enhance the socio-economic status of the indigenous people and for development of the region.

Policy Perspectives at Global Level

In the era of global climate change, resource use and management practices that rely on deforestation and use of fire which emits tons of carbon have come under increased pressure. This is particularly the case of shifting cultivation. This type of cultivation is so different from the conventional practices of lowlands cultivated by the majority of the population as it is one of the most misunderstood land use systems. Thus, in the name of forest conservation and development, colonial and post-governmental governments in Asia have devised policies and rules to eradicate shifting cultivation for more than centuries (Fox et al., 2009).

Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have recently launched a large-scale conversion of forest land into oil palm cultivations;

rubber plantations have initiated in Southwest China over the last decades and are rapidly expanding in Cambodia and Laos. These programs have come under severe criticism due to their contribution to deforestation, loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation and dispossession of indigenous communities over their land (UNFCCC, 2009; Mukul and Herbohn, 2016).

The United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people clearly states that indigenous people have the rights to their land, territories and resources and participate in decision-making directly related to their land resources. Further, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is required before the formulation of policies, programs and projects that had a concern on them. However, the indigenous people are not able to allow effectively in the climate change mitigation schemes like Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries and their rights to their land, resources and territories continue to be ignored (UNFCCC, 2009).

The REDD is a new mechanism which is designed to use market or financial incentives to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases from deforestation and forest degradation. It is the outcome of the Kyoto Protocol agreement. It is not only to reduce greenhouse gases but also it can deliver “co-benefits” such as biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation. In some developed countries REDD is adopted, but in case of India, it is not yet implemented. It may have the great potential, but the benefits of fallow systems should be recognized in the mechanism. The monitoring system must not only focus on carbon stocks but also look at how livelihood of local farmers developed if they are prevented from producing food locally and live under fragile tenure and governance regime. In many places, the mode of cultivation remains the livelihood of the local people, but it is also undergoing rapid changes and sometimes force transitions to other forms of land use. The main challenges and opportunities of the cultivators are to ensure that the poor farmers have access to products, to clarify land tenure of

fallow land and to provides a guarantee that the compensations will be paid and not be lost in systems of poor governance (Hett, C. et al, 2012; Fox, J. et al., 2009 and Mertz, 2009).

At the regional level, we need to analyze pros and cons of this new mechanism before it is implemented in our country. Further, will the shifting cultivators really benefit from the REDD mechanism and how is it likely to be implemented in the developing countries like India where ecologically fragile environments are undergoing rapid changes?

Policy at National and State Level

Even since the British period, Indian policy makers consider shifting cultivation as primitive, destructive and the cost of forest loss far outweighs its production benefits. Malik (2008) states that this type of cultivation needs to be changed since it is primitive and inferior to the conventional method of agricultural practices. In 1883, a famous British writer, Baden Powel said, “the system is so wasteful that somehow or the other it must be put a stop just like any other great evil” (Malik, 2008). However, Peel (1983) states that the way to stop such practices is to reserve large forest and prohibit such cultivation; otherwise there will be no forest to cut down and burn.

The propaganda of such claims led to strong advocacy towards the abolition of such cultivation which were later found in the *National Forest policy, 1894* which issued a statement “*The shifting cultivation costs more to the community than it is worth and can only be permitted under due regulation*”. Following the British legacy, the post-independence India tried to maintain the policies that are stereotyped and based on the principle of reductionist science. The policy makers and government often assume shifting cultivation as universally unsustainable and destructive to forest and wildlife. Therefore, the policy formulation towards it has always been to wean the cultivator away to conventional agriculture and

gradually reduce the area of *jhum* cultivation (Saikia and Bhaduri, 2006). The result of such policy is the *National Forest Policy of 1952* that discourages the practice of such cultivation. The *National Tribal Policy, 2006* formulated by Ministry of Tribal Affairs look at the perspective of the land tenure system and alternative to such cultivation (Rao and Ramu, 2014).

The policy at state level especially in Nagaland and Manipur manage to encourage the practice of such cultivation. The *Naga Hills Jhumland Regulation, 1946* gave absolute rights to the original inhabitants over their land and permitted the practice of shifting cultivation, clearing of forests and grazing of cattle. However, some limitations over the utilization of forest resources were drawn after the enactment of the *Nagaland Forest Act, 1968* and the *Nagaland Jhumland Act, 1970* by which the government has absolute rights to acquire any forest land on payment of compensation for protection and development. It provides a detailed chapter on penalties and procedures on the line of forest acts such as prison sentences and fines in case of contravening (Saikia and Bhaduri, 2012). The *Manipur Hill Area District Council Act, 1971* recognized the rights of indigenous people to manage the forest but not being the reserved forest. The people are allowed to practice *jhum* or other form of shifting cultivation with a specified regulation laid down by administrator and district council (*The Manipur Hill Area District Council Act, 1971*).

However, Das (2006) highlights that the policies towards the indigenous people give a cultural surprise as they are not able to fully emancipate themselves from their age-old farming practice. The new form of farming often does not keep up their promise either because of the inherent flaws in the system like corruption, bad science, bad planning or the communication gap between traditional knowledge and formal knowledge. The following table 1 indicates the notable regulations and programmes towards such practices in Nagaland and Manipur

Table 1: Remarkable Regulations or Programmes relating to Shifting Cultivation in Nagaland and Manipur

Sl. no	Regulations or Programmes	Focus Area	Regulatory Body
1	<i>Jhum</i> Intensification and Extension of Cropping	Fallow period management, adoption of improved farming practices, introduction of multipurpose tree species, awareness and training programmes,	Department of Agriculture
2	National Watershed Development Programme for Rain-fed Areas (NWDPRA)	Introduction of mix plantation (tree, shrub and grass), to produce sufficient food grain in a sustainable manner, to restore ecological balance in the degraded and fragile rain-fed	Department of Horticulture and Soil Conservation
3	Watershed Development Project for Shifting Cultivation Areas (WDPSCA)	Development and protection of <i>jhum</i> lands by soil and water conservation measures	Department of Horticulture and Soil Conservation
4	Contour Bunding	Development of contour bunding, bench terracing and plantations	Department of Horticulture and Soil Conservation
5	Integrated Watershed Development Programme (IWDP)	Awareness and training programmes on degradation of land, sustainable farming	Department of Horticulture and Soil Conservation

6	Integrated Land Development (ILD)	Improving land degradation through integrated land development under NABARD	Department of Horticulture and Soil Conservation
7	Integrated Watershed Management Development Programme (IWMP)	Introduction of mini watershed plans and its significance	Department of Land Resource Development
8	Joint Forest Management (JFM)	Participation of locals in creation, management and protection of forest with a focus on sustainable agro-forestry	Department Of Forest, Ecology, Environment and Wildlife
9	<i>The Naga Hills Jhumland Regulation, 1946</i>	Rights of indigenous people over their land and practice of shifting cultivation including clearing of forests and grazing of cattle	Government of Nagaland
10	<i>The Nagaland Forest Act, 1968</i>	Protection and development of forest area	Government of Nagaland
11	<i>The Nagaland Jhumland Act, 1970</i>	Rights of indigenous people over the forest land with particular protection and development	Government of Nagaland
12	<i>The Manipur Hill Area District Council Act, 1971.</i>	Rights of indigenous people to manage the forest but not being the reserved forest.	Government of Manipur
13	<i>National Tribal Policy, 2006</i>	Towards land tenure system and alternative to shifting cultivation	Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India

Source: Authors' Compilation from different sources

After interaction with forest rangers, village council and government officials, it is found that the encroachment of any persons for cultivation, cutting of trees and cattle grazing is restricted in reserved and protected forests in Nagaland. In contrast, the shifting cultivation, felling of trees and cattle grazing is observed in Manipur even in reserved and protected forests. Manipur will observe a faster rate of forest and environment degradation as compared to Nagaland.

Some Initiatives by Government

There are some successful and failed initiatives which were taken up by the government to promote shifting cultivation in the region. Firstly, we discuss few of the failures. A three-tier system model of land use was introduced by some scientists of Indian Council of Agricultural Research to serve the modification of shifting cultivation in Nagaland. In this model, the upper part of the slope left forested the middle portion of plantation crop and the lower portion being terrace cultivation. The model has only limited application because it is very rigid as it intervenes and causes conflict among different communities in the region. Another failure model of shifting cultivation is "Bund Cultivation" which is widely practiced in the Garo hills, Meghalaya where the slope gradient is not too steep (Kumar and Ramakrishnan, 1990 and Das, 2006).

Regarding some success stories initiated by the government, Tripura and Assam were the first states to introduce shifting cultivation control programmes by encouraging the plantation of cash crops like rubber, coffee, black pepper, cashew nuts in the early 1960's. During the 5th Five year plan (1974-1979), Watershed Development Project for Shifting Cultivation Areas (WDPSCA) was introduced in the northeast region. Under the Department of Horticulture and Soil Conservation, the WDPSCA scheme was introduced. In 1995, the scheme was initiated in Manipur. The same scheme was also introduced in Nagaland through Department of Soil and Water Conservation. The primary goals of this scheme

are to protect and develop the hill slopes of *jhum* areas through the various soil and water conservation measures; to reduce land degradation process; to improve the socio-economic status of the cultivator families; to develop the land leading into settled cultivation (WDPSCA website). Other schemes or programmes are shown in the above table 1.

In 2008, some scientists from Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), Northeast Barapani have introduced some high yield production of ginger, turmeric and new rice varieties like SARS, Kimin, Bamtara and others in some parts of Meghalaya and Nagaland. The programmes were successful.

Innovation through Public-private Partnership

In Nagaland, there are some challenging initiatives undertaken to promote public-private partnership in engaging shifting cultivation. For instance, there is a project Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development (NEPED) funded by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in collaboration with India-Canada Environment Facility. It was introduced in 1994 and worked at the village level to promote agroforestry by planting trees in 1995. The state has been actively engaging with the indigenous people to improve the method of shifting cultivation by providing innovative ideas and scientific knowledge.

The project was implemented in three phases. The cultivators were asked to plant another perennial crop in addition to the several annual crops in their plots. The method was to establish two test plots in each of the thousand villages. NEPED also introduced certain crops such as passion fruit, ginger, turmeric, orange, wild sunflower and tapioca plantation (Saikia and Bhaduri, 2012; Deka and Sarmah, 2010).

The main challenge of the above mentioned project activities was on the test plot where the farmers themselves would select, test and demonstrate agro-forestry with technical support from

the NEPED. For its implementation, a separate organization was formed drawing officers from different departments in Nagaland. In this project, steering committee members look after the task of training village councils, rural development boards and farmers. In addition, steering committee members are also responsible for monitoring the test plots and nurseries. They are the primary mediators between the local farmers and the technical expertise of agricultural researchers. In each village, the Government of Nagaland establishes village development boards and village councils with the specific purpose of rural development. The village development boards were established by taking into consideration the traditional village organization of a given cultural group. So the project of enhancing the traditional agriculture was implemented through this institutional mechanism. The NEPED capacitates these institutions for village level interventions, instead of merely using them as entry points into local communities (NEPED and IIPR, 1999). The overall main strategies of the project were:

- i) Addressing people's need and providing employment opportunities and income generation.
- ii) Identification of the trees by local people and demonstration of method towards sustainable resource management.
- iii) Extend the shifting cultivation cycle and promoting marketing initiatives.
- iv) Harness the biodiversity wealth and traditional knowledge system.
- v) Protection and development of the degraded forest.

Another project, National Agricultural Innovation Project (NAIP) of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) through the Agriculture Department of Nagaland University also intended to accelerate the agricultural practices. The main objective is to alleviate poverty, income generation by collaborative departments and application of agricultural innovation by the public research

organizations in partnership with the local farmers, civil society and private organizations (Saikia and Bhadhuri, 2012). Through this project, local farmers were given training and exposure to grow crops like ginger and turmeric.

Innovations from local farmers

Local farmers have developed their own, specific, holistic and harmonious knowledge and practices. The type of land use is temporary which is mixed cropping system at the same time. Members of the family and relatives are the main labourer involved in this mode of cultivation. Generally, in Nagaland and Manipur women play a vital role in the selection of seed, planting, watching and weeding. Other activities like cutting of the trees, clearing, burning of the cut trees are done by men. Table 2 gives the idea of farmer's preferred crops with their season and the reasons for the preference.

Table 2. Preferred Crops by Local Farmers in the Study Area, Nagaland and Manipur

Preferred crops	Reason for preference (Cropping season)	Preferred crops	Reason for preference (Cropping season)
Rice	Staple food (June-November)	Pineapples*	Cash crop (October-January)
Maize, Millet	Staple food and making local alcohol (May-November)	Turmeric	Consumption and cash crop (June-November)
Mustard	Home consumption and cash crops (October-March)	Orange*	Cash crops (Throughout the season)
Potatoes	Vegetable and cash crop (August-October)	Sweet Potatoes	Home consumption and cash crop (May-August)

Ginger	Consumption and cash crop (Throughout the season)	Beans	Home consumption (November-February)
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Source: Authors' compilation based on field survey, 2017. Here * meanstypes of plantations which have been recently favored by local farmers particularly in Tamenglong and Ukhrul area in Manipur.

After interviewing 18 local farmers (10 cases in Manipur and 8 in Nagaland), it is found that most of the farmers prefer crops like rich, maize, millet, potatoes, beans and sweet potatoes. Such crops are mainly cultivated for their self-consumption (household consumption and prefer alcohol preparation for drinking and merrymaking during the festival). Few farmers prefer mustard, pineapple, ginger and orange plantation in their cropping pattern. Such cultivation is more into market orientation. They earn money from such crops that support family, education for their children. Most of them do not avail any financial support or loans from the government.

There is number of innovations that are based on farmer's knowledge and practices such as generating variety in seed crops, fencing, harvesting techniques, and the introduction of socially value tree. They are discussed as follows.

The generation of new variety is a part of innovation system in any agricultural practice. Introduction of new seed varieties in different crops through various ways in this practice. The womenfolk collect the mature seeds for further storage during the time of harvesting. Such type of seed collection has been practiced among *Angami, Ao, Sema, Tangkhul, Kuki, Mao, Monsang and Kabui* tribes in Nagaland and Manipur. In case of storage of maize, the farmers stored maize before they are mature. The immature cobs are boiled and hung in the kitchen to dry. Boiling is required to avoid the cobs drying out. This is a local innovation recently

developed to avoid possible loss of maize to rodents and insects. The varieties of rice seed are exchanged between or among the communities. Government institutions and other programmes also play a vital role in bringing new crops into the field.

Farmers' harvesting techniques are one of the important innovative ideas in the context of shifting cultivation. The local farmers (*Tangkhul, Kuki, Mao, Monsang and Kabui* tribes in Manipur) use scarecrows in the crop fields to avoid crop damage by animals. Mostly the scarecrow is made of maize or millet straw and a head made from an earthen pot or similar rounded structure. It is generally placed on a bamboo pole in the middle of the field. The process is an age-old practice and a relatively effective strategy to frighten the birds, monkeys and other animals in the field (Saikia and Bhaduri, 2006). The local farmers use a beating stick to separate grain such as millet seed from the plant. The technology is simple and uses only sticks and some rope. When the stick hits the floor, the small sticks thresh the grain three five times faster than a single stick used in other areas. Traditionally the cultivators used the tools like *cheirong*, henhoe, *dao*, rack, *thangol* (sickle), baskets. *Cheirong* is used for separation of grain from cut plants, henhoe is used digging the soil before plantation, *dao and thangol* is used for cutting crops, rack is used to mix the flying ash after the field is burnt and also used in separation of full grain and empty grain and baskets are usually used to carry seeds, vegetables and firewoods. Recently, new tool like spades, modified in henhoe are started to use in *Angami and Ao* community. The changes and modifications of the tools are brought by interactions with neighbouring areas along with efforts by the local blacksmiths (ibid).

The introduction of the socially valued tree is also an interesting innovation adopted by some communities in the region. *Angami, Ao and Sema* tribes believe that there are some socially valued trees in the community. Nepalese Alder (*Alnus Nepalensis*) is one of them. Such species grows at high altitudes. It is a pioneer species of

degraded lands and does not require fertile soil (Rathoreet al, 2010 and Ramakrishnan, 2007). The tree improves soil fertility by fixing atmospheric nitrogen into the soil. The tree sheds its leaves to retain moisture and mulches and gives humus to the soil. The wood is also used for various domestic needs such as fuel, charcoal burning, construction and specially used for making luxury furniture. The community always has the idea of its ecologically important species for soil fertility management. They have perfected the technology of accommodating the tree in their field so much so that it becomes a socially valued tree (Rathoreet al, 2010; Ramakrishnan, 2008 and 2007).

