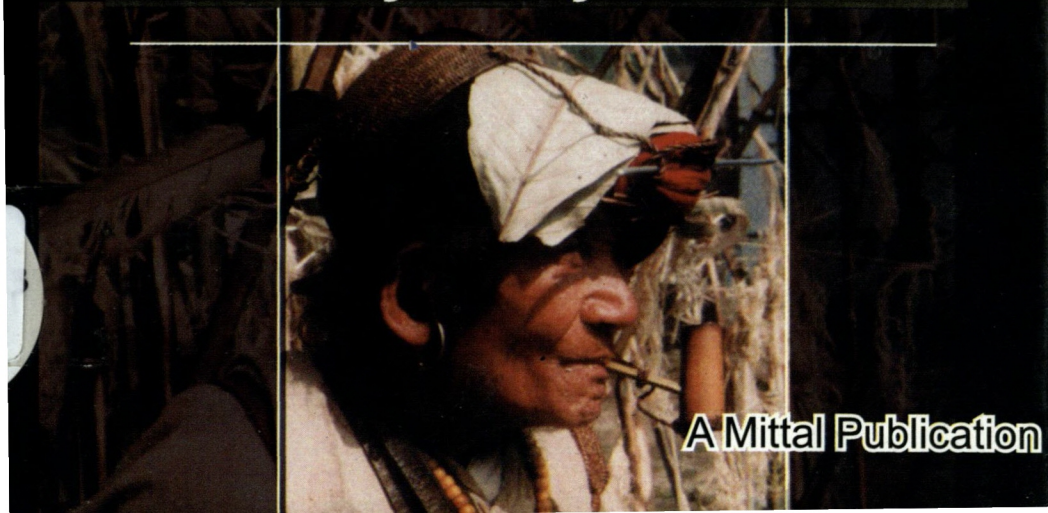


Nabam Tadar Rikam

**EMERGING RELIGIOUS
IDENTITIES OF
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

A Study of Nyishi Tribe



A Mittal Publication

This book deals with emerging religious identities and transformations taking place for the last five decades in Arunachal Pradesh with specific research on the Nyishi tribe. Ethno-historic method has been followed to capture the imagination and process of changes in the society. A factual narrative with condensed interpretations have been mutually embedded in a lucid and comprehensive manner. The book is first of its kind and covers exhaustively the entire gamut of the subject. Apart from its importance and utility in the world of academics, it will also benefit the common readers and researchers.

Rs. 450



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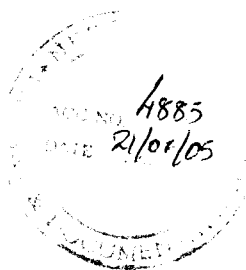
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1

INTRODUCTION

I

Arunachal Pradesh: Land and People

Situated in the extreme northeastern part of India, Arunachal Pradesh is one of the unique pieces of land on this earth. The first ray of the sun peeps at this land. This is the reason, Arunachal is popularly known as the land of rising sun. It is located at the latitude of 26° 28' N and 29° 30' N and longitude of 91° 30' E and 97° 30' E.¹ It is a sentinel of the country bordering as many as three neighbouring countries viz. China, Myanmar and Bhutan besides Tibet, an autonomous council. Dong, located in Anjaw district of the state, shot into limelight in the world for being the first place to receive the sun ray in this millennium. Arunachal Pradesh has a total of 83,743 sq.km² landmass, of which more than 80% are hilly regions that sustain the forest resources. There are as many as 110 major and minor tribes that inhabit in the state. Arunachalees, basically belong to Paleo-Mongoloid stock and mostly speak the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages. As per the 2001 census, the population of Arunachal Pradesh is 1091117. The density of population is 13 persons per square Km.³

Table 1.1: Population of Arunachal Pradesh from 1961 to 2001

<i>Census Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Density</i>	<i>Schedule Tribe</i>
1961	336558	4	298436
1971	467511	6	369408
1981	631839	8	441167
1991	864558	10	550351
2001	1091117	13	694606