The local innovation has brought transition to conventional practice which essentially upholds the key components of shifting cultivation that is slash and burn with changes in the geometry of land use. The change in preparation of field from along the slope to across the slope leading to substantial soil retention achieved without heavy inputs of modern technology. It is considering an intermediate from shifting to settled farming but retain of the age old practice. It is a local innovation which the cultivators have adopted feeling the constraints of limited agricultural lands due to their increasing population pressure and the state control the forest resource (NEPED and IIRR, 1999).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since time immemorial, shifting cultivation is inextricably linked with the socio-economic and cultural life of indigenous people in the northeast region, and it is closely connected with their rituals and festivals. The geographical location and lifestyle of the people make inevitable for such agricultural practices. The people indulging in such practices is gradually decreasing because people have tended to seek the other way of life which are less labour intensive, more productive and lucrative (such as private business, animal husbandry, services and government sector). However, it is still prevalent in many hill areas of the northeast region.

Introduction of new alternatives in the plantation of cash crop like ginger, turmeric, pineapples under shifting cultivation has been a successful innovations and initiatives in the northeast region. With an aid from the government, the local farmers are given planting materials and financial help to wean people from the shifting cultivation. Such agricultural practice continues to be viewed in a deprecatory manner. However, innovations involved in the cultivation brought by the local farmers, the scientists and other public-private collaborations are still underway and continue to modify the way of practicing from time to time.

The success of the NEPED, WDPSCA and ICAR project is a good example of how trial ability has been applied properly while diffusing knowledge in the region. Moreover, the indigenous knowledge on the shifting cultivation, the number of people dependent on it, the rate which is being replaced by other land-use systems or other alternatives given, and the environmental consequences of these changes are imperative to consider before the introduction of any new mechanism. The following recommendations would be essential for sustainable practices and development of shifting cultivation in the northeast regions of the country.

- i) Choosing an area for shifting cultivation should be made in such a manner that reducing of forest degradation and environmental pollution must be given utmost priority (choosing a low lying and less forested area, reducing the burning of forest leaves, branches and trees, promoting the use of organic fertilizers and so on)
- ii) Introduction of horticulture and more cash crops (wheat, tea, sugarcane, spices, mustard seeds, groundnuts, orange, almond, wild sunflower, passion fruit and so on) on a large-scale plantation should be promoted.
- iii) More awareness campaigns and initiatives from the government on the introduction of scientific, sustainable

technology to improve production and sharing of knowledge in the current practices.

- iv) Public-private partnerships should be enhancing so that the production of crops uplift from subsistence farming to market oriented farming.
- v) Finally, the indigenous people rights towards land, territories and resources must be recognised and encouragement to participate in decision making at the time of policy formulation.

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Religious and Cultural Syncretism in Medieval Bengal

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to focus religious and cultural syncretism between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal during medieval period for more than five hundred fifty years from Turkish conquest of Bengal to the Battle of Plassey (C: 1204-1757) on the basis of original sources with special reference to contemporary Bengali Vernacular literature. In this connection it is necessary to mention that the connotation of Medieval Bengal here is not the partitioned Bengal of today but the geographical Vangadesa where the people of the land speak in Bengali. Medieval Bengal comprised the modern provinces of West Bengal, some parts of Bihar, Orissa, Tripura, Assam and the modern state of Bangladesh. I have also sought to study in this paper how this syncretism between the Hindus and the Muslims was revealed in the religious and cultural spheres of life of the Bengalis through Sufism, Pirism, Nathism, Vaishnavism, Kartabhaja sect, Mullaism, life style of the scroll painters, etc. under the period of study. Syncretism was also noticeable between the two communities in their way of lives as reflected in popular cults, local customs, superstitions, religious rites, marriages, social ceremonies and gamut of literature during contemporary Bengal. It was visible in art, architecture, painting, music and some other field of Bengali mind. However, the main objective of the present paper is to finally focus the trends of syncretism in religion and culture of Bengal under the period of study.

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This paper is an attempt to focus on religious and cultural syncretism between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal during medieval period on the basis of original sources with special reference to contemporary Bengali Vernacular literature. I have also sought to study in this paper how this syncretism between the Hindus and the Muslims was revealed in the religious and cultural life of the Bengalis under the period of study.

Medieval Bengal has neither any authoritative nor any continuous contemporary socio-cultural historiography. Mirza Nathan's Persian work *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*, "an oasis in the desert of historical ignorance", in Sir J. N. Sarkar's words, is a political history, which hardly throws light on the social condition of Bengal.¹ Nevertheless, Bengali literature had attained its maturity and had definitely come into being during the period under review in Bengal. Though no original work on the social history of Bengal exists, the typical Bengali mind was truly portrayed in the literature of this period.

Theoretically Islam has no relation with Hinduism. Islam and Hinduism stand in marked contrast to each other. Islam stands for transcendence; the command of Allah is all, Islam is complete resignation to the will of God and the Muslims are the resigned ones. Hinduism stands for immanence; the "divine without" is an expression of the "divine within". Its ultimate wisdom is the aphorism, "Thou art that", and this leads to incarnations of the deity and his worships in many forms. On the plane of social teaching Islam inculcates the idea of brotherhood making every man equal before God, irrespective of caste, nationality, race or colour.² Contrasted with this is the religiously sanctified inequality of castes in Hindu society.³

Islam and Hinduism, the two disparate religions came to exist and thrive side by side with each other after the Turks (Muslims) became rulers of Bengal and indeed, of the whole of India. On the one hand, there was the ancient and tolerant Hindu civilization constituted various elements, on the other, there appeared the

dynamic and expansive Islam of Semitic origin, which believes in one God, one Prophet, one scripture and one empire.

The Hindus and the Muslims have been living together in Barak-Surma Valley as well as Bengal for about 800 years. Islam penetrated Indian lives into three phases: 1. Conflict, 2. Mutual Appreciation and 3. Assimilation.⁴ The third phase of assimilation is very significant in the cultural and religious lives of Bengal under the period of review. This trend of assimilation among the Bengalis will be highlighted in this paper. The contemporary vernacular literature informs us that both the Hindus and the Muslims broke the barriers of religious injunctions and performed common worships in many cases- such as Pir Worship. It is to be noted that syncretism was visible in Sufism, Pirism, Nathism, Neo-Vasnavism, Kartabhaja sect, life-style of the Bauls, practices of the scroll painters etc. and the gamut of Bengali literature namely *Mangal Kavyas*, *Vaisnava* literature, translated works, *Pir* literature, *Sufi* literature, Punthi literature, *Atharo Bhatir Panchali*, *Purba Banga Gitika*, *Mymensing Gitika* etc. witness syncretism in the Bengali society.

Pirism:

The Pirs fostered Hindu-Muslim syncretism in Bengal including Barak-Surma Valley during the medieval period. 'Pir', a Persian word, literally means "old" but it denotes a "mystic guide" (e.g. Shah, Sheikh, Murshid or Usthad), who initiates disciples (murids) into mystic orders. While all Pirs are Sufis, all Sufis are not Pirs. The belief in Pirs and worship in their shrines did not originate in India but were brought from Afghanistan, Persia and Iraq by the immigrants, along with their religious orders. But in India in general and Bengal in particular, certain factors facilitated the penetration of saint worship into Muslim society. Pir worship was a form of joint worship of the Hindus and the Muslims in Medieval Bengal. The large settlement of foreign Muslims side by side with the Hindus and the converts enabled Islam to strike its root deep in society. The worship of local god and goddesses largely contributed

to it. On the other hand, in 1831 Garcin de Tassy held the saints to be “substitutes for the Musulmans, in the place of the numerous gods of the Hindus... As amongst the saints, venerated by the Musulmans, there are some personages who professed the faiths of the Vedas, so several of the Musulman saints of India, are venerated by the Hindus.”⁵ *Ghazi Vijaya* and *Satya Pir Vijay* of Faizullah (16th Century); and *Ray Mangal*, *Shasti Mangal*, *Sitala Mangal* and *Kamala Mangal* (17th Century) of Krishna Das and *Dharma Mangal* of Ruparam all indicate clearly that Bengali Hindus were devoted to Pirs in the late 16th and the 17th centuries, because the Vaisnavas had lost some of their influences over the society at that time. A large number of Hindus began to regard these pirs as their gods, and their tombs were visited by the Hindus and Muslims alike. Again the pre-existing *guru-chela* relationship of the Hindus found a similar ideal in the *pir-muridi* relationship of Islam. To the convert Muslims, pirs are like the Tantric gurus and their tombs and *dargahs* (shrines) were like the Chaitayas and stupas of the Buddhists. As a result of Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis, worship of numerous pirs originated in Bengal, e.g. Satya Pir, Manik Pir, Kalu Ghazi, Bara Khan Ghazi and others. A medieval Bengali poet wrote,

“The pirs of the Muslims became the gods of the Hindus.
They manifested themselves and were worshipped by both the
communities.”⁶

So pir worship was a great example of syncretism between the Hindus and the Muslims and it developed cordial relation between the two communities.

Every pir belonged to a mystic order. The Muslim reverence for the living pir had its counterpart in the Hindu veneration for the guru or gosain. *Sijdah* (Prostration) of the *murid* (disciple) to the *pir* was comparable to the *Sastanga Pranipath* of the Hindu *chela* to guru. This was considered by orthodox Muslims as most sacrilegious. The *pir* was supposed to possess miraculous powers: curing diseases, making sterile women conceive, and even reviving

the dead to life and causing rain to fall (as Shah Karam Ali of Jagannathpur reportedly did in Tippera).⁷

Gradually the sanctity of the sites of the pirs also spread among the Hindu masses. There is mention of the old *pirs* and hermitages of the *pirs* of Bengal in the adorations of the various directions (*digvandana*) in *Dharma Mangal*, *Chandi Mangal*, *Manasa Mangal*, *Purba Banga Gitika (East Bengal Ballad)*, *Mymansieng Gitika* (ballad) and other poetic works. In other words it can be safely asserted that Hindu popular literature had spaced earmarked in *Mangal Kavyas* for Muslim *pirs* and the places associated with them. So it is an irrefutable sign of Hindu-Muslim syncretism. The opinion of those historians who have drawn a picture of uninterrupted intolerance and oppression during this age is not true. As a result of the growing influence of pirs on Bengali society, the intensity of the clash and hostility of the initial Muslim conquest gradually decreased. Had it not been so, there would certainly have been no reference to such adoration in popular Hindu religious poems.

Towards the end of the 17th century Sitaram Das, a Hindu poet adored the Muslim pirs in the long invocation of his work from the core of the heart. This seems to be a very good symptom of cultural assimilation. Again, in the early 19th century, Faizullah, the author of *Satya Pir Panchali*, wrote in the *vandana* of his work,

“I shall first of all salute Pir Niranjana and then sing in praise of Muhammad Mostufa and Panjatan. After making concentration I worship Sher Ali and Fatima for whom Hassan and Hussain were born. I worship the goddess Sati and other chaste women. I worship Daibaki, Rohini and mother Sachi who gave birth to Gorachand (Sri Chaitanya). The poet Faizullah dedicated to truth sings thus.”⁸

Here the Muslim poet showed his regard for the great personalities, so we can argue that there was a suitable environment of syncretism in the society that is why the Muslim poets invoked and adored Hindu goddesses in his verses, otherwise the voice of the poet would have been different.

In the literature that grew on the Pirs, i.e. The Pir ballads, we get a blending of Dharma Thakur of the Buddhists, the pir of the Muslims and the Narayan of the Hindus in the *Pir Panchalis* (poetical works praising the glory of the Pir) composed in the 17th century, especially towards its later part.

Towards the closing period of the Mughal rule in Bengal the first effort towards the fusion of religions between the Hindus and the Muslims through the Medium of the ballad of Satya Pir and Satya Narayan. Sukumar Sen says that the scribes of the pir ballads were Hindus, the singers were Muslims, but their composers were the poets of both communities. Sen states further that numerous Hindu writers from West Bengal to Assam composed Satya Narayan or Satya Pir Panchalis by equating Rahim of Mecca and Rama of Ayodhya. There are considerable similarities between the ballad of Faizullah of West Bengal and the Panchali of Rameshwar Bhattacharya. The story of Faizullah contains clear hints of cultural assimilation. He has saluted the adorable deities of both communities in the beginning and then writes,

“You are Brahma, you are Vishnu and you are Narayan,
Listen, O Ghazi, pay heed to yourself to preaching in the
assembly (i.e. instead of fighting)”.⁹

As regards the contrariety between Brahminism and Islam the Brahman says that one loses his caste by reading the Quran as at its very beginning there is the word Bismillah. In reply Satya Pir gives the following argument,

“Except one Brahma, no two Brahma exist, the Lord of all is one Niranjana Gosain, in whose name Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar utter prayers. In one pore whose skin lies the endless universe. Without hands, without legs, he holds the world. He has no mouth to eat, he hears without ears, sees without eyes. None can recognize Him though He is omnipresent. Bismillah is but another name of that very same Niranjana: Vishnu and Bismillah are not at all distinct”.¹⁰

So Satya Pir, Satya Narayan, Vishnu and Bismillah, Allah and Niranjan have all become fused into one. Hence the view of Ramesh Chandra Majumdar that Satya Pir was the God of the Muslims and Satya Narayan of the Hindus does not appear to be correct, at least at the time of the rise of this worship.

From 16th to 18th centuries various local Pir cults grew up in Bengal with traditions and legends around some Muslim saints (pirs) and mythical heroes of uncertain identity which became very popular among the masses of the both communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. Khawajah Khizir, Pir Badr, Zindah Ghazi, Madar Pir, Panch Pir etc. are very important among them. They were worshipped by the masses irrespective religion. The Muslims forgot Islamic dictum that a Muslim would worship none except Allah and the Hindus did not confine them to the narrow wall of religious boundary and both of them became the devotees of the pirs and made them busy in the invocation of the Pirs. So it is a clear evidence of syncretistic culture of Bengal.

Sufism:

The contribution of the Sufis in the field of religious syncretism in Bengal deserves mention. Before judging the role of the Sufis for syncretism it would be profitable to see how Sufism is defined. If mysticism deals with the inner and emotional life of man, Sufism seeks to give a mystic interpretation of the religious life in Islam. Though not a sectarian religion outside Islam, it differs from orthodox Islam in its view of the attitude of the heart towards God and problems of life. The Sufis seeks to explore the spiritual world not through the cold formalism of the law (Shariah) but through the warm mystic path of way (Tariqah), of yearning after and coming to union (wasl) and fellowship with God. Essentially, therefore, it is a faith, representing a spiritual, emotional and esoteric reality. Browne has rightly described Sufism as a “system of pantheistic, idealistic and theosophical mysticism.” According to Islamic theory Sufism was born in the bosom of Islam. Louis Massiagnon, the

French orientalist and Reynold Arnold Nicholson and Arberry, the two British scholars, imply that Sufism is essentially Islamic, the Quran and Hadith supplying its basic frame work. No doubt, they told about early stage of Sufi terminology. But it is not historically correct to hold that Sufism was not influenced by foreign ideology and elements. Even mysticism was prevalent before Islam among different peoples- the Chinese, the Indians, the Jews, the Persians and the Greeks. So with the expansion of Islam in different parts of the world, Sufism or Islamic mysticism came to adopt different forms.¹¹

Sufism came to India from central and west Asia and penetrated Indian lives both in the towns and villages. It came to Bengal before the Turkish conquest of Nadia by Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji. Since the middle of the 13th century the number of the Sufis was increasing and in the 14th century they reached their zenith. They established shrines in different parts of Bengal and propagated Islam. The Brahminical society of Sena period lost its control on the masses then. There was neither a religious personality nor a guru among the Hindus who could console the sufferers. In this critical juncture of Hinduism, the lower class Hindus were very much impressed by the liberal and democratic ideas of the Sufis and their supernatural activities and was interested to embrace Islam.¹²

Historians believe that there are apparent similarities between Indian Hindu thought and Sufi doctrine of Islam, especially in their developed form.

Arnold Nicholson was convinced that the idea of Fana (Self-annihilation, passing away into universal Being) “is certainly of Indian origin” (probably from Buddhist nirvana). The German scholar Richard Hartmann opined that Sufism (in its earliest period) is inwardly permeated by Indian theosophy. In the 17th century Prince Dara had noticed several Indian elements in Sufism. R.C.Zahner, Formerly Spalding Professor at Oxford University,

has recently examined this critically and concluded that Sufism is Vedanta in Muslim dress. He said that some fundamental tenets of Sufism about the Absolute or God and the relation of individual souls to it were possibly derived from the Vedanta of Sankara. On the other hand, Hindu mystic tradition, typified by Vaisnavism influenced Sufism. The relation between man and God is like master and servant in Islam. And in Vaisnavite Hinduism it is like lover and his beloved. In relation with God the Sufi concept of *Ashek-Masuk* is more influenced by Hinduism than Islam. So we can say that Sufism has changed its colour in Bengal as well as in India. Obviously it is a trend of Syncretism. Enamul Haque writes, "In the lowly *Khanaqahs* of the Sufis and the humble *Astanahs* of *darwishes*, both the Hindus and the Muslims used to meet together and exchanged their views. Liberal views and fraternizing influence of the Sufis were daily drawing the two people of different religions closer and closer, and ultimately during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the two communities were greatly united together by the inalienable bond of the mutual toleration and fraternity."¹³

In the later period the role of the Sufis for the development of syncretistic culture between the Hindus and the Muslim was remarkable. The Bauls and the Sahayias are the off-shoots of Sufism in Bengal. They also played very important role for peace and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims in the society of United Bengal. Lalan Faqir is the most famous among the Bauls. One of his song is quoted below for better understanding of the role of the Bauls for assimilation and syncretism in Bengal---

"God ever presents at the door of the devotee and he does not make any distinction of caste and creed, between a Hindu and a Muslim. As the world is lighted by the rays of the moon, so every living being is born out of the same Divine Spirit."¹⁴

Here Lalan is arguing oneness of human being and it is more than a sign of syncretism. The Bengali society responded to Lalan's call.

Nathism:

Nathism was born of the fusion of the old Yoga system of Patanjali, Tantricism of the Buddhists and the Hindus and the Saiva-Agama theory of the Pala age. Adinath (Siva) was its supernatural originator. His attendant Matsyendra Nath or Mina Nath was the first human guru. In the 10th century this Natha doctrine extended to Bengal, Assam, Nepal, Tibet and Northern India and later to Peshwar and Kabul.¹⁵ The Natha saints were not Brahmins. They were liberal and accepted the essence of different doctrines. Anybody could profess the Natha doctrine, irrespective of caste and religion.

Matsyendra or Minanath and Goraksanath were very important Natha saints. The Natha literature has grown around the stories associated with them. In the subsequent ages there were Muslim devotees of Nathism. Natha and Sufi literature mutually influenced each other for four hundred years (13th-16th centuries). They transformed Matsyendra first into 'Machhandar-Machhandali' and still later into 'Mochra Pir'. Hence innumerable Muslim words and similes have been used here and there in Natha literature. The influence of Islamic spirit and literature on it can be imagined. On the other hand the influence of the Natha philosophy on the Muslim Sufis is seen in a Hathayogic Tantrik religious book of the Nathas written in Sanskrit, the *Amrita Kundu* (The Reservoir of Nectar).¹⁶ During the 15th-18th centuries the Sufi poets being inquisitive of yoga (abstract devotion and communion with the Supreme Being) had translated the system into Bengali. The name of Shukur Mahud's *Gopichander Sannyas* and Faizullah's *Goraksha Vijaya* can be mentioned in this context for their contribution to Natha literature. Sayyid Sultan of Sylhet effected a fusion between Yoga and Sufism and composed *Jnana-Pradip* and *Jnana-Chautisa*. Of course he strongly announced that he did not Hinduise Islam. But Hindu elements were found in his writing.

Vaisnavism:

While Islam was spreading in Bengal, a new force arose which was destined to arrest its pace with the philosophy of equality and brotherhood under the leadership of Sri Chaitanya (1486A.D.-1533A.D.). The Bengalis became transformed into an entire and integrated nation by the cords of Bhakti of Chaitanya. He had deep love and vast sympathy for human beings. Many poets composed verses about him and his philosophy. The poems versified by the love of God and Radha-Krishna love or dalliance are known as 'Vaisnava Kavya'.

The evidence gleaned from Vaisnava literature throws light on both sides of the picture of social and cultural syncretism in Bengal.

Brindaban Das and Krishnadas Kaviraj were the two most famous authors of the Vaisnava literature in the Sultanate Bengal. They wrote that the qazi of Nabadwip tortured the Vaisnavas. But they were not tortured out of communal feeling but for political reasons. The non-Vaisnavas like the Saktas and the Naiyaiks complained to the qazi against the Vaisnavas to ban Namkirtan. The qazi ordered to ban Namkirtan for avoiding conflict between the Vaisnavas and non-Vaisnavas among the Hindus. But it is true that there is not a single instance that the Muslim masses opposed Vaisnava movement in any way.¹⁷

It is to be noted in this connection that being angry at the decision of the qazi Sri Chaitanya raided the house of qazi with his followers in Nadia, the latter referred his friendly relations with Chaitanya's maternal grandfather, Nilambar Chakrabarty.

“According to village relationship Chakrabarty is my uncle,
Village relationship is purer or truer than even blood relationship.
Nilambor Chakrabarty is your grandfather,
So in this connection you are my nephew.”¹⁸

R.C. Majumdar has ridiculed qazi's expression. No doubt the qazi has referred to the village relationship for self-defence, but

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it is also important to live in a society peacefully. There was a difference in the orthodox society between the two communities, but they maintained friendly and cordial relations.

Even the Brahmins used to imitate the Muslim practices. Jayananda indicates the true identity of many Hindus of those days.

“The Brahmin will retain beards and read Persian
With socks on their feet and stick in hand, they will hold a canon.
A few will recite the *Masnavi*”.¹⁹

He further informs us that Jagai and Madhai, two brothers and Brahmins devoted to Vaisnavism used to read *Masnavi*.

“By reciting *Masnavi* they stay in forest of reeds.”²⁰

These are the clear indications of social and cultural rapprochement between the Muslims and the Hindus in medieval Bengal.

Vainavism borrowed many Islamic elements, particularly Sufi elements. Enamul Haque have sought to trace parallels between Vainavism and Sufism, viz. *dasha* and *hal* (ecstasy); *Krishnanama* and *Zikr* (recital of God’s name); *kirtana* and *sama* (Sufi musical gatherings) and attribute the deep pantheistic monotheism of Vainavism, its emphasis of Divine love and anti-caste attitude to Sufi influence.²¹

It is very interesting to note that many Muslim poets appeared with Vainava inclination in Mughal Bengal. They preached the message of religious syncretism, tolerance and synthesis in their poems. Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee has traced 162 Muslim poets with Vainava sentiments in his book, *Banglar Vainavbhabapanna Mussalman Kavir Padamanjusha*. Unfortunately their dates are not always available. However irrespective of their dates the sentiments underlying their writings are significant and point to valuable conclusions. While Sashibhusan Dasgupta hold that most of them belonged to the 19th and the 20th centuries, it is quite plausible to hold, with Jagadish Narayan Sarkar that

traditions of such mutual toleration can be traced much earlier in contemporary literature even outside Bengal as well as in 'Islami Bangla Sahitya'. In the writing of Sufi Pir Qutban of Northern India (*Mrigavat*, 1512), and a few other authors such traditions are available. Again Malik Muhammad Jaisis, (of Awadh) *Padmavat* (1520-40 A.D.) in Awadhi preaches the message of Hindu-Muslim fusion. Mian Sadhan's Awadhi *Meinasat* (i.e. *Mayna Sati*) also bears the clear impress of Vaisnava lyrics. This tradition was also followed in Bengal. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar says that even most of the poets belonged to the 18th century; some at least belonged to the earlier periods. Most of these Vaisnava poets were inhabitants of Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) - versifiers of Srihatta (Sylhet), Chittagoan, Tripurra and Mymensingh exceed in number those of other places.²² Asim Roy says, "Ranging from the sixteenth down to the early years of the present century, these Muslim Pada compositions have been gradually recovered and published in relatively old and recent publications of Bengali Padas."²³ From these arguments we may hold that there were a few Muslim poets with Vaisnava sentiments during the Mughal period. It is needless to say that the cultural value of the poems and songs is very important and significant. Even though these are poems and historical source these are nonetheless valuable as throwing light on the mental outlook and approach of the writers. The trend of composing poems by the Muslims with Vaisnava sentiments is especially helpful in understanding the oneness of the Bengali people and broadness of their mind.

Only a few Muslim poets with Vaisnava inclinations like Daulat Qazi and Alaol, of the 17th century, will be mentioned here. The Sufi devotee, the poet Daulat Qazi, was at once the greatest Bengali Muslim poet and one of the most poets of old Bengali literature. The Poem "Sati Mayna", which Daulat Qazi composed on the basis of Mian Sadhan's Awadhi "*Mainasat*" of the 16th century, is an incomplete Panchali poem. In "*Sati Mayna*" along with the adoration of Allah and Rasul (i.e. Prophet) is mentioned the Dwarka of Krishna, dramatic performances of description of twelve months

(Baromasya Pala), various melodies, stories of the Puranas, Hindu dresses and Kirtan. It also bears the clear impress of Vaisnava lyrics. The name of Alaol, an inhabitant of Faridpur district of Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh), in the seventeenth century is very important in this field. His best work is '*Padmabat*', which was written in 1651 at the request of Magan Thakur, a minister of Arakan Raj. It is the Bengali adoption of '*Padmabat*' of the Awadhi poet, Malik Muhammad Jayasi.²⁴

This work can rightly be considered a bridge of Hindu-Muslim fusion. Alaol was a gifted Bengali Muslim poet. He adopted a pure Vaisnava theme for his lyric. He writes on Radha's secret meeting with Krishna going early in the morning and returning late at nightfall. For this she is taken to task by her sister-in-law. Radha finds some excuses to tide over the dilemma and difficulty. Such is the theme of the peace.

Most poems of the devout Vaisnavas can be regarded as Radha-Krishna allegories. The Sufi Pir and Vaisnava poet Syed Mortuza prays thus,

"Carry me across, carry me across, oh boatman Kanai
Oh Kanai, do thou ferry me across
Oh Kanai, thou art the custodian of the ferry ghat and the
watchman of the path.
I offer my fresh youth as the ferry fare.
The market time is well past, but there is no transaction.
See the sun has reached the meridian.
Says Syed Murtuza, oh, Radha, the milk-maid, Lost are all
milk-maids in the market of Kanaiya."²⁵

Though Lal Mamud was born in a Muslim family, yet he was a devotee of Krishna; he says of himself,

"Though born as a Muslim, I do not ever think that I shall be deprived of the sacred feet (of Krishna). Now Lal Mahmud has indeed accepted the name of Hare Krishna as his be-all and end-all."²⁶

He further says,

“Whether a Hindu or a Muslim, it is all the same to you, who consider the caste of one’s own son? A devotee (Bhakta) is best of all castes whether he is a chandal (low caste) or a chammar (cobbler). Some call you Kali; some call you Banamali (Literally, the gardener, here Krishna) and others call you Khoda and Allah: this is the secret (essence) of all secrets.”²⁷

Chand Qazi says that he was very much devoted to the songs of Krishna’s flute.

He writes,

“Chand Qazi says on hearing his (i.e. Krishna’s) flute I cannot restrain my tears.

In sooth, I will not live unless I see Hari.”²⁸

It is evident from the above examples that it was in Bengal that at one time the message of religious syncretism was uttered by the Muslims and what a degree of eagerness laid behind the message.

A few Muslim Vaisnava poets have indicated God by using the name of Radha-Krishna. To Hachhan Raja Chaudhury (Husain Raza) of Sylhet district there is no difference between Radha and Khoda. He addressed Radha as Rahim and Rabbani,

“I long for you, oh! You beautiful Radha, I yearn after you. For you Bengali Hasan Raja roams with tears. The Hindus call you Radha, I say you are Khoda. If I invoke you as Radha, the Mullahs and the Munshis prevent me. Hasan Raja says I will not allow this difference to exist whatever the Mullahs and the Munshis say is just nonsense.”²⁹

Again he says,

“Oh my precious Radha, oh my precious Radha, why does my mind hanker after you? Listen to me, Oh Radha you, the queen of the world. I do not agree that only the Hindus invoke you as Radha. Nothing exist except Allah, the rest is blank.

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Repeatedly does Hasan Raja call you Rahim and Rabbani and also Shuvani. He calls Allah-Allah, I know not except one.”³⁰

From the above verses we can easily understand that a revolutionary change came in the mind of the Bengali Muslim poets. Actually Islam does not believe in image worship. But here the picture was completely different from ideological point of view. They broke the narrow limit of religious injunctions, casting all hesitations, composed books on Hindu religion, composed song in honour of Radha, Krishna, Chaitanya and other Hindu gods and goddesses.

Even today after taking bath in the Ganges many orthodox Hindus, recite the Gangastak (hymn to the Ganga), composed in Sanskrit by Daraf Khan, the Muslim poet of Tribeni, Hooghly. Daraf Khan’s work proved his liberalism. But it is very interesting to note that Daraf Khan was felicitated by the contemporary Muslim poet instead of scolding him for his pro-Hindu attitude. The poet writes,

“At Tribenighat I adore Daraf Khan, whose water for ablutions was supplied by the Ganges.”³¹

The united devotional exercises of the two communities helped the integration between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal and it developed a common culture, a culture of syncretism.

Popular Cults, Local Customs, Superstitions, Religious Rites and Ceremonies

The Muslims ruled Bengal for more than five hundred and fifty years. During this long period both the Hindus and the Muslims came into close contact with each other. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar writes,

“As a result of long contact between the two communities, the lower classes of both the Hindus and the Muslims came to have common objects of worship. Members of one community appeared to the gods and saints of other, failing their own, during illness or distress”.

Buchanan found such mutual worship among the two communities. He suspected that some Qazis and Pandits used to do so in Rangpur, while in Gorakhpur even Muslims of foreign origin and high rank were influenced by Hindu practices through their womenfolk. Similar was the growth of the cult of Satya Pir (True Saint) and Satya Narayan (True God) among Muslims and the Hindus respectively without the use of any image; the god being 'very good natured and ever ready to 'concede trifles' in Bengal.

During medieval period a large number of poets, Hindus and Muslims of different places of East Bengal, composed lyric poems (*gitikas*) regarding the sorrows and joys of village people. Collectors gathered and preserved all these with care. Dinesh Chandra Sen collected these *gitikas* from them and edited and published books with the name of *Purba Banga Gitika* and *Mymansingh Gitika*. The exact date and year are not always available of all the *Gitikas*. In spite of that these are very important source-materials for the study of the social history of medieval Bengal under the rule of the Mughals and the Nawabs.

Purba Banga Gitika and *Mymansingh Gitika* manifest and witness amicable relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal. These refer to good mutual understanding among the votaries of two religions during the Mughal rule. A Muslim poet wrote in the adoration of a ballad named *Nurnneha O Kabarar Katha* ,

The Hindus and the Muslims are rope of a same bundle; someone says Allah Rasul, someone says Hari. Bismillah and Sri Bishnu are the same; when they are made different, they are called Ram and Rahim.

The poet tried to unite the Hindus and the Muslims on the same platform. He did not find any difference between Rama and Rahman except calling them in different name. Muslim Pirs and the Hindu gods are the same in his eyes. The poet's liberalism can be compared with the outlook of a great philosopher. These verses

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have a deep message for present day India wherein lie various forces like language, province and religion.

Another Muslim poet writes in *Pir Batasi Pala*, “After adoring you, O brothers, Hindu and Muslims I extend my adoration for the pirs and also I adore Mecca, Madina, Kasi and Gayathan.”³²

One can easily argue that the ballads were neither product of Hindu or Muslim culture, but of a single Bengali folk culture.

Kartabhaja Dharma (Religion):

Mutual religious practices were noticeable between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal between 16th to 18th centuries. Out of the mutual practices of both the communities, a new religious sect named ‘Kartabhaja Dharma’ grew up in Bengal in the 18th century. This sect was also known as ‘Satya Dharma’, ‘Satimar Dharma’, ‘Ekmoni Dharma’ etc. Aule Chand (birth is unknown, but died in 1769) was the founder of this sect and preached his Dharma in the Nadia district of Bengal, and had as his disciples Muslims as well as Hindus. From the school of Sri Chaitanya the Kartabhaja sect branched out and this sect preached the ‘Satya Dharma’ (True Religion). He left behind Bais Faqir (22 disciples), Ram Saran Paul, his wife, Saraswati Devi (Satima), his son Ram Dulal (Dulal Chand) and Kanai Ghose. They took the responsibility of preaching the spirit of ‘Kartabhaja Dharma’.³³ They also organized the sect and laid down its precepts in a series of songs. The doctrine of the Kartabhajas is as noted by Tarachand³⁴ given below.

1. There is only one God, who is incarnate in Karta.
2. The spiritual guide ‘Mahasaya’ must be all in all to his *Barati* or disciples.
3. The mantra or religious formula of the sect must be repeated five times a day as a means of salvation and of obtaining material prosperity.