[Source: Census of India, (Arunachal Pradesh) 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001]

The land is an abode of over five hundred rare orchids, which are incomparable throughout the world. The natural vegetations, flora and fauna add extra charm and beauty to this hidden paradise. Several authors and scholarly visitors have appreciated and praised the enchanting scenic beauty of Arunachal Pradesh in distinctive descriptions. Verrier Elwin very aptly describes this feature in the following words: 'the beauty of the countryside - the distant mountains white with snow, the nearer hills dressed in pine, oak and fir, the limpid green of winding rivers - has created in them a love of beauty, a sensitive taste and a desire to make good things.'⁴ Sachin Roy, who worked on the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh writes, 'Man and nature have stayed here for centuries facing each other, entrenched in their positions, making occasional forays into each other's dominions. But struggle has been harder for man.'⁵

Traditionally, the people of Arunachal Pradesh may be broadly divided into two groups on the basis of ethnicity and religion i.e. the Bodic and the non-Bodic. Those tribes who profess Buddhism of either sect - Hinayana or Mahayana and have migrated from Myanmar and Bhutan comes under Bodic group while those group of tribes who profess and maintain different but distinct types of indigenous faiths come under non-Bodic group. Among non-Bodic group, the Tani group of tribes, which includes Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, Miri or Mishing who claims to be migrated from the north, is numerically larger than the other groups and sub-groups in the state. They worship Donyi Polo as their indigenous religion. But now many Arunachalees especially from the Nyishi tribe and the Adi tribe have converted to Christianity.

II

Administrative Growth and Development

The administrative growth of Arunachal Pradesh has been precisely started after the British occupation of Assam in 1826 A.D. Initially, the British continued the appeasement policy of Ahoms towards the frontier tribes. However, by the end of 1850, British modified their policies, which were essentially called 'non-interference.'⁶ The passing of 'Inner Line Regulation 1873' and its subsequent promulgation in Lakhimpur and Darrang in September 1875 and March 1876 was basically an extension of the policy of non-interference.⁷ With the appointment of Captain F. Needham as Assistant Political Officer at Sadiya in 1882, the fragile type of frontier administration was given to a virtual shape. As a result of development in Lhasa, in

August 1910, Chinese activities on the frontier and murder of Noel Williamson, Assistant Political Officer in March 1911 at the hands of Abors (now Adis), British policy of 'non-interference' was replaced by a policy of 'loose political control.'⁸

The definition of Indo-Tibetan boundary in 1914, popularly known as 'Mac Mohan Line'⁹ was the most important step initiated by the British. The 'Government of India Act of 1919', designated all the tribal areas of Assam as 'backward tracts', which was rechristened to 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas' in 1935. Consequently, the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontiers of NEFA were designated as 'Excluded Areas.' In 1942, the Tirap Frontier Tract was carved out of the Sadya Frontier Tract, while in 1946 the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two divisions - the Abor Hills and the Mishmi Hills. At the dawn of independence, there were five administrative frontiers but they had undergone a series of territorial and jurisdictional readjustments. In 1954, the Frontier Divisions were given the names i.e. Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, Tirap and Tuensang, but at the end of 1957, Tuensang was re-united with the Naga Hills District as the new Naga Hills and Tuensang Area.¹⁰

However, the promulgation of the 'North-East Frontier (Administration) Regulation 1954', paved the way for full scale administration for the entire area under the collective designation of 'North-East Frontier Agency - NEFA. A 'Single Line Administration' system was introduced which greatly increased the efficiency of work and the spirit of co-operation among the officers.¹¹ The Ministry of Home Affairs took over the administrative responsibility of NEFA from the Ministry of External Affairs in 1965.¹² Consequent upon the passage of 'North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act 1971', NEFA was converted into a Union Territory status.¹³ In next year the name was again rechristened to Arunachal Pradesh and the administrative divisions were also renamed from Divisions to Districts. A four tier Panchayati Raj introduced in 1969 was replaced by Pradesh Council in 1972. In 1975, the Pradesh Council under the administrative head of Chief Commissioner was upgraded to Provincial Assembly with Council of Ministers headed by Chief Minister and the status of Chief Commissioner was also promoted to Lt. Governor. The first General election to elect thirty Members Legislative Assembly (MLA) was held in 1978. Within a decade, Arunachal Pradesh attained her Statehood on 20th February 1987. The strength of the Member of Legislative Assembly was raised to sixty and with a continuous bifurcation of districts, now the number has been increased to sixteen.