4. Meat and wine must be abstained from.
5. Friday must be held sacred and should be spent in religious meditation and discussion.
6. There is no distinction in the cult between the upper, the lower or between the Hindus and the Muslims. A Musalman has more than once got the rank of a teacher. The members of the sect eat together, at least once or twice in a year.
7. No outward sign of adherence to the sect is required. A Hindu may retain his sacred thread, and a Muslim need not shave on becoming a member of the sect.
8. Fervid love or Bhakti is the only religious exercise necessary.

From the above doctrine of Kartabhaja sect it can be stated that this new sect accepted the theory of the unity of God, five prayers a day, Friday prayers, egalitarian concept and the idea of one leader from Islam. The doctrines of the sect are the mixture of Islam and Hinduism. That is why it was equally popular among the Hindus and the Muslims. The credit of the sect is that it brought the two communities in close contact with each other in the 18th century Bengal.

Mullaism (Priesthood):

There is no place of *Mullaism* or priesthood in Islam. But contemporary Bengali literature gives us ample information about the growth of *Mullaism* and the influence of the *Mullah* or Priest in the society. The Mullah was fairly well-versed in religious principles and daily practices of Islam. They were consulted by the villagers in the Muslim society and paid for their services. In his *Kavi kankan Chandī*, Mukundaram Chakraborty records the historicity of the above-mentioned statement.³⁵ The influence of the *Mullah* of Islam is comparable to that of the Brahmin *Purohit* of the Hindus.

Marriages:

There are numerous evidences in our vernacular sources that during Muslim rule in Bengal from the conquest of Nadia (1203) to the Battle of Plassey (1757) inter-religious marriages were evident between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal. As for example we can mention that Ilyash Shah (1342-57) married a Brahmin girl named Phulmoti of Village Vajra Jogini in Vikrampur and Sultan Sikander married a Hindu lady. The future Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah was born of this latter married.³⁶ This trend was continued in Mughal Bengal not only in the ruling class but also among the masses of the two communities of an extensive and profound scale. The Muslims did not follow the rigidity of the *Shariat* in matters of marriages with Hindu girls in Bengal. The practice of Hindu-Muslim mixed marriages was prevalent in the 17th century Bengal. Most of the contemporary literatures inform us about the love affairs of Muslim boys with Hindu girls and their devotion to each other. What does it mean? It is the clear indication of the trend of the contemporary society under the period of review as reflected in the literature. Even the Hindu girls were not converted to Islam before their marriage. The Muslim considered them as *Ahl-i-Kitab* like the Jews and the Christians, who got revelation of God through their Prophets. On the other hand the Hindu girls did not treat them as untouchables, Yavanas and Melechchas. The Qazi used to perform Hindu –Muslim marriages according to Muslim practice, but never raised the question of conversion of the Hindu girls to Islam before marriage which was compulsory in Islam particularly for the cases of pagans. As for example we can mention the marriage Ratikala with Sultan Shah, the local king of Chamor. A contemporary poet writes,

“The Qazi wearing his dress come soon and performed the marriage ceremony thinking that Lord was within his easy reach.”³⁷

The Islamic *Shariat* was violated not only in this marriage but also many other inter-community marriages. This helped both the communities to come in close contact with each other.

J.N. Sarkar argues,

“It is very difficult to assess how far social union was secured through such inter-communal marriages. The Hindu women could not entirely give up the traditional manners and customs even after their marriages with Muslims. Numerous converted Hindus too have largely preserved their religious rites, manners and customs.”³⁸

His doubt is significant. To my mind, a man can change his religion, but it is not easy to change his ways of life. These neo-Muslims gave to Indian Islam as well as to that of Bengal an indigenous temper which made rapprochement between the two religions easy and natural.

Scroll Painters:

In the past many scroll painters lived in the districts of Midnapore, Burdwan, Murshidabad etc. But now this old-age community is going to be extinct. At present, the scroll painters are generally found in the neighbourhood of Midnapore. The religious faith of these painters is very popular. They do not belong either to the Hindu or to the Muslim community fully. Though they do not say their Namaj regularly, all of them say their Namaj on Id festival. Then they worship the god Vishwakarma with due pomp each year in the month of Bhadra.³⁹ The God Viswakarma is the chief artisan of the Gods and the presiding deity of all the branches of art.

Many customs of the social life of the scroll painters are similar to those of the Muslim society. For example, marriages between male and female cousins are very common occurrence. In the community of the scroll painter's widow marriage and divorce are being practised from the beginning as they are in the Muslim society. The scroll painters do not burn their dead bodies, but they bury them. It may be noted in some cases before burying the dead, the Hindu custom of singeing the mouth of the dead at cremations followed by the painters. The burial ground of the painter is situated

at a separate place. Since the religious rites and behaviours do not correspond either with the orthodox Hindus or orthodox Muslims. The pictures of these painters are an important instance of the folk-art of Bengal.⁴⁰ These pictures can in no way be described as having an Islamic trait in them. They were neither Hindus nor Muslims. Their life-style is still a symbol of united culture.

All the painters bear two names--- one is Hindu name and the other a Muslim name. When they visit a Hindu locality, they use for their Hindu names, but when they go to a Muslim-dominated locality they use their Muslim names.⁴¹ For example, the name of a painter may be Jatindranath Chitrakar and also Jainuddin Sheikh.

Conclusion:

Mughal Bengal was considered as the land of syncretism and assimilation. It was seen in every sphere of life in the society, religion and culture. The Muslims were largely influenced by the Hindu customs and ceremonies and vice versa in Bengal during the period under review. By observing such a life-style Emperor Babur rightly commented on it as "Hindustani way of life."⁴² This style was prominently visible in the religious and cultural lives of Bengal including Barak-Surma Valley during the period under study as reflected in the contemporary vernacular literature and other sources.

From the above evidence and analysis made in this paper, it can be safely concluded that not only an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding, tolerance and respect developed but also a trend of assimilation and syncretism was evolved in religious and cultural lives between the Hindus and the Muslim in Barak-Surma Valley and other parts of Bengal from the 16th to 18th centuries as reflected in the Bengali vernacular and other sources. This syncretism of the two communities marked the daily life of the masses outside the crooked circle of politics and above the complexities of the Holy Law of Islam and Hinduism. It must be admitted in this connection that orthodox Islam and Hinduism were also practiced in Bengal.

Orthodox Islam was practised in mosques, madrasahs, observance of fasts, saying of namaj, celebration of festivals and books written on *Hadith* and *Fiqh*.⁴³ Similarly, Hindu orthodoxy was also found in worship of gods and goddesses, celebration of *pujas* and their rituals and rites.⁴⁴ The two streams flowed side by side in Bengal. One was the popular religion more a way of life than strictly a religion and the other was the orthodox religion. But the syncretistic ideas influenced the entire nation as a whole during the period under review.

Notes and References:

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- ¹⁷ Brindaban Das Thakur, *Sri Chaitanya Bhagabat*, 4th edition published by Mrinal Kanti Ghosh, Calcutta, 440 Gauranga Era (not later than 1540), pp.18, 75.; Krishnadas Kaviraj, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, ed. by Atul Krishna Goswami, 3rd edition, Calcutta, 1325 B.S., p.122.
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- ¹⁹ Jayananda, *Chaitanya Mangal*, Atul Krishna Goswami (ed.), Calcutta, 1307 B.S.
- ²⁰ Ibid. *Masnavi* is written by Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi in Persian who was a great Sufi. It is next to the Quran and Hadith in importance and reverence to the Muslims.
- ²¹ Enamul Haque, *Bangae Sufi Prahab*, Calcutta, 1935, pp. 165-78.
- ²² Ibid, pp.89-90.
- ²³ Asim Roy, *Islamic Syncretistic Traditions in Bengal*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1983, p.i87.
- ²⁴ Md. Shah Noorur Rahman, op.cit. p.73.
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- ³² Ibid, p.539; Richard M. Eaton also discussed about the syncretic tendency of Bengali culture in chapter10- 'The Rooting of Islam in Bengal' in his book

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Women in Brahmanical Literature: Some Aspects

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Abstract

Earlier researches on early India have focused mostly on the aspects of society, economy, polity and art including the 'position of women'. The recent researches have turned their attention to the study of causes, consequences and nature of subjugation of women in the early society and emergence of patriarchy. The notion of patriarchy cannot be ignored while discussing women as it defines unequal gender relations where males were dominating and females were always subjugated. Besides, women's identity was known only through their male relatives, which in turn gave birth to a male dominated society. Consequently women's behaviour, reproduction and sexuality were controlled and guarded by male. Further, women were seen as a private property of men not having any existence of their own. It is in this background that present paper seeks to study the depiction of women as projected in Brahmanical texts and the patriarchal attitude towards women. The paper uses the Brahmanical literature such as: Manusmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Arthashastra, Ramayana and Mahabharata and focuses largely upon the private women.

Keywords: private women, progeny, guarded, female nature, pativrata, economic resources

Introduction

Earlier researches on early India have focused mostly on the aspects of society, economy, polity and art including the 'position of women'. The recent researches have turned

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their attention to the study of causes, consequences and nature of subjugation of women in the early society and some of them have been able to throw light on how gender as a social category can be used as an analytical tool to understand this subjugation. Feminist historians such as Uma Chakravarti,¹ Kumkum Roy,² and Shalini Shah³ have largely contributed in this field through re-interpreting the existing sources from feminist perspectives and gender studies (women) and using literary texts which were not focused in the conventional histories. This new scholarship has raised serious concerns about the identity of woman and argued that the roles of women as portrayed in the Brahmanical texts were mostly written from a male centric approach. The early scholars, largely under the influence of the nationalist school, have explained the position of women in early India as 'high'. However, younger generation of historians, using the feminist perspective has been able to locate a different picture of the position of women in early Indian society. Their writings clearly show that women's identity was known only through their male relatives, which in turn gave birth to a male dominated society. Consequently women's behaviour, reproduction and sexuality were controlled and guarded by male. Further, women were seen as a private property of men not having any existence of their own. It is in this background that present paper seeks to study the depiction of women as projected in Brahmanical texts and the patriarchal attitude towards women. The paper uses the Brahmanical literature such as: *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Arthashastra*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and focuses largely upon the private women.

I

In early Indian society two categories of women emerged: 1. dutiful and devoted wife also described as 'private' women, 2. the nuns and prostitutes/ courtesans termed as 'public' women. The private women included mother, daughter, sister which formed part of the household and most of the Brahmanical texts of the period centered their discussion on them. In the Brahmanical texts, the

patriarchal household or the *grha* is dominant. The *grhapati* or the male householder presided over the *grha* which consisted of a wife and sons in particular. For women, they had to move from one household to another and marriage served as a key means as it marked a shift in their roles from daughters/sisters to wives. Thus, it is through marriage that patriarchal domination was able to infiltrate. It is through marriage males can control and harness the procreative ability of women and direct it towards the birth of male progeny.⁴ Hence there is an obligation to control women's bodies in order to maintain the purity of the male line. Manu pointed out that women were created to be mothers to bear children while men were created to be the one who carry on the line.⁵ Further, Manu also mentions that the woman represents the field and the man to be the seed.⁶ Fertility was regarded as the most essential prerequisite for a wife in the patriarchal household and a barren wife was considered to be insignificant. Manu states that the wife is the visible form since she is the one who begets a child, cares for them when they are born.⁷ Similarly Yajnavalkya also echoes the same statement that the wife should be served and well-maintained and protected since it is the wife only who provides the man offspring.⁸ Procreating a son was considered to of great importance. Yajnavalkya states women should be attended and protected carefully because the continuity of the family lies on the wife who provides the man with a son, grandson and great grandson and for a man to attain heaven lies on the great deeds performed by them.⁹ There is a passage in the text which states: 'a faithful wife, married in accordance with the law and dedicated to revering the ancestors, may properly eat the middle ball from that (ritual) if she wishes to become pregnant with a son.'¹⁰ Thus it can be stated that birth of male offsprings was more favoured as compared to daughters.

The early marriage ensured greater control of parents. Jaya Tyagi has rightly argued that girls were married of at an early age to ensure the chances of the groom of keeping his family's lineage as well as to have control over the girl's reproduction.¹¹ Further, it has also been observed that men also see women as potentially a fertile

ground, a receiver and conserver of man's seed thus making full use of her fertility span.¹² Gerda Lerner opines that, 'By controlling women's sexuality through the requirement of prenuptial chastity and by the establishment of the sexual double standard in marriage, men assured themselves of the legitimacy of their offspring and thus secured their property interest.'¹³ Thus, a woman's body was only seen to function as a bag to carry the seed. Apart from this, it can be observed that a woman's body is regarded as a space where culturally coded and socially sanctioned norms are inscribed. This has also to do by training the girl child to serve others from a very young age. Hence the identification of women with their bodies becomes the root cause of their oppression in a patriarchal society.¹⁴ The subjugation of women's body finally led to their subordination and exploitation.

Certain alternatives were provided in the Brahmanical texts in which females were subordinated under male authority. Manu was the most ardent supporter of the idea who laid down that a girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything in her own house and that even in her childhood she remains under her father's control, in her youth under her husband and when her husband dies under her son.¹⁵ He also mentioned that even the weak husbands must strive to guard their wives.¹⁶ One of the reasons for controlling women's sexuality can be noted down from the clear statement of Manu where he says that 'for by carefully guarding his wife, a man guards his offspring, his character, his family, himself, and the Law specific to him.'¹⁷ Similar is the view of Yajnavalkya about the male control over female.¹⁸ In the Anusasana Parva of the *Mahabharata*, it depicts that women cannot be independent and should be guarded and protected. A passage from the epic states that: 'Women should always be protected by thee (from temptations and opportunities of every kind).'¹⁹ Bhishma in the Anusasana Parva has stated, 'O king, Mann, on the eve of his departure for Heaven, made over women to the care and protection of men, saying that they are weak, that they fall an easy prey to the seductive wiles of men,...'²⁰ Bhishma while narrating a story

has described that a lady approached Ashtavakra but he resisted her and turned her away. When he dissuaded her, the lady answered him that she is her own mistress and by accepting her, he incurs no sin. Ashtavakra replied, 'Women can never be their own mistresses. This is the opinion of the Creator himself, viz., that a woman never deserves to be independent.'²¹ In the *Mahabharata*, there are some other references which point out that women had to maintain their chastity. Draupadi while informing Satyabhadra about the duties of a wife tells her that one should not even talk in private to her own sons.²² Similarly Sandili says to Sumana that she never used to stay at the door of her house nor did she speak long with anybody.²³ Therefore it can be said that women were expected to perform their duties according to the ideals set by the society where women has subordinate position to men. Looking at this setup, it is can be said that women came to be dependent on the men. Manu admits that no man can completely guard women by force.²⁴ So to be able to exercise a control over women, he suggests that the husband should employ the wife in the collection and the disbursement of his wealth, in cleaning, in cooking food, and in looking after the household.²⁵ Other means were also adopted for controlling women. Yajnavalkya mentions that a woman whose husband is away from home, a wife should abandon playing, beautifying the body, joining societies and festivities, laughing and going to another's house.²⁶ From the above discussion it appears that women were controlled and subjugated. However, from a scrutiny of one of the stories of the *Mahabharata* it emerges that the position of women declined during this period. It is noted that earlier women were free and independent as noticed from the conversation between Pandu and Kunti²⁷ but later he mentions as to why women had to be confined to the husband.²⁸

Manu is not satisfied with the confinement approach and is of the view that due to their weaknesses they even cannot be confined. He writes 'By running after men like whores, by their [private women] fickle minds, and by their natural lack of affection these women are unfaithful to their husbands even when they are

zealously guarded here.²⁹ Thus Manu writes that knowing their nature, as it was born at the creation a man should make an effort to guard her.³⁰ Similarly in the *Ramayana* Agastya observed since time immemorial women cling to men in prosperity and abandon him in adversity. He further goes on about the way she speaks has been regarded to be as sharp as a sword and her moods can be compared to that of an eagle's flight.³¹ In another episode in the *Ramayana*, Queen Kausalya's lament to Sita before her departure with Rama into the forest stated about the nature of women as untruthful, heartless, unchaste, devious and vain, full of evil passions and the destroyer of long-honoured ties.³² There are also other statements in the *Ramayana* which project the female nature.³³ When Yudhisthira asked Bhishma that he wanted to hear about the disposition of women, Bhishma answered that 'women are said to be the root of all evil. They are all regarded as exceedingly frail.'³⁴ Similar statements which described the nature of women can be seen in the *Anusasana Parva*.³⁵

Attempts to regulate the female nature are discussed in terms of the duties of women as depicted at length in the Brahmanical texts and they focus significantly upon the concept of *pativrata*. Shalini Shah has explained the concept of *pativrata* which symbolizes the 'service role' of women.³⁶ Their duty was to serve their husbands and worship him as a god which has been termed as the *pativrata*. The duty of the wife towards her husband is clearly depicted in the *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Manu states that for women, 'the marriage ceremony equals the rite of Vedic consecration; serving the husband equals to the living with the teacher; and care of the house equals the tending of the sacred fires.'³⁷ This statement given by Manu clearly defines the duties of the wife. Manu writes that the wife after her father or her brother with the permission of her father, gives her to someone, she should then obey her husband while he is alive, and she should not violate her vow to her husband when he is dead.³⁸ Yajnavalkya states that wives should act according to/by the direction of their husband which according to him is the highest duty of a wife.³⁹ Further in

the next few verses he states that a wife should be devoted to the pleasure and to the welfare of her husband and hence such a wife then obtains renown in this world, and after his death attains the best.⁴⁰ The wife's duty to serve their husbands is also observed in the Anusasana Parva of the *Mahabharata*.⁴¹ Similar statements of a wife serving her husband as a god are noticed in the *Ramayana*.⁴² Other instances which provide the idea of *pativrata* in the *Mahabharata* include the dialogue between Draupadi and Satyabhadra, Uma and Mahesvari and Sandili and Sumana. Manu further says that a virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even though he behaves badly, or freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities.⁴³ Furthermore, the role that a woman as a wife should undertake in the household can be noticed in the *Mahabharata* when Kunti blesses Draupadi and tells her that she should wait on her husband anointed for the performance of grand sacrifices and she should be devoted to her husband. She further blesses her that she may be the mother of the long lived and heroic children.⁴⁴ Apart from performing the services to her husband, the wife is also required to provide her service even to other members of the household like Sandili who always waited upon and served her mother-in-law and father-in-law.⁴⁵ When a wife looks after the welfare of her husband then she shall be exalted and go to heaven⁴⁶ and even a virtuous wife who remains chaste when her husband has died goes to heaven just like chaste men, even if she does not have any sons.⁴⁷ Manu further says that even a woman who is not unfaithful to her husband but restrains her mind, her heart, speech, and body reaches her husband's worlds after death, and in doing so good people call her a virtuous woman.⁴⁸ But he further writes that if the wife is unfaithful towards her husband she is an object of reproach in this world and she is reborn again in the womb of a jackal and is tormented by the diseases born of her evil.⁴⁹ Thus if a wife was unfaithful to her husband she was looked down upon in the society while men were never perceived in this manner. This was not the end of the agony of the women. Sometimes, they were even compared with slave and hence deprived of the access to the economic resources and this aspect is discussed below.

II

The Brahmanical texts depict that women cannot have any access to economic resources. In the *Mahabharata*, it mentions that, ‘...a wife, a slave, and a son can never earn wealth for themselves. What they earn always belongeth to him who owneth them.’⁵⁰ Similarly is the approach echoed in the Sabha Parva, Udyoga Parva and Manu.⁵¹ However, Manu differentiates between the women of higher and lower stratum of women. The *Laws of Manu* does not recognize the role of women belonging to the higher stratum of the society as generating resources or participating in productive activities.⁵² But it provides insight whereby wives of lower orders are earning a livelihood, thus contributing to the generation of resources in the family.⁵³ From the text it is clear that ‘the above rule does not apply to wives of travelling performers or to wives who earn a living of their own, for such men get their women to attach themselves to men and, concealing themselves, get them to sexual liaisons.’⁵⁴ In this context, Kavita Kaur has argued that sexual liason is seen as a form of livelihood in the lower sections of the society. Therefore from the statement above it can be observed that wives of the lower orders were expected to earn a living for their families even from sexual services. Furthermore Gaur has argued that it should be remembered here that the authority was vested with their husband, and hierarchical relations within the household did not change although their wives were earning.⁵⁵

In the *Arthasastra* one can notice the wives assisting their husbands on the manufacture of white liquor on festive season for medicinal purpose.⁵⁶ Kautilya tells us that women belonging to the lower orders such as dancers (*talavacaras*), wandering minstrels (*caranas*), fishermen (*matsya*), fowlers, cowherds (*gopalakas*), vintners and others can accompany their male family members. He further goes on to say that the males of these groups give enough freedom to their women counterparts.⁵⁷ For going along with their male folk were not considered as an offence but if it is prohibited then they shall have to pay a fine.⁵⁸ Though Kautilya has pointed out

that women were having an access to earn their living but he also mentions that women of these groups such as women of actors(*natas*), dancers(*nartakas*), singers, musicians(*gayana- vadaka*), storytellers, bards(*kuslavas*), rope dancers (*plavaka*) and women who follow a secret profession shall be charged a fee per show of five *panas*.⁵⁹ Thus, the frequent mention of women of the lower strata in the text suggests that the women belonging to this community had better opportunity of accessing the material resources. Furthermore, one can observe the involvement of wives in their earning capacity where Kautilya states that ‘And the wife (shall not be held liable) for the debt incurred by their husband, if she has not assented to it except in the case of cow herds and cultivators tilling for half the produce.’⁶⁰ This indicates that their wives will be held responsible for the debt incurred by their husband whether it was taken with their assent or not. Kavita Gaur also asserts that the relationship of the husband and the wife belonging to the lower strata of the society can be compared to the conventional household. Thus one can notice that the responsibility of sharing the debt in lower sections of the society indicates the rights and responsibilities of both man and woman to earn a livelihood and wives would have generated enough resources for the family.⁶¹

Usually women of upper strata do not have much access to property or material resources other than their *stridhana*.⁶² Manu orders that the king should punish the relatives with the punishment of theft if they take away the *stridhana* of a woman when she is still alive. Here Manu makes reference to women who are barren or have no sons, those who have no families, who are faithful wives, widows or those who are ill.⁶³ Manu in chapter 9 makes mention of the *stridhana* or women’s property.⁶⁴ Apart from this, what she receives subsequent to her marriage and what her husband gives her out of affection- upon her death then the property goes to her children even if her husband is alive.⁶⁵ It asserts that when a mother dies, all uterine sisters and brothers should divide the maternal estate equally among themselves. If those sisters have any daughters, they should gladly give them also something from

their maternal grandmother's property.⁶⁶ By limiting and restricting women to *stridhana* it suggests that they were not expected to earn a living by themselves nor participate in any economic activity. Shalini Shah has opined that even if women were entitled to their *stridhana*, it mostly depends on the degree of control over the disposal and enjoyment which would determine the quality of their property rights. Furthermore, she goes on to say that the *stridhana* was not only women's wealth, but one that is given to women at the time of their marriage.⁶⁷ Manu also points out that women who are married under the *brahma*, *gandharva* and *prajapatya* marriage,⁶⁸ the property of woman is awarded to her husband alone if she dies without any offspring.⁶⁹ Manu also mentions that whatever property is given to a woman by her father goes to the unmarried Brahmin daughter, or to that daughter's offspring. Further, he makes it very clear that women should never alienate the common property of the family or even her own private property without the prior permission of her husband.⁷⁰

Yajnavalkya has also described the issue relating to inheritance rights. With reference to the wife's right to husband's property, he writes that in the case any person dies without leaving any of the twelve kinds of sons, then his wife, daughters, parents, brothers, nephews, siblings, his relatives, disciples and *brahmacaris* are entitled to his property. This rule according to him is applicable to all the *varnas*.⁷¹ *Yajnavalkya* also lays down that a wife should get a share in her husband's property if she is abandoned by her husband. He states, 'He who abandons an obedient and skilful, son-bearing and pleasant speaking wife should be made to give one-third of his property to her. If he has no property, he should maintain her.'⁷² In the *Anusasana Parva*, it is mentioned that the husband can give his wife some wealth.⁷³ *Yajnavalkya* also opines that after the death of the father and mother, all the sons should distribute the property and liability of their father equally.⁷⁴ But if the sisters are unmarried at the time of the partition, each brother should give one fourth part of his share or money equal to the value of one fourth part of his share for their marriage. This has been mentioned in the text that

states, 'And the sisters also, but by giving them, as an allotment, the fourth part of his own share.'⁷⁵ The position of daughter was further protected in case of the death of her mother by providing an exclusive right over her *stridhana*. She was considered the only heir of her mother's property. Yajnavalkya states that, 'Of the mother's (property) the daughters (shall take) the residue (after the payment) of debts.'⁷⁶

For Kautilya, marriage was considered as an important transaction. For him all transactions begin with marriage. He stated this in the form of the different marriages to be undertaken. Kautilya gives instructions regarding women's property as well as on widow remarriage and her property rights. For him, maintenance and ornaments constituted women's property. For him, 'maintenance is an endowment of a maximum of two thousand (*panas*) as to ornaments there is no limit.'⁷⁷ The chapter further discusses as to how the wife will use this endowment. The wife can make use of this property in maintaining her son, her daughter-in-law, or herself or whenever her husband is absent and has made no provision for her maintenance. But in certain cases such as calamities, disease and famine, in warding off dangers and in charitable acts, the husband, may make use of this property. Kautilya further says that if used in the *gandharva* and *asura* marriages, the husband shall return both with interest, if used in the *rakshasa* and *paichasa* marriages, he shall pay the penalty for the theft.⁷⁸ Regarding the property rights of women, Kautilya allowed that daughters can inherit the estate of their father, if they are born of pious marriages and there was no male offspring.⁷⁹ But widows were not accorded this right. Apart from the above, the text also describes living widows, their property rights, and their rights upon remarriage.⁸⁰ It is mentioned that the women shall settle on sons born to her from many husbands, hence she shall conserve her property in the same condition as she had received from her husband.⁸¹ Apart from this, the text further states that when a husband is dead, the widow if she is willing to lead a life of piety she shall at once receive the endowment and ornaments and the remainder of dowry. If after receiving these she remarries

again, she shall be made to return both with interest. However when she is eager to start again a family, then she shall receive at the time of remarriage what was given by her father-in-law and her late husband.⁸² But if she remarries against the wishes of her father-in-law, then she has to give up what was given to her by her father-in-law and her late husband.⁸³ The text indicates that widow remarriages was possible and was allowed in the society. On the other hand, the text also states that if the husband is alive and the wife is dead, then her sons and daughters shall divide the property among themselves. If there are no sons, the daughters shall be able to have the property.⁸⁴ Thus, this depicts a different picture where women were confined within the patriarchal domains of the society.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, one can observe that women were usually restricted to the private space. Her duty was to look after the welfare of her husband and his family members. If she looks after her husband and worship him as a god then she shall be exalted in heaven. Brahmanical lawgivers had put forward that women should always be under the control of a male head which justifies that they were different from men. While men were regarded to be socially independent and can move out of the household this was not the case for women. Her sexuality was protected and guarded in the patriarchal household in order to maintain the family lineage. Furthermore a woman's body came to be valued only in terms of their reproductive function so as to maintain the lineage. Another reason for women to be controlled by males was their female nature. If one does not control her thereby bringing about instability in the social order. With the dominance of patriarchy one can find that gender relations were not fully restricted. Further in terms of economic access, women were limited only to their *stridhana* and inheritance rights. But there were few women those who belonged to the lower orders who took part in certain economic activities and were earning a livelihood. By studying the Brahmanical texts, it has been observed that the males were having more rights to property

but certain relief was given to wives, daughters and widows who were not denied of property.

Notes (Endnotes)

- ¹ Chakravarti, Uma. 2007. *Every Day Lives, Every Day Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of 'Ancient India'*, Tulika Books, New Delhi.
- ² Roy, Kumkum. 2010. *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- ³ Shah, Shalini. 2012. *The Making of Womanhood Gender Relations in the Mahabharata*, Manohar, New Delhi.
- ⁴ Tyagi, Jaya. 2008. *Engendering the Early Household Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Grhyasutras Middle of the First Millenium B.C.E.*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp. 120-121.
- ⁵ Manu IX.96. (Hereafter Manu) Reference is from Doniger, Wendy and Smith, Brian K. 2000. *The Laws of Manu*, Penguin Books, New Delhi; Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- ⁶ Manu IX.33.
- ⁷ Manu IX.27.
- ⁸ Yaj. I.3.78. (Hereafter Yaj) Reference is from Vidyarnava, Late Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra (trans), 1918. *Yajnavalkya Smriti with the Commentary of Vijnanesvara Book 1 The Acharya Adhyaya*, The Panini Office Bhuvaneshvari Ashrama, Allahabad; Gharpure J.R.,(trans) 1939(Second Edition). *Yajnavalkya Smriti Volume II Part IV With the Commentaries of The Mitakshara by Vijnanesvara Bhikshu, the Viramitrodaya by Mitramisra and the Dipakalika by Sulapani Vyawaharadhyaya*, Bombay.
- ⁹ Yaj.I.3.78.
- ¹⁰ Manu III.262
- ¹¹ Tyagi, Jaya.2008, p. 128.
- ¹² Sheth, Surabhi D. 1992. 'Women's Sexuality: A Portrayal from Ancient Indian Literature,' *Manushi*, No. 71, Jul – Aug, p.19.
- ¹³ Lerner, Gerda.1986. *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, p.22.
- ¹⁴ Mathur, Kanchan. 2008. 'Body as Space, Body as Site: Bodily Integrity and Women's Empowerment in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.43, No.17 (Apr.26-May 2), p.55.

- ¹⁵ Manu V.147-148; Manu.IX.3. A similar statement is given in the *Mahabharata*. See, *Mbh*, Anusasana Parva, Section XLVI, p.25.
- ¹⁶ Manu IX.6.
- ¹⁷ Manu IX.7.
- ¹⁸ Yaj. I.3.85.
- ¹⁹ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section XLIII, p.16. (Hereafter *Mbh*) Reference is from Ganguli, Kisari Mohan (trans), The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa available at www.krishnapath.org/.../Mahabharata/Mahabharata-By_Kisari_Mohan_Ganguli.pdf accessed on 18.12.2017 at 3.30 p.m.
- ²⁰ *Mbh*, Anusasana Parva, Section XLVI, p.25.
- ²¹ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva , Section XX, p. 113.
- ²² This can be cited from the epic which states, ‘Foregoing all excitement and carelessness in the presence of men, conceal thy inclinations by observing silence, and thou shouldst not stay or converse in private even with thy sons, Pradyumna and Samva.’ See, *Mbh* Vana Parva Draupadi- Satyabhama Samvada Section CCXXXII, p.476.
- ²³ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section CXXIII, p.254.
- ²⁴ Manu IX.10.
- ²⁵ Manu IX.11.
- ²⁶ Yaj.I.3.84.
- ²⁷ *Mbh* Adi Parva, Sambhava Parva, Section CXXII, p.254.
- ²⁸ For details see, *Mbh* Adi parva Sambhava Parva Section CXXII, p.254.
- ²⁹ Manu IX.15.
- ³⁰ Manu IX.16; Manu IX.17; Manu II.213-215.
- ³¹ *Ram* Book 3, Chapter 13, p.30. (Hereafter *Ram*) Reference is from Shastri, Hari Prasad (trans.), 1952. The Ramayana of Valmiki A Complete Modern English Translation Volume 1 Bala Kanda and Ayodhya Kanda, London; Shastri, Hari Prasad (trans.), 1957. The Ramayana of Valmiki A Complete Modern English Translation Volume 2 Aranyka Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda and Sundara Kanda, London; Shastri, Hari Prasad (trans.), 1959. The Ramayana of Valmiki A Complete Modern English Translation Volume 3 Yuddha Kanda and Uttara Kanda, London.
- ³² *Ram* Book 2, Chapter 39, p.247.

- ³³ Some examples can be cited here, the female ascetic Anasuya the wife of Sage Atri mentions to Sita about denigrating women. See, Ram Book 2 Chapter 117, p.407; Queen Kaikeyi has been described as the destroyer and wicked woman by king Dasaratha. When Rama left for his exile she has been compared to a venomous serpent. See, *Ram* Book 2 Chapter 12, p.177; When Sita sent Lakshman for Rama's assistance, it can be noted that Lakshman was not willing to leave Sita alone. When Sita got angry at Lakshman, she said some cruel words to him in which he responded; ' . . . An ill-considered utterance from a woman causes no surprise. Negligent in her duty, fickle and peevish, a woman is the cause of dissension between father and son; truly I am unable to endure these words of thine that pierce my ears like flaming darts, . . .' For details see, *Ram* Book 3 Chapter 45, p.94.
- ³⁴ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva, Section XXXVIII, p.4.
- ³⁵ Bhishma narrates about the conversation between the Rishi Narada and the celestial courtesan Panchachuda where she goes on to tell about the true and eternal faults of women. For details see, Mahabharata Anusasana Parva Section XXXVIII, pp. 5-6; Further, Bhishma states: 'Woman is a blazing fire. She is the illusion . . . she is the sharp edge of the razor. She is poison. She is a snake. She is fire. She is verily, all these united together.' See, *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section XL, p. 7; In the same Parva another description is made with regards to the female nature. For details see, *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section XLIII, p.16.
- ³⁶ Shalini Shah further argues, 'In fact, *pativrata dharma* was meant to provide the ideology to school women in this role. This dharma was conceived not as a self –denying passive faith based solely on unquestioned devotion to the husband. . .' For details see, Shah, Shalini. 2012, pp.103-104.
- ³⁷ Manu II.67.
- ³⁸ Manu V.151.
- ³⁹ Yaj. I. 3.77.
- ⁴⁰ Yaj. I.3.87.
- ⁴¹ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section CXLVI, p.317.
- ⁴² When the aged female Anasuya spoke to Sita when Rama and Sita came to the *ashrama* of Sage Atri she spoke that, ' . . . She who is devoted to her spouse, whether in the city or forest, regardless whether he be a sinner or virtuous, that woman attains the highest region. Whether a husband be cruel, or the slave of desires, or poor, a virtuous wife will continue to worship him a god. . .' See, *Ram* Book 2 Chapter 117.