III

The Nyishis

The present study is based on Nyishi tribe, which is one of the major tribes of the state. They are inhabited in five different districts namely Upper Subansiri, Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kume, Papum Pare and East Kameng. These districts are named after the major rivers i.e. Subansiri, Kurung & Kume, Papum & Pare and Kameng respectively. A few Nyishis are also inhabited in Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The five districts are located in the central and western part of the state which falls under the North Eastward Himalayan Range. Besides the above major rivers, there are numerous minor rivers and streams that either originated from or flow through these districts. The rivers are turbulent and flow with full force during the rainy season and, as such these are not navigable.

The region is surrounded by Tibet and China in the north, Assam in the south, West Siang district in the east and West Kameng district in the west. Its abundant natural vegetations largely influence the climate. But with the rapid deforestation and urbanization, the variations in the climatic conditions are visible as unlike the olden times now we have both hot and humid climate in the foothills while the up hills or interiors experience extreme cold particularly during the winter-months. During monsoon, rainfall is heavy in the valleys and southern part of the region. The average annual rainfall is 250 cm. approximately. Soil erosion and landslide are common features of the region, leading sometimes to flood causing thereby damage to roads, bridges, agricultural field, and crops, thus endangering the human lives, domestic animals and other properties.

The area is gifted with abundance of flora and fauna. The natural vegetations are varied in nature with the elevations of the region, which shelters numerous kinds of creatures. Among the tree species khukar hollock, oak, jetali, amari, simul, pine, walnut, hill chompa, wild banana, wild palm etc. are commonly found. Numerous shrub varieties like creepers, elephant grass, maiden-hairs, spear grass, wild berry, dye-creeper, lady-fern etc. grow in plenty. Canes and bamboos of various types grow in abundance and they have great role in the socio-economic life of the people. Among the wild animals that maintain the ecological balance of the nature are tiger, leopard, lion, wild cat, golden cat, jackal, elephant, deer, wild boar, wild buffalo, monkey, porcupine, squirrel, rat etc. and snakes of different types are making their abode in the forest. The birds of varied kinds such as snake bird, little green baron, cattle egret, night heron, spotbil

duck, sparrow, hawk, eagle, vulture, cuckoo dove, owl, crow, wood pecker, bulbul, horn bill etc. are making their habitat in the vast and dense ever green forest of this region.

Historically, culturally and even in terms of language the Nyishis have a close affinity with the neighbouring tribes such as Adis, Apatanis, Tagins, and the Miris or Mishings of adjoining Assam. Like these tribes, the Nyishis also do believe that they are the descendants of Abo Tani (mythical forefathers). That is why all these tribes are called the 'Tani Group of Tribes' in Arunachal Pradesh. The Nyishi tribes including the Tagin and the Hill Miri (many have assert themselves as Nyishis) have been mistakenly or without justification termed as Dafla or Dumpla by Ahoms. Later on, the colonial ethnographers continued to use the same nomenclature and were carried even in the constitution of the independent India.