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- ⁴³ Manu V. 154.
- ⁴⁴ *Mbh* Adi Parva Vaivahika Parva Section CCI, p.395.
- ⁴⁵ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section CXXIII, p.254.
- ⁴⁶ Manu states ‘Thus when a wife who obeys her husband she is exalted in heaven and should never do anything that might displease her husband, when he is alive or dead.’ Manu V. 155-156.
- ⁴⁷ Manu V. 160.
- ⁴⁸ Manu IX.29
- ⁴⁹ Manu IX.30
- ⁵⁰ *Mbh* Adi Parva Sambhava Parva, Section LXXXII, p. 180.
- ⁵¹ *Mbh*, Sabha Parva, Section LXX, pp.137-138; *Mbh*, Udyoga parva, Section XXXIII,p.62; Manu VIII.416.
- ⁵² Gaur, Kavita. 2016. ‘Dynamics of Women’s Work in the *Sastric* Sources: Household and Beyond’ in Vijaya Ramaswamy (ed.), Women and Work in Pre-Colonial India, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p.41.
- ⁵³ Gaur, Kavita. 2016, p.41.
- ⁵⁴ Manu 8.362.
- ⁵⁵ Gaur, Kavita.2016, p.41.
- ⁵⁶ AS.II.25.38. (Hereafter AS) Reference to the *Arthashastra* is from Kangle, R.P. 1992(Reprint). The Kautilya Arthashastra Part II, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi.
- ⁵⁷ AS. III.4.22.
- ⁵⁸ AS. III.4.23.
- ⁵⁹ AS. II. 27.25.
- ⁶⁰ AS. III.11.23.
- ⁶¹ Gaur, Kavita. 2016. p. 40.
- ⁶² *Stridhana* means the wealth of a woman to designate the resources that married woman could claim. For details, see Roy, Kumkum. 2009. Historical Dictionary of Ancient India, Scarecrow Press, Maryland, pp.304-05.
- ⁶³ Manu VIII.28-29.
- ⁶⁴ According to him, the *stridhana* consists of six types; what a woman receives at the nuptial fire, what she receives when she is taken away, what she is

given as a token of love, and what she receives from her brothers, mother and father. See, Manu IX.194.

- ⁶⁵ Manu IX.195.
- ⁶⁶ Manu IX.192-193.
- ⁶⁷ Shah, Shalini. 2012, pp.50-51.
- ⁶⁸ Marriage was recognized as the most important rite of passage for women and one of the important one for men within the Brahmanical tradition. In the Brahmanical literature especially the *Dharmasutra* and *Dharmashastra* contains a list of about six to eight different forms of marriages. These are *Brahma*, *Prajapatya*, *Arsa*, *Daiva*, *Gandharava*, *Asura*, *Raksasa* and *Paisaca*. For details see, Roy, Kumkum. 2009, p.200; Manu III.20-21; Yaj. I.3.58-61; *Mbh* Adi Parva, Sambhava parva Section, LXXIII, p.155; *Mbh. Adi Parva, Section CII, p. 219*; *Mbh* Anusasana Parva Section LXIV, p.17.
- ⁶⁹ Manu IX.196.
- ⁷⁰ Manu IX.198-199.
- ⁷¹ Yaj.II.8.135,136.
- ⁷² Yaj. I.3.76.
- ⁷³ *Mbh* Anusasana Parva, Section XLVII, p.27.
- ⁷⁴ Yaj.II.8.117.
- ⁷⁵ Yaj. II.8.124.
- ⁷⁶ Yaj.II.8.117.
- ⁷⁷ AS.III.14-15.
- ⁷⁸ AS. III.2.16-18.
- ⁷⁹ AS. III.5.9-10.
- ⁸⁰ Kautilya has dealt on this in detail in Book III chapter 2.
- ⁸¹ AS. III.2.31.
- ⁸² AS. III.2.19-21.
- ⁸³ AS. III.2.23.
- ⁸⁴ AS. III.2.36.

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Oral Tradition for Development Communication

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Abstract

This paper is about oral tradition for development communication. Communication is an integral part of oral tradition. The cardinal issue is having the spoken language as the mode of communication. The social customs of the society is transmitted from one generation to the next generation by using verbal communication. It is through oral tradition the social-cultural repository of societies is transmitted from generation to generation. The social-cultural repository is represented in the social frame which serves as the guiding cardinal principle in social interaction, social relationships and activities of societies. The social frame of oral tradition has the capacity to contribute towards improving the present system of development planning and implementation.

Keywords: oral tradition, communication, social frame, social-cultural, repository, development.

Introduction

Oral tradition is a rare subject for discussion in workshops related with development planning and implementation. The inclusion of oral tradition can be seen as a positive indication in development discourse and particularly in the context of development discourse related with indigenous or tribal societies. In the paper the focus is about Oral Tradition for Development

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Communication¹. Before delving into the subject matter, it is important to take into account that the history of human societies provides an interesting exposition on the diversities of development found among human societies. Broadly, it can be observed that there are societies who in the course of history have developed the written script and have developed the system of communication both forms: oral and written. There are societies which are struggling to develop their own written script.

Another dimension which is related with oral tradition is communication. Communication is an integral part of oral tradition. The social existence of human societies depended on communication. It is through communication verbal, signs or written daily life is conducted with lesser confusion. Communication is real as social actors composing the society are real; and social actors' interaction is based on communication. Communication is an essential ingredient to keep society functioning and social actors performing various tasks.

The cardinal issue is having the spoken language as the mode of communication. Without a language, it becomes incomprehensible for any kind of communication between two or more social actors. Language is linked with the human mind. The human mind in all its senses is the critical factor for human existence and it is also the bases of separation between human from animal. It is the human mind that uses symbols and classification of 'things' in social world and nature; and according to Levi Strauss (in Leach 1974:45), 'the special marker of symbolic thought is the existence of spoken language in which words stand for (signify) things "out there" which are signified'. Thus, mind and language form the very basis for communication among social actors; and metaphorically speaking language is the 'heart and soul' of oral tradition. As language is

¹ The paper was presented in a workshop on 'Learning and sharing from Best Practices of Community -led sustainable livelihood development initiatives in North east India, organised by North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas, Government of India, 9th - 10th November, 2017, Shillong - Meghalaya.

the symbolic signifier it cannot be separated from oral tradition. Oral tradition and communication are embedded into one body. Without language there can be no oral tradition, language serves as the communicative link between the mind and social existence; and it also provides for the understanding of oral tradition among living social actors. According to Burke (1993) language 'shapes the society in which it used' (in Aryal 2009:65).

Coming back to oral tradition, before the invention of writing, oral tradition was the only mean and the most vital form of communication for human beings. It was observed by Martins (2012:160) that 'oral tradition is as old as human beings, for before the invention of writing, information was passed from generation to generation through spoken words. Many people around the world continue to use oral traditions to pass knowledge and wisdom'. It is through verbal communication oral tradition has been made possible in transmitting and supporting diverse social and physical activities in human societies. This mode of communication continues despite modern literacy and modern forms of communication such as the internet.

Oral tradition is a vast subject-matter; however, keeping the objective of the paper in mind it would examine the significance and relevance of oral tradition in relation with development communication. The sources of information have been drawn from secondary sources and from the field experience of the author who had been engaging with societies of the North-East India for more than twenty years. On the basis of such information the paper has drawn an analytical view of the subject-matter discussed.

The Social Frame of Oral Tradition

When referring to oral tradition, it is usually associated with societies who have language without a written script or societies with a written script and still depending on oral tradition. Before proceeding further in the discussion, an attempt is made to define oral tradition. According to available materials, oral tradition has

been defined in many different ways. Oral tradition can be seen as ‘documents of the present also inheriting a message from the past’ (Vandina, in Aryal 2009). In the views of Rosenberg, 1988 (in Aryal 2009) oral tradition ‘is the transmission of cultural items from one member to another, or others. Those items are heard, stored in memory, and, when appropriate, recalled at the moment of subsequent transmission’. In the observation of Martins (2012:159), ‘oral tradition as a term applies to a process of transmission of facts from one individual to the other through oral message which are based on previous information’. Thus, one can say that oral tradition is the process of transmission and it covers wide range of knowledge, wisdom, morals, norms, customs, beliefs and practices including other cultural elements intrinsic to the society from one generation to the next generation. Secondly, oral tradition can be separated broadly into three categories: societal; village; and clan and domestic groups. This separation is essential because of the fact that there are aspects of oral traditions which are common at the societal level; and there are oral traditions which are specific to the village or the clan and domestic groups.

According to Martins (2012), oral tradition ‘covers wide range of subject matter and can be found in a variety of forms’. To be able to comprehend oral tradition from holistic dimension, it is important to understand it from the position of social frame. If you examine any of the living indigenous/tribal societies today in the world, their continued existence spatially and socially is based on oral tradition. The conduct of social interaction and social relationship among social actors in everyday life and during extra-ordinary days such as social gatherings, ceremonies, religious festivals, etc., is governed by social norms and customs. This knowledge and practice of norms and customs is transmitted as oral tradition. On the basis of oral tradition the social order of social life is made possible including the conduct of various activities for survival.

Another aspect of the social frame is the social customs and the structure of the pattern in social life of human societies

can be observed on the basis of social institutions. According to Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1984:216) social institutions can be said to be ‘social practices that are regularly and continuously repeated, are sanctioned and maintained by social norms, and have a major significance in the social structure’. Under social institutions five major complex institutions can be broadly identified as economic; political; religion; kinship and marriage; and cultural. The instrumental elements under each institution are shown in table – 1.

Table – 1
Social Frame of Oral Tradition

Institution	Key Domain	Instrumental Elements
Economic	Property relations, production, consumption, and distribution	Control and use of land and forest land; use of plants and wild edible plants; method and techniques of indigenous cultivation; crops and seeds collection, seeds preservation and seeds sharing; market; labour, use of water sources, seasonality calculation, wild animal, insects, etc.,
Political	Regulations and use of legitimate power	Membership status and representation; position and status of holders of authority; the practice of decision making; control and managing both territoriality and societal affairs; and authority related with customary beliefs and practices; and enforcement of regulations.
Religion	Beliefs and rituals	World views, ethics, morality, rites and rites-de-passage, religious ceremonies or festivals, rites and sacred sites; the separation of sacred and profane; and keepers, protectors and priests.

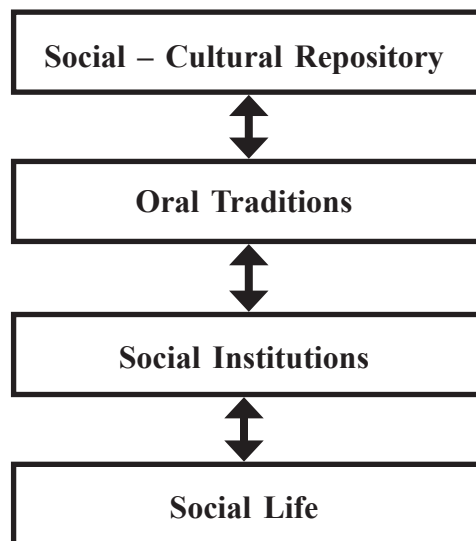
Kinship and Marriage	Descent, clan and family.	Membership and the social status and position of men and women; the separation between kinsmen and non-kinsmen; customary rules and regulation of exchange of mates; customary beliefs and practices related with inheritance of property; and the socialisation of the young.
Cultural	Norms, knowledge and practices, arts and sports, music, dances and festivals, crafts and weaving, technology, language, ideas, etc.,	Beliefs and practices related with ecology and environment; techniques; hands-on training; folklore, legends, myths, tools and implements, ideas, language - terms, phrases, idioms, metaphors, etc,

The social customs of the society is transmitted from one generation to the next generation by using verbal communication. The verbal communication is carried out by adopting and applying different mediums such as songs, poetry, couplets, theatre, storytelling, narration, hands-on training, apprenticeship and socialisation. In oral tradition the communicator as the source of the origin in the transmission process plays an important role. In majority of oral-based societies, the holder and keeper of oral tradition and the transmission agency of the social customs and the social norms is usually the responsibility of elders of the society, elders of the clan and elders of the lineage and elders of domestic groups.² It is for this reason that elders in such societies are considered as legitimate holders and protectors of wisdom and knowledge of the social frame and thus are respected. It can be further added that it is through the elder generation that the social frame is sustained which in turn guides the nature and dynamics of social interaction and social relations of social actors in society.

² A group of people who habitually share a common dwelling and common supply of food (Goody); and it 'provide material and cultural resources needed to maintain and bring up its members' (Yanagisako).

Lastly, as an illustration, it is the social frame that has given the indigenous/tribal societies the spatial and social identity. Indigenous/tribal societies of the world in general and the spatial world of tribal societies called the North-East India in particular have for centuries lived and continued to survive without the modern state and its bureaucratic apparatus because of the existence of the social frame. Even in the context of the present day, the social frame in the form of oral tradition continues to have social relevance and significance in the life of such societies. The social frame found in such societies has some of the best practices in agro-biodiversity including rich collection of indigenous knowledge and indigenous technology which the modernist agencies can learn, adopt and apply in the modern developmental framework. The social frame can also be seen to be the protective shield in the interaction between indigenous/tribal societies with modernity and modernising forces. Thus, one can say that it is oral tradition that nurtures and shapes the social frame which in turn guides the social-cultural life of the people. In this sense, social frame is the repository of oral tradition (Chart – 1).

Chart – I
The Social Frame of Oral Tradition



Oral Tradition in Developmental Framework and Development Communication

It is proper to introduce the concept of development communication prior to the discussion on developmental framework. Development communication is a conceptual frame and it can be seen as part of development planning and implementation. According to Kaul (2011:2) “development communications are organized efforts to use communications processes and media to bring social and economic improvements, generally in developing countries”. It was further highlighted by the author (Ibid.: 17) that in the ‘new development paradigm’ development communication has focused on four issues such as: (i) “Equality of the distribution of social and economic benefits, information and education; (ii) Popular participation in development planning and execution, accompanied by decentralization of activities to the local level; (iii) Self-reliance and independence in development with emphasis on the potential of local resources; and (iv) Integration of traditional with modern systems, so that development is a syncretisation of old and new ideas, with the exact mixture somewhat different in each locale”. However, development communication as proposed in the new development paradigm is a challenge to many developing countries.

On the issue of development communication as a concept proper conceptual clarity is required. Development communication according to the report of the working committee on ‘Communication in Support of Development’ organised by the International Broadcast Institute at Cologne in 1973 (as cited in Moemeka 1989:3) has outlined three aspects: (i) “Development: The improvement of the well-being of the individual and the betterment of the quality of his or her life; (ii) Communication: The transfer of information between individuals or groups of individuals by human or technical means; (iii) Development Support Communication: The systematic use of communication in the planning and implementation of development”.

In the volume, *Development Communication Sourcebook: Broadening the Boundaries of Communication*, the author, Paolo Mefalopulos (2008:8) has cited two sets of definition derived from the Development Communication Division of the World Bank which considers development communication as “an interdisciplinary field based on empirical research that helps to build consensus while it facilitates the sharing of knowledge to achieve positive change in development initiatives. It is not only about effective dissemination of information but also about using empirical research and two-way communication among stakeholders. It is also a key management tool that helps assess socio-political risks and opportunities”.

The second definition was drawn from the First World Congress of Communication for Development, held in Rome in October 2006. According to the author the definition was a consensus decision and was defined as “a social process based on dialog using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels, including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating, and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication” (Ibid.).

One can say that development communication is a process of dissemination of information related with transforming and improving the lives of individuals, groups and communities. Dissemination of information can be through formal and informal mechanism, and involves different tools of communication. In development communication the process of interaction and exchange is two-way traffic between stake holders or between many social actors. The course of interaction and communication between stakeholders or social actors is reciprocal.