Few ethnographers and authors tried to describe the Nyishi (Earlier known as Dafla) in their own ways in totality vis-à-vis the other tribes of the state. They had painted wrong picture of the tribe by studying only a few pockets of the Nyishis and subsequent authors have repeatedly used the same notion. Thus, F. Hamilton, described the Daflas as retaining 'the fierce and warlike spirit of the ancient Assamese; they indulge their appetites in eating unclean food as much as the impure nations of China and Europe, and adhere to their old customs, altogether rejecting the instruction of the sacred order of the Hindus and what is called the purity of its law.'¹⁴ Similarly, in his book, *The Daflas of the Subansiri Region*, B.K. Shukla described, 'despite these physical variations; however, all the Daflas are well built, muscular and handsome. The maidens are attractive with their simple and innocent looks and the children with their rosy cheeks are particularly pretty.'¹⁵ But Mr. Shukla, on the other hand distracted the truth relating to the temperamental behaviour of the Nyishis. This distortion is explicit in his words: "Their hills have remained terra incognita for centuries, with a long history of acts of brutal vengeance, raids and ransom, assault and murders. 'Innocent adventurers and intruders were liable to be ambushed and killed.'¹⁶

The myths and legends establish beyond doubt that the Nyishis and for that matter the entire human race descended from the same ancestor i.e. *Atu Nyia Tani*. The people call themselves *Nyeshang*, *Nishi* or more appropriately as *Nyishi* since the time immemorial. As per their mythology, the term '*Nyishi*' or '*Nyeshang*' is derived from two words i.e. *Nyi* or *Nyia* - means man or human race that descended from *Atu Nyia* (first real man on earth) and *Eshang* or *Ishi* - means

high hills or highland. Therefore, a compound word 'Nyishi' denotes the descendants of *Atu Nyia* who dwells in the highland. This is the reason they are called highlanders. Nyishis, by nature are conscientious, confident, sturdy, brave, courageous, industrious, simple and straightforward. However, due to the variations of topographical and climatical conditions, their physical stature, dress, phonetic accent of language etc. vary slightly from one region to other. But because of the same racial blood, more or less their temperament, attitude and mentality are almost similar. In the words of Haimendorf:

*The Daflas are less homogeneous than many other hill tribes in that part. They are distinguished by two pronounced and divergent types. The more frequent type is made up of those having round, flat face with a broad snub-nose, prominent cheekbones, eyes lying in the flat sockets, and other type is characterized by an oblong face, a prominent often hooked nose with a narrow bridge, deepest eyes, a well-pronounced chin, ruddy complexion, comparatively high stature and athletic build.*¹⁷

In absence of standard historical documentation and lack of archaeological sources, there is no definite idea about the origin, evolution and pattern of migration of the Nyishis. In this way, the early history of Nyishi is shrouded in the midst of wilderness.¹⁸ Nevertheless, they have rich culture, glorious tradition and fascinating religious faith, which have been vigorously professed and maintained through ethical codes, orally and believed to have been handed down from generation to generation since the time immemorial. The social and cultural ethos is elaborately represented in their *Idh-bingnam*, *Buya-sonam*, *Rukhpi-sonam*, *Nyeme-Kabnam*, *Bingjam-jamnam*, *Baghe-panam*, *Darkumba-darnam*, *Nargubo-narnam* and so on and so forth.

In the beginning, the Ahom rulers in Assam had only occasional contact with this tribe. The Ahom Buranji made the first mention of Daflas (Nyishis) in 1562 when they became allies of the Kochs in their invasion of Assam. The Nyishis were divided into western Daflas and eastern Daflas. The Nyishis used to descend down with their hill product in the foothills once or twice in a year to exchange or collect their essentials from the plain dwellers of certain adjoining areas. This kind of relationship sometimes turned to sour and that led to clashes between the Nyishis and the plain people. The Buranjis had referred to several Ahom expeditions into the Nyishi (Dafla) country.¹⁹ The first conflict was directed against the western Nyishis in 1614,

where the Ahoms were badly defeated with heavy loss of men and provisions. Subsequently, the Nyishis unleashed a reign of lawlessness in the foothills and that is why they are recorded as the most turbulent and formidable tribe that the Ahoms had encountered. To check and avert the raids and plunders of the Nyishi, the Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-41) constructed a huge fort call *Dafla Garh* in the Darrang district which is also popularly known as *Raj Garh* (Royal Fortification). Throughout the Ahom period in Assam, the ruler's main concern was to contain the frontier tribes in their hills and forest as they used to disturb peace in the foothills. They adopted a policy of conciliation followed by cautious use of force in extreme case.

The Nyishis were so turbulent that once, the Prime Minister of Raja Udayaditya Singha, while cautioning the king, declared that, 'the Dafla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat hole.'²⁰ But Raja ignored his warning and ultimately the expedition received crushing defeat from the hands of Nyishi. Muhammad Kazim, in the days of Aurangzeb wrote, 'The Daflas are entirely independent of the Ahom Raja, and plunder the country contiguous to their mountains.'²¹ One of the earliest specific references to the tribe occurred in the account written by Shihabuddin Talis who accompanied Mirjumla when the latter invaded Assam in 1662 A.D. He wrote, 'the Dafla tribe did not place its feet in the skirt of obedience to the Ahom Raja, but occasionally encroached on his kingdom.'²² In order to buy peace in the foothills, the Ahom king, Pratap Singha formally granted a Posa right to the Nyishis and a few hill tribes. In fact, the Posa, which was hitherto collected illegally by the hill tribes, was regularized with a condition that they shall show allegiance and pay tribute to the king. But the regularization of Posa payment hardly made difference in the attitude and activities of the Nyishis as the raids and plunders continued unabated. With the decline of Ahom kingdom in Assam in the early part of 19th century, internal disorder and dissension cropped up; the tribal living in the border area did not lose their time to take a share of the common spoils, by plunder and aggression on their foothill neighbours.

It was in this state of affairs, the British took the reign in 1826 A.D. While realizing the problem, the government wanted to pay the Posa in terms of money in lieu of kind but the offer was not acceptable to the tribesmen for the simple reason that the money had no exchange value in their interior places. However, by employing tact or shrewdness (conciliation and force), the Britishers could able to

make the tribe acceptable to the commutation of Posa payment from kind to cash. On the line of containing the raids and clashes along the foothills, the government enacted an Act in 1873, popularly known as 'Inner line Regulation of 1873'²³, which among others forbade the entry of outsiders into the tribal hills without having valid pass.

The frontier policy of the government was given new shape with the appointment of J.F Needham as Assistant Political Officer of frontier track in 1882. It is to be noted that the early administrators and for that matter the government was least interested to have contact with the people of north western part corresponding to present Nyishi inhabited districts. The topographical conditions with little or no immediate economic viability could be the possible reason of such lukewarm attitude towards this region. In practical purpose, the British never tried to occupy the territories of the frontier tribes and even refused to intervene in their internal affairs. They were only satisfied by receiving submission of tribes and their refraining from creating nuisance that too in the British territory.

From the early part of 20th century the relationship between the Nyishis and the Britishers took new turn as there were no persistent raids or clashes in the borders. Meanwhile, there was perceptible influence from the northern neighbours and the government had apprehension of possible threat to their northeast possession in future. Therefore, the government sent the Miri-Mission²⁴ in 1911-12 to the hills of Subansiri region primarily to acquaint the land and the people of hills and to assess the outside influence. The government duly approved the survey report and its recommendation and as a result the western section of North East Frontier was formed in 1913. Evidently, the administration was gradually extended and the whole tribal area was divided into the Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract in 1919. In order to bring effective administrative control, the Balipara Frontier Tract was separated into Sela Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area corresponding with the Kameng Region and Subansiri Region of Arunachal Pradesh. As a result of this bifurcation, the western branch of Nyishi came under the jurisdiction of Sela Sub-Agency and the eastern branch, which was numerically larger falls under the Subansiri division. In the processes, the Sela-Sub Agency was further divided into East Kameng, West Kameng and Tawang Districts of which the Nyishis inhabit in East Kameng. Similarly, the Subansiri region has been bifurcated into four separate districts, where the Nyishis inhabit.