Coming to the discussion on the position of oral tradition in developmental framework and development communication one has to interrogate the very idea of developmental frame work. One can draw the analogy from the cinema. Hollywood known for

all its extravagance in the world of leisure and pleasure has also occasionally metaphorically dealt with serious matters concerning the survival of human race. In the context of this paper, the movie *Avatar* stands out. It stands out because of three reasons: (i) probably the first of its kind to reflect on indigenous peoples' situations; (ii) the projection of the modernist developmental agenda; and (iii) the presentation of the social frame of indigenous peoples. The ending part of *Avatar* is interesting and metaphorically I can say that the 'conquistador'³ (invaders) had to accept the defeat of their grand design of destructive-extractive development. However, in reality the story is different because oral tradition is yet to have a place in the development discourse and in the developmental framework. For an appreciative inquiry and proper understanding of the subject-matter the societies of North-East India can be an illustration.

Prior to the year 1826 meaning before the arrival and subjugation of the region under the colonial state, societies of the region were sovereign in their respective territories and conduct their social life on the basis of their social frames. As a region it has varied landscapes and with more than two hundred social frames (tribes and non-tribes). Each one is unique in its own way and distinct from another. In one sense, it is a region of complex social-anthropological aquarium of human societies. Inhabitants of the region living in their own carved-out territories have been surviving for centuries with minimal dependency on the outside world. Over generations they have developed their ways and means of survival and some of these practices are highly sustainable such as the terraced cultivation of the Angami tribe in the state of Nagaland or the wet rice cultivation of the Apatani tribe in the state of Arunachal Pradesh or the sacred forests in Khasi-Jaintia hills in the state of Meghalaya. One can cite many more examples found in the region. The continuity of such practices is located in the social frame and it is oral tradition which has provided societies

³ *conquistador* was the name given to the Fifteenth-to-Seventeenth century Spanish and Portugese soldiers who conquered much of the world, most famously the Central and Southern Americas.

of the region the capacity and the resiliency of sustaining life and nature. It is correct to say that they may not have all the indices of a modern society, however, their survival as a human race to the present day can be attributed to social frame and oral tradition.

The social frame found in societies of North – East India have their own system of economic practices, such practices have supported the socio-economic life of people for generations and it continues in the present times. Under colonialism, they were left to themselves to manage their socio-economic life as the British was hardly interested in development of the region. After the formation of India as an independent democratic nation-state, tribal societies of the region in particular were brought under various provisions of the Constitution of India. In this type of politico-bureaucratic structure North-East India became part of the five year plan model of development. In this type of development planning and implementation, societies of the region became beneficiaries of the process of development.

And from the point of view of development communication, developmental planning and implementation in India falls under the politico-bureaucratic structure and can be observed at the level of community development block. It was highlighted by Kaul (2011: 19-20) that, “the government decided that the best way to achieve the projected goals was to decentralize interpersonal communication to the community block level. Each community development block was served by a team of multi-purpose village-level workers supported by the subject matter specialists at the block level, and supervised and co-ordinated by the block development officer”. In this type of development communication structure it was a one-way traffic communication. The government functionaries disseminate only the guidelines of the government programmes and the people who are called ‘beneficiaries’ are only receivers of the information. Local context and indigenous knowledge and practices are not taken into account. This aspect was further pointed out by Kaul (2011) that in designing developmental plans or projects majority

of countries hardly give serious thought to ‘traditional and folk’ knowledge including ‘feedback and discussions’.

It can be further elaborated that for the purpose of developing the region number of strategic suggestions for implementation were made by various official reports. Some of the reports are as follows: High Level Commission Report to the Prime Minister (1997); the National Human Development Report (2002); the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), (2002); the North Eastern Region Vision 2020 (2008); and the Report of the Task Force: To look into problems of hill states and hill areas (2010). Such documents provide the official version that the region (North-East India) lack economic development and suggestions were made to overcome the developmental problems by increasing investment and incentive. The identification of developmental problems and strategies to overcome such problems was in the hands of the government. Development interventions such as infrastructural facilities, health facilities, education, flood control, landslide support system and weather forecasting, etc., became useful for the common needs of inhabitants in the hill areas as well as in the plain areas. On the other hand, there was no kind of discerning to understand how these societies have survived before the arrival of the modern state. As highlighted in the preceding description that societies of the region have various kinds of indigenously developed economic practices which are viable and has sustained these societies for generations. However, such knowledge and practices are yet to be given any consideration in development planning framework for the region. The only exception among the official reports that can be cited was the recommendation made by the Task Force (2010) which had suggested new model of development for the region (developmental zones) and guided by the ecology – the mountain perspective. This suggestion was never considered.

Coming back to the region, the social-cultural repository found in tribal/indigenous societies is yet to be fully accounted for, despite that it is so diverse and rich. Though it is a daunting task to take

cognizance of these practices which are in such societies, one can provide few examples as an illustration of the role of social frame and oral tradition in the socio-economic life of societies in the region. The examples are taken from the village of Pnar community of Jaintia hills in the state Meghalaya. The Pnar community is known for holding and keeping many kinds of indigenous knowledge and practices (Lamare 2005). The method of cultivation adopted and applied in Jaintia hills in general and in the villages in particular, were jhum cultivation, terraced cultivation, wet rice cultivation, and the indigenous method drip irrigation⁴. The cultivation of crops starting from the pre-sowing, sowing, weeding, pre-harvesting and harvesting has been based on indigenous knowledge. Indigenous agriculture was intrinsically linked to nature and accordingly the seasonal calculation has been evolved and handed down over generations.

It was observed that the community ‘to possess a top-ranked indigenous knowledge system in the utilization of the rich plant diversity around them for various purposes’ (Samati and Begum 2006). According to the description provided by Samati and Begum (2006) and Jaiswal (2010), the *Pnar* community has rich knowledge with regard to the connection between plants and ‘the agricultural seasons and their significance in agricultural activity’. The illustration in table -2 is self-explanatory.

Table – 2

Indigenous Agricultural Seasons of Pnar Community

Season	Plant indicators	Vernacular name	Significance
Pre sowing	Fagaceae	<i>Ryntiang</i>	<i>Mih sla lung</i> meaning appearance of new leaves indicates the commencement of spring

⁴ This method has been studied by many scientists and experts from across the world and is highly appreciative in the context of science of farming.

Sowing	Pinaceae	<i>Kseh</i>	Needle leaves of <i>Kseh</i> illuminate smoky vapour and has foggy appearance indicating sowing season (e.g. sow rice seeds)
Transplanting and weeding	Theaceae	<i>Shyrngan</i>	<i>Phuh syntu</i> meaning flowering of the tree indicates perfect time for transplanting of rice and weeding
Pre-harvesting	Castonis indica A. DC. C.tribuloides	<i>Skop</i> <i>Sning</i>	<i>Da mih soh</i> meaning fruiting time of these two species indicates that paddy is ready for harvesting
Harvesting	Butea buteiformis Phoenix humilis	<i>Rapalong</i> <i>Satlai</i>	<i>Phuh syntu</i> meaning fruiting time of these two species indicative of the completion of harvesting time and to protect the grains from being rotten (locally referred <i>Rdem</i>)

Source: Jaiswal, Vidhand, 2010; and Samati, Hajal and Begum, Samim Sofika, 2006.

The second example is a case study drawn from the village of Nongryngkoh. One of the interesting features about Nongryngkoh village was paddy cultivation. It was found that approximately one fourth of the village population cultivated paddy. The reason was because the village has limited paddy fields. However, the village has seventeen varieties of paddy called in local dialect such as *Khawja Shulia*, *Kba Rabon*, *Sabiah saw*, *Sabiah lieh*, *Duriaw*, *Typhot*, *Tngen*, *Mala*, *Khyrwait*, *Soothem*, *Sootang rit*, *Sootang heh*, *Pingsah*, *Kba Shdai*, *War*, *Jwai*, and *Kba Tlang*. According to the information from the village, the variety of paddy seeds was handed down over generations including the process and technique of cultivation and planting of seeds. It can be said that domestic

groups of the village have been holding, keeping and protecting the indigenous agricultural seeds and practices. However, hardly one finds any mentioning in government developmental framework.

Another aspect is wild edible plants, and such plants can be found in selected locations of the forestlands or jhum fields or agricultural fields and near to wetlands. Such plants were never cultivated but they have been growing wild and people can collect them. Wild edible plants can be collected without any restrictions and consumed as vegetable items. As an example the wild edible plants found in villages of Jaintia hills is presented in table – 3. The knowledge of identifying and collecting at particular season, and the knowledge to use such wild edible items were part of oral tradition. According to the tribals/indigenous peoples, wild edible plants have medicinal value.

Table - 3

Wild Edible Plants

Local name	Botanical name (family)	Use
Jajew	<i>Sonchus oleracea</i>	Fruits eaten raw
Slileshiat	<i>Ficus clavata</i> Wall. ex Miq. (Moraceae)	Leaves and fruits are used as vegetable
Jiakeng (J)	<i>Ilex acuminata</i> Willd. (Aquifoliaceae)	Leaves eaten as vegetable
Sohchlia	<i>Cirsium involucreatum</i>	Seeds are aromatic, eaten raw
Ja tyndong	<i>Codonopsis parviflora</i>	Leaves are cooked and eaten
Jarian	<i>Fagopyrum dibotrys</i> (D.Don) Hara. (Polygonaceae)	Tender shoots used as vegetable
Tyrkhang	<i>Diplazium esculentum</i> (Retz.) Sw. (Athyriaceae)	Fronds cooked as vegetable
Sohprew	<i>Luffa acutangula</i> (L.) Roxb. (Cucurbitaceae)	Unripe fruit cooked as vegetable

Source for botanical names: Kayang 2007, Jaiswal 2010 and Kharbuli, Kayang and Syiem 2003.

These examples conveyed the contribution of oral tradition in the social world of tribal /indigenous societies of North-East India or elsewhere in the world. In the views of Nongkynrih (2013), ‘the indigenous method of farming and technology is another set of objects representing indigenous knowledge and wisdom in sustainable food production’. He further elaborated that, ‘however, the physical world of tribal communities is being affected by the new paradigm of development and market –oriented extraction of natural resources as the mantra of poverty reduction and economic growth...’ This seems to be one of the reasons that can explain the exclusion of oral tradition from the dominant development framework of the modern state and international financial agencies.

The examples revealed that oral tradition has its own kind of contribution to the socio-economic life of the people. It also signifies that oral tradition has its own kind of meanings and significance to the life of tribal/indigenous societies. If oral tradition is irrelevant to the life and survival of tribal/indigenous societies they would have discontinued the practice ages ago. Oral tradition has its own kind of potentiality and can enrich the modern paradigm of development, provided that modern paradigm of development is willing to learn and appreciate. It is also true that modern scientific knowledge and technology has its own limitations in addressing complex issues of the social world and nature. Adopting the indigenous socio-economic practices would add to techniques of problem solving because these indigenous knowledge and practices have been experimented through trials and errors over generations, and have shown to solve some of the challenges experienced by societies particularly in those matters concerning with nature, health and food. One can argue that oral tradition can be integrated in the developmental framework and development communication. The contribution can be broadly categorised in three ways: (i) learning and documenting the rich resources available as oral knowledge and oral wisdom that deals with wide range of issues; (ii) in judiciously adopting and applying it as a participatory technique of assessment and appreciative inquiry; and (iii) in adopting, applying and improving the best practices

found in such societies. Also, it should be noted, the integration of oral tradition in developmental framework and in participatory learning and action can lead to two-way exchange of knowledge, learning and practices. In this sense, development communication in the context of oral tradition can be seen as an asset to the process of development. This is more so when taking into consideration the variety of landscapes and ecosystems inhabited by tribal/indigenous societies and where large portion of the knowledge systems and practices are still unwritten and based on oral tradition.

It has also been recognised that oral tradition has its own set of limitations with regard to the knowledge transmitted from generation to generation. However, scholars and experts gathering information based on oral tradition are aware of this problem. Seitel (2010:403) highlighted that, 'in the midst of doing field research, oral tradition scholars usually know many cultural experts with whom they can collaborate to increase their understanding and improve their representations and analyses'. Another way of addressing this issue is by applying the participatory learning and action, and interviews as techniques to discern ideas and knowledge of community elders. Lastly, information collected should undergo the process of verification by the community studied; and cross checking with written sources if available.

Conclusion

It is through oral tradition the social-cultural repository of societies is transmitted from generation to generation; and oral tradition has a spoken language or a spoken dialect which serves as the verbal mode of communication. The verbal mode of communication can be in different forms such as recitation, couplets, poetry, theatre, narration, and socialisation, etc,. The social-cultural repository is represented in the social frame which serves as the guiding cardinal principle in social interaction, social relationships and activities of societies. The social frame is the cardinal principle that provides the base of survival of tribal/indigenous societies

and continues to be so in the present times. The social frame has the capacity to contribute towards improving the present system of development planning and implementation and development communication. Will the nation-state's developmental framework integrate oral tradition in the developmental process of tribes/indigenous societies? The same goes for international development bodies and international financial institutions too.

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Performance as Philosophy in the context of the Lai-Haraoba

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Abstract

The paper makes an effort to claim that the Lai-Haraoba of the Meitei performs a philosophy. Approaches to making this claim come from recent works in the philosophy of rituals and performance studies. One line of thinking that has emerged in these works is that performances can embed truth claims. This line is extended in this paper to contend that the Maibi, the principal performers of the ritual dances of the Lai-Haraoba perform a text that asserts a reality.

Key Words: Lai-Haraoba, Maibi, Dance as Philosophy, Rituals, Body.

I

This paper examines the worldview of the Meitei¹ of Manipur as performed in the Lai-Haraoba, in the light of the idea that performance can be philosophy. This new line of thinking in performance studies argues that there is philosophy in performance. Within the context of this development the performances of Lai-Haraoba, especially its dances, perform a philosophy of a community.

The Lai-Haraoba is the social, cultural and religious expression of the Meitei worldview. It is an annual ritual festival. The meaning of the term Lai-Haraoba is not without contestations. Some scholars translate it as merry-making of the Gods. It could also be in some sense understood as appeasing or appeasement of the Gods and

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Goddesses. There is also the view that Haraoba is a corruption of the term *hoi laoba*. It is a description of the shouting of the word 'hoi', which herded out the cosmos from the belly of Atingkok². This interpretation captures an important aspect of the ritual festival because as much as the Lai-Haraoba is a festival to appease the deities and the spirits, it is a festival in which the creation of the cosmos, the settlement of the Meitei people and its civilization is performed through songs, dance and rituals. The dances are predominantly performed by the Maibi.

The Maibi has been understood as shamans.³ There are limitations to this categorization, but nevertheless this characterization can give a starting point to understand the Maibi. The Maibi have many functions within Meitei society. They are herbalists, midwives, clairvoyants, dancers and spiritual leaders. They are also priestesses who tend to the Gods and Goddesses, and who conduct the rituals in the temple of the deities. But most importantly, they are the performers of the dances of the Lai-Haraoba, which expresses the worldview of the Meitei. They are the chosen ones through which the gods and spirits speak. No person becomes a Maibi through choice; it is only through a divine or extra-mundane intervention that someone becomes a member of the institution of Maibi. A chosen one after manifesting signs of being chosen seeks a destined teacher, an already established Maibi, who would then take her through an institutional training – training of dancing, singing, divination, performance of rituals.

The metaphor of the cosmic womb from which the cosmos germinates has representation in the hand gestures of the Maibi in the Lai-Haraoba dance. Maibis perform the moment of the release of creative energy in the beginning of the cosmos. This is registered in the very beginning of their dance sequences, in the Lai-Haraoba. This moment is registered in their dance as the upper part of the body breaks from the complete stillness into a slow movement recapturing the primal rhythm. Maibis use 364 hand gestures during the dance sequence. It starts with the re-enactment of the creation

by nine male deities and seven female deities. This is followed by dance representing, through fine gestures, the development of the human body in the womb. Then the birth of the child, the growing up stages, the building of houses, civilization through cultivation of land, various stages of weaving are recreated elaborately. There are also various dance sequences which depict the continuity of human life.⁴

At a first glance, therefore, the Maibi dance represents a worldview. There would not be good grounds to contend otherwise, taking into consideration the purpose of their dances. But to say that what they dance is philosophy needs some preparations. If philosophy is a second order reflection on any subject, then the claim for philosophy of dance would be difficult to be discounted. Consider the phrase, “philosophy of X”. It is an ambiguous phrase. But we can get two important senses here, which are derived from the discussion of the phrase “philosophy of religion”. It has been pointed out that “philosophy of religion” could mean philosophy of the object of inquiry that is religion or it could mean the philosophy that belongs to religion.⁵ This analysis has brought in the idea that these two senses could be there in the general phrase “philosophy of X”. Hence, the idea of dance as philosophy could be available over and above the philosophical question regarding dance as the object of inquiry.

Philosophy can mean many things but some of the central understandings as listed in any discussion of its definition would be 1) an intellectual activity 2) a theory derived at as a result of philosophical inquiry 3) a comprehensive view of reality and man’s place in it.⁶ It would be difficult to conceive of dance as an intellectual activity. In the Cartesian divide between mind and body, movements of the body could hardly be called an intellectual activity. Therefore, it would be far-fetched to claim that dance is a theory derived at as a result of philosophical inquiry. But some dances do try a representation of a worldview – a comprehensive view of reality and man’s place in it. The Socratic sense of philosophy which concerns knowing oneself has been extended by

Albert Schweitzer's conception of philosophy as reflection on man's place and destiny in the natural world.⁷ If the meaning of philosophy means a comprehensive view of reality and man's place in it, we could claim that the performance of Maibi in Lai-Haraoba, which represents a Meitei world-view – a comprehensive view of what reality is and her relation to it – is a philosophy in this conception of philosophy *albeit* a very broad understanding of philosophy.

Graham Priest undermines the deflationary understanding of philosophy of latter Wittgenstein who has answered that philosophy arises from a certain mistake. Priest also rejects Derrida's indeterminate meaning of truth, for both these understanding of philosophy is self-refuting. Priest defines philosophy neither by its subject matter, nor by its method, but by its spirit – the spirit of unbridled criticism.⁸ If philosophy has this character of unbridled criticism, and if it has to have that, then performance and dance in particular could hardly be called philosophy.

II

Yet, recent studies in ritual performances have seen some original contributions to the idea that rituals embody metaphysics, and that rituals have a noetic element.

The general understanding of performance is as an act of executing, presenting something to an audience. It could be in the form of dance, play, song, etc. Dance comprises of bodily movements and gestures usually to a set of rhythmic pattern and choreography. Some forms of dance are considered fine art, some dances are to do with rituals, and some are social dances which includes dances, for the sake of entertainment and enjoyment. Sometimes these forms of dances can overlap without blurring these distinctions.

By ritual we understand ceremonial actions or practices performed by particular community which gives the sense of continuity of life, the sense of belongingness, which gives meanings to our existence. "Ritual reminds us of a larger archetypal reality

and involves in us a visceral understanding of such universal paradigms as unity, continuity, connectivity, reverence and awe.”⁹ There is meager contribution of philosophical thought to the study of rituals because the assumption that “ritual activities are thoughtless, i.e. rituals are typically seen as mechanical or instinctual and not as activities that involve thinking or learning”¹⁰ is rife. “The assumption has been that bodily movements are not representations and therefore whatever is going on in the movements of rituals must be something other than thinking.”¹¹ But on the other hand... “ritual is often interpreted as symbolic activity, and on this interpretation rituals may symbolize knowledge.”¹²

This line of thinking has been objected on the ground that it would engender everything and anything as philosophy. Performance as philosophy is distinguished from philosophy of performance in these objections. Performance as philosophy is resisted for some obvious reasons. “For some, though to say that performance is philosophy or experience is thinking risks rendering ‘philosophy’ a term that means everything and nothing; it is to dissolve the identity of philosophy altogether”¹³. What Cull has pointed out is a genuine difficulty for anyone to identify some performances as philosophy. This has called in a new tact in finding new way of philosophizing.

It has been observed that if philosophy would not admit dance to be a philosophy, then it is imperative that a new style of philosophizing be undertaken - “...a faithful thought and experience of dance cannot be included within philosophy but would require a new style of philosophy.”¹⁴ For, “...the figure and possibility of dance link the concepts of philosophy, meaning and life.”¹⁵

Heidegger says that poetry reveals truth, as thinking, as philosophy, would reveal truth. The truth that poetry (and other arts possibly) reveal is beauty. Though thinking cannot be identical with poesy; though philosophical thinking could not be identical with the performance of philosophy, they are the same at a certain level.

We modern men presumably have not the slightest notion how thoughtfully the Greeks experienced their lofty poetry, their works of art – no, not experienced, but let them stand there in the presence of their radiant appearance...Yet this might be clear to us right now: we are not dragging Hoelderlin's words into our lecture merely as a quotation from the realm of the poetic statement which will enliven and beautify the dry progress of thinking. To do so would be to debase the poetic word. Its statement rests on its own truth, and here truth means the disclosure of what keeps itself concealed. The beautiful is not what pleases, but what falls within that fateful gift of truth which comes to be when that which is eternally non-apparent and therefore invisible attains its most radiantly apparent appearance. We are compelled to let the poetic word stand in *its* truth, in beauty. And that does not exclude but on the contrary includes that we think the poetic word...what is stated poetically, and what is stated in thought, are never identical; but there are times when they are the same – those times when the gulf separating poesy and thinking is a clean and decisive cleft. This can occur when poesy is lofty, and thinking profound.¹⁶

Though the activity of philosophy might not be identifiable with the action that is performance, they are at a level. The level in which they are same is the end of both the activities – the uncovering of truth.

Modernism in dance argues for the subjective genitive reading of 'of' in the phrase philosophy of dance.¹⁷ "And dance that devoted itself to the modernist project undertook the theoretical or philosophical task of 'defining its own essence' or 'interrogating its own conditions of possibility.'¹⁸ Kristen Boyce extends this to argue that the two readings are interdependent. Though Boyce delimits her investigation to the realm of art dance, her approach opens investigating the idea that the ritualistic dance of the Maibis contain philosophical reflections and thought.

Dance as gestures translatable to propositions and statements could claim representative of certain end points in philosophical

reflection. Boyce citing Greenberg notes that the cognitive turn in modernism (dance is thinking) is a response to a crisis. In the wake of newly developed scientific methods, the arts (along with religion and philosophy) were denied the kind of seriousness they had traditionally been taken to have – seriousness in their being sources of knowledge. They were therefore faced with the task of demonstrating that they afforded a kind of experience that was ‘valuable’ in their own right and not to be obtained from any other form of activity.¹⁹ In its hope to regain ‘seriousness’ i.e., knowledge communicated through dance, “they returned dance from its self-preoccupation to an engagement with the world and human concerns.”²⁰ The interesting thing to note here is that the Maibi dance is all about this engagement with the world and the concerns of the community. Thus, the seriousness that is sought to claim that dance is philosophy is already present in the dance of the Maibis. The standard approach of the modernist dancers is to fit dance to a conception of philosophy. The attempt has been to make dance philosophical, to make it carry philosophical reflections to meet philosophy, to regain its “seriousness”. As an alternative to this approach Boyce makes the argument that philosophy can approach dance to recover philosophy which is already in the movements.

Some of the arguments that have been made to advance the idea that movement is thinking and embodiment of knowledge are encapsulated in the following. “For if knowledge is to be derived from experience as most philosophers as well as all experimental scientists pretty well agree that it is, then it must be the whole of experience, experience in all its parts rather than only in some, that is meant. Action must be included as well as thought and sensation.”²¹ If thinking is an embodied activity that represents thought, then dance which is an embodied activity cannot be denied the relation with thinking. The centrality of the body in the Meitei worldview comes very lucid in how the body is written in the very letters of its writing system. The significance of the body in Meitei culture and worldview is presented in Ray’s insightful study on how the body and its parts become scripts, writings and cosmology.²²

To some society or community dance could represent a whole of reality. This has slowly gained recognition. “Until, recently, it might have been hard to imagine how dance could fruitfully be conceived as involving any form of reflection. Copeland, for example, argues that for much of its history, dance has suffered the effects of a deeply entrenched Cartesian dualism: because its medium is the human body, dance has been conceived (and often conceived itself) as ‘mired’ in the body, feeling and subjectivity – more suited to serve as a therapeutic antidote to the ‘abstractions and deceptions’ of reason than as a medium of thought.”²³

In the line of the idea that thinking is embodied activity, one could also speculate that dance is an embodied thinking though a highly developed activity of thinking process. In a more radical way one could say that dance expresses things beyond our ordinary languages. It says that dance (in particular and arts in general) say something which is not available in language of words. The representational contents of the Maibi dance in Lai Haraoba articulate something which is beyond our ordinary languages. Contrary to our initial intuition that dance cannot think, a sort of reversal in this intuition is taking place in such pronouncements as, “If we cannot make sense of what it is to act with our bodies, neither can we make sense of what it is to think that something is the case.”²⁴ This is re-enforced by the observation that “Many philosophical approaches today seek to overcome the division between mind and body. If such projects succeed, then ritual activities that discipline the body are not just thoughtless motions, but crucial parts of the way people think.”²⁵

III

We have noted above that the Maibi performs a worldview. A worldview need not merely relate to “a people’s understanding of its social environment, but also to its understanding of an even more inclusive environment, reality itself.”²⁶ Worldview could then become metaphysics, if we understand the later to be “inquiry into

the generic or necessary features of human existence.”²⁷As part of the Lai-Haraoba, the community dances, led by the Maibis. Here, through the act of dancing, the participants come to know that they belong to the community. As Schilbrack puts it the ritual body, here in this case the dancing body, comes to know metaphysical truths “in the flesh”. These metaphysical truths inform authentic existence. Metaphysical truths are how things really are. Thus, to participate in a performance of a representation of how things really are is an effort to live in consonance with that truth. Through the rituals of the Lai-Haraoba, enacted through dancing, the community participates in how the Gods act and behave. There is the legend that the Lai-Haraoba is a mimesis of the humans perceiving the behavior of gods.²⁸ “Such metaphysical knowledge, inscribed on bodies through ritual, is also practical knowledge. This ritual knowledge of reality is used to shape conduct, to get people to act “properly”, as “we” act, as “true humans” act, or as the Gods act.²⁹ In this way, ritual metaphysics is used to alienate a range of possible behaviors as not in accord with ultimate reality, and thereby to fabricate *authentic* human beings, authentic in the sense that their behavior is authorized by the very nature of things.”³⁰

The dances of the Lai-Haraoba inscribe body as texts. “But these texts are metaphysical texts”³¹ for they are metaphysically informed body dancing in tune to the metaphysical truths which the body attempts to represent, express, convey and also to come to know those truths through the act of dancing. Thus, the dances of the Lai-Haraoba have elements of the metaphysical and the epistemological. This conclusion can be further pushed to claim that the dances itself are forms of inquiry – not just a representation of knowledge gained through some means but the source of knowledge itself, “ritual can be seen in some cases at least as a form of inquiry itself, a source of knowledge in its own right.”³² Schilbrack grounds this on writings of Theodore Jennings as in “ritual action is not only the product but is also the means of a noetic quest, an exploration which seeks to discover the right action or sequence of actions”³³.

Some of the Lai-Haraoba dances are for community participation. Through these ritual dances a young girl or a boy comes to know who they are in the world, or what they are capable. But more importantly, such participations “give rise to metaphysical thinking when they induce participants to experience features of the ritual as features of the human condition generally.”³⁴ A muslim going on a trip to Mecca may come to experience that trip not only as a particular trip but through that trip experience life itself as a journey. Likewise, a young girl participating in the Lai-Haraoba following the steps and gestures of the Maibi might come to experience the synergy and the rhythm of creation and the cosmos through that particular dance individuated by a particular time and place. This participation is a question, an inquiry because it reveals an answer, a metaphysical answer.

IV

The most convincing reason for the idea that dance can claim a philosophy comes from some philosophers who argue for modern art dances as philosophy in movement. The point of their argument is the identification of dance with philosophy not through direction of fit from either of the fields. This is done so that neither of the two fields is given priority. The identification is instead done at a common meeting place, which is aesthetics. “On the alternative approach, philosophical reflection belongs to some forms of dance in virtue of a reciprocal relation of mutual dependence that obtains between the artistic power of the dance and the philosophical reflection that is present in it. From the perspective of this approach, dance’s philosophy is not of interest because it appears to secure respectability for dance. It is of interest because investigating proximity between philosophical and artistic power, which has been poorly understood, promises to deepen our understanding of both philosophical and artistic endeavor”.³⁵

The Maibi dance can be called art without difficulty though it is more a ritualistic dance rather than a self-conscious aesthetic

endeavour. Yet, it is easy to see it as an art for it is the progenitor and the source of the Manipuri Ras Dance, which is one of the recognized classical dances of the country. This canonization is recognition of its aesthetic qualities. So, on Boyce's reciprocal relation between dance and philosophy the Maibi dance, which can easily be shown as a repository of aesthetic qualities and values, is an art because it achieves something philosophically important. One could surmise that the achievement lies in the performative assertion of what constitutes as the beautiful. In this line of thinking, one can note that the Maibi dance represents, and teaches norms that are to do with living. Taking a cue from Boyce one could contend that the Maibi dance achieves not only a representation of a moral order but an assertion of that order. Therefore, something philosophically important has been achieved. Boyce's dictum that because a dance achieves something philosophical, it becomes art would meet objections from some sections of artists especially those who believe in the idea of art for art's sake. Art for art's sake is a deliberate attempt to make art ground in itself. But, that could very well be a philosophical stance regarding art.

Every time the Maibi performs in the Lai-Haraoba, they are remaking a world of the Meitei which is already there. While dancing they are actualizing each of the Meitei's worldview. Each moment performed is a lived experience for the Meitei. "Embodied practice always exceeds the limits of written knowledge because it cannot be contained and stored in documents or archives."³⁶ If worldview is to be allowed entry into the realm of a generous understanding of philosophy, then dance of the Maibi is philosophy. In the line of the idea that dancing is highly developed activity of thinking process, Maibi dance is an involved activity in which there is not just a theoretical understanding of a worldview but a presentation and assertion of a worldview through performance.

End Notes

¹ Sir Charles J. Lyall in his Introduction to *The Meithei* by T. C. Hodson gives a synoptic view of the Meitei.

It was my fortune to visit Manipur only once (in February, 1888) during my service in Assam, and I am thus acquainted with the subject chiefly by hearsay. But I have always taken a lively interest in this singular oasis of comparative civilization and organized society, set in the midst of congeries of barbarous peoples, over whom its rulers exercise an authority, which if scarcely approaching the settled polity of more advanced communities, is at least in the direction of peace and order. The valley of Manipur in several respects resembles in miniature its neighbor, that of the Irawadi. In both the civilized people who occupy the central settled and organized region are nearly akin to the wild folk who inhabit the hills which enclose the alluvial plain. While Burma has accepted the mild and gentle religion of Buddha, and thus profoundly modified the original animistic cult, Manipur has been taken into the pale of Hinduism, and has imposed upon itself burdensome restrictions of caste and ritual from which its greater neighbor is happily free. In both countries, however, the older religious ideas still survive beneath the surface of the philosophical systems borrowed from India, and in reality sway to a large extent the lives and sentiments of the people. (Lyall, 1908, p. xvii)

² Atینگkok is a primeval being, which could be translated as void or emptiness. Adhikarimayum (2013, p. 35)

³ Ibemhal (2006), Ray (2004), Walter & Fridman & (2004), Kehoe (2000)

⁴ Sharma (1992)

⁵ Mautner (1996)

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Angelo (2008)

⁸ Priest (2006)

⁹ Hennes (2013)

¹⁰ Schilbrack (2004, p. 2)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cull (2012, p. 25)

¹⁴ Colebrook (2005, p. 5)

- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Heidegger (1968, pp. 19-20)
- ¹⁷ Modernism in dance is a 20th century phenomenon and is not to be mistaken with philosophical modernism though there is the similarity between the two in the latter's reflection on itself – its conditions and possibilities.
- ¹⁸ Boyce (2015, p. 39)
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.37
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Feibleman (1976, p. 170)
- ²² Ray (2009)
- ²³ Boyce (2015, p. 37)
- ²⁴ Weil (1978, p. 7)
- ²⁵ Schilbrack (2004, p. 4th Cover)
- ²⁶ *Ibid.* (p. 128)
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Adhikarimayum (2013)
- ²⁹ “The origin of the festival is that the gods held the first Lai Haraoba on the Koubru Hill, so that their descendants should imitate them and perform the same as it had been done by the deities so that they will never forget the secret ad the sacred story of the creation of this universe and the birth of the different lives on this earth.” Caeser, Chaningkhombee, & Sanasam (2012, p. 278)
- ³⁰ Schilbrack (2004, p. 131)
- ³¹ *Ibid.* (p. 133)
- ³² *Ibid.* (p. 136)
- ³³ As quoted in Schilbrack (2004, p. 136)
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* (2004, p. 138)
- ³⁵ Boyce (2015, pp. 48-49)
- ³⁶ Taylor (2008, p. 101)

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