Like other tribal groups in the state, Nyishi society is also based

on patriarchal and primogeniture is the fundamental law of inheritance though variations are also not uncommon. In the context of Arunachalee tribes, the structural formation of the social organizations seems to be quite similar but its stratification or division and the working pattern are different, as some tribes have evolved organized social institution while others have less organized institution. The

Sl. No.	Name	1961	1971	1981	1991
1	Adi (group)*	77187	93959	120839	158059
2	Aka	2230	2345	1947	3531
3	Apatani	10793	12888	16580	22526
4	Deuri	-	2683	3608	5200
5	Hill Mini**	2442	8174	6936	11017
6	Khamba	1110	848	342	1333
7	Khampiti	2644	4115	7010	8339
8	Khowa	659	703	625	1046
9	Memba	2431	2468	2679	1169
10	Miji	2079	3549	4074	5779
11	Mishing	2817	3359	5201	5899
12	Mishmi	19722	22561	24596	31329
13	Monpa	20799	28209	32902	38862
14	Nyishi	51023	82187	87075	116258
15	Nocte	19287	23416	26257	33720
16	Sherdukpen	1144	1639	2096	2254
17	Singpho	957	1567	2353	2978
18	Sulung***	1781	4288	4233	5448
19	Tagin	24055	22107	27124	28860
20	Tangsa	6741	13447	18921	26016
21	Wanchu	23382	28650	32441	38528
22	Lisu	78	926	5	1530

(Source: Census of India: 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991)

Notes: * Adi is divided into various sub-tribes and one of the major sub-tribes i.e. Galos have preferred to call themselves as Galo in place of Adi tribe.

** Hill Miris affirms and call themselves Nyishi as the words - 'Hill Miri' were coined and used by outsiders. But some of them still preferred to retain the words on the plea that it has been used for quite long time.

*** State Assembly has passed a resolution recommending the government of India to declare the Sulung (Puroik) tribe along with Bangru as sub-tribes of Nyishi tribe.

Adi's Moshup (Dormitory) and *Nyishi's Yapa Goya* (Youth or peer group) or *Apatani's Buliang* (Division based on age) may be cited as a prominent examples respectively.²⁵ Unlike other tribe, Nyishis do not have sub-tribes. This is why they are accounted as the single largest community in the state.

One striking feature of Nyishi society is that it is neither based on caste system nor stratified into classes, except a loose type of social distinction, which is not determined by birth or occupation. They evolved broad base family organization and a joint and extended family norms which still exist but altogether in changed forms. Nyishis are divided into five major phratries based on lineage called *Hoso* (Identification through descendent of same forefather) namely *Dopum*, *Dodum*, *Dolu*, *Anyia Hari* and *Hagung*. The first three are the descendents of the immediate son of *Atu Nyia* i.e. *Haring Ringdo Tado* while the last two are the direct sons of *Atu Nyia*, *Anyia Hari* being his last son. The phratry system and for that matter clan division is mainly important on social and religious aspects. The most striking feature is that the members of same phratry and clan would help and co-operate one another in socio-religious functions and they would share the blood and heart of a sacrificed or killed animal as a bond of brotherhood what may be called *Uyi Haa Debam Nam*. However, beyond this, it does not insist on same habitat nor forges separate political entity nor requires practising similar pattern of economic activities.²⁶

In ideological term, the Nyishis considered the women as the source of peace, progress and prosperity. According to them, the importance and status of women increases and binds through an established 'reciprocal marital exchange' system in the society. However, the traditional Nyishi women were overburdened in their family affairs as they practically manage the family. This has deprived them from taking active part in other aspects of the society. But all sensible man would always consult or seek advice from his woman counterpart before taking any decision. Clan exogamy and tribe endogamy is the law of marriage. Clan is a very important component in the structural organization of the tribal society relating to marriage and breach of the clan rule is considered to be a serious offence. A reciprocal exchanges between both the parties i.e. the bride and the groom, actually binds them in more strict terms than one could imagine because it works as a renewing force through which the relationship goes generations together.

Slavery existed among the Nyishis since the time immemorial.

But it was quite different from the slavery system prevalent in other society as the basis of slavery was not birth or occupation. The master took the whole responsibility of their slaves including food, housing and clothing. In this way there was no much difference between freeman and slave because the treatment to the slaves was always humane and at times they could become freemen. Now slavery system is becoming a thing of the past as many of the earlier masters have started voluntarily freeing their slaves.

In the strict sense of the term Nyishis do not have political organization. In fact the Nyishis and for that matter the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were not aware of the state and government other than their village and village councils. For them, their state was their village, which has its own natural geographical contiguous boundary. Their government was their village council, which was all conducive to serve their purpose while their sovereign ruler was nature and environment was their policy maker. The Nyishis do have politico-cum-judicial system called *Nyele*. A place where the contentious issue/problem is discussed to find out amicable solution is known as *Nyele Meram* or *Barekh Meram*. A medium through which the warring parties are persuaded for amicable settlement of the dispute is known as *Gingdung* or *Bungriang Bungte Angnam*. The decision of the *Nyele* is always guided by customary law, which prescribes a punishment of material compensation and sometime a social boycott too. Though it is not based on an institutionalized system yet *Nyele* is a unique mechanism to deal with the varied issues of the society with certain degree of satisfaction. *Nyokum* is a major festival of the community celebrated once a year while *Yulow Panam* is the highest ritual ceremony generally performed among the members of a clan or a family.

Except occasional trading contacts that too through limited barter system the Nyishis do not have close relation with their neighbouring tribes. Even they could hardly interact with their fellow Nyishis who dwell over large geographical regions with rugged topography that sustain their isolation from the rest of the world.

IV

Historiographical Survey

The colonial ethnographers had generated enormous data on the tribes of North East India. Some of the earlier works include Mackenzie's *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill*

tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal (1884), E.T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal* (1872, 1960), E.A. Gait's *History of Assam* (1926), etc. These works have provided us the first hand information about the composite tribal communities inhabiting the region.

Many have worked on Christianity in the context of northeast in general and community specific in particular. F.S Downs has written a number of books on Christianity. To mention a few: *The Mighty works of God: A brief history of the council of Baptist churches in North East India* (1971), *Christianity in North East India* (1983), etc. A denomination wise works, have also been carried out by few scholars such as David Syiemlieh, *A brief History of Catholic Church in Nagaland* (1990), Milton Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India* (1992) in two volumes. O.L. Snaitang, in his *Christianity and Social Change in Northeast India* (1993) has examined the role of Christianity in the context of over all social change in northeast India. He opines that Christianity has played a positive role in socio-cultural and economic transformation of the region. J. Puthenpurakal's (edited) *Impact of Christianity on North East India* (1996) is a collection of interesting essays relating to the impact of Christianity on the people of the region.

Coming to the Arunachal Pradesh in specific, first we need to keep in mind the report and tour diaries produced by the colonial administrators in response to the problems they encountered while administering the frontier tracts. Mention may be made of Dun's *Preliminary Notes on Daflas* (1896), Needham's Report on the Bebeijya Mishmi Expedition - 1899 (1900), A. Hamilton's *In Abor Jungles* (1912), Duff's Report on Miri Mission (1912) etc. A few administrators who had basically anthropological background took up specific studies. Special mention may be made of Furer Haimendorf's *The Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of Subansiri Region* (1947), *The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours* (1962), *A Himalayan Tribe: from Cattle to Cash* (1980), and *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh* (1982). However, while dealing with the Nyishi tribe, Haimendorf has generalized many aspects despite the fact that he had studied a small group of Nyishis inhabiting around the Apa Tani Plateau. U.G. Bower's *A Hidden Land'* (1953) is a travelogue related to the tribes of Subansiri belt.

Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1959) has been a useful text for understanding and dealing with the problems of Arunachalee tribes. His *Democracy in NEFA* (1965) is an attempt to highlight the role

and importance of traditional democratic institutions of the tribal communities and their relevance in tribal administration. Elwin's another documentary work on the tribes of Arunachal is *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* (1959). Though Elwin's *The Tribal World of Elwin* (1964) is autobiographical in nature but we get a deep insight into the tribal life as well. Ramchandra Guha's book on Elwin, entitled '*Savaging the civilized*' (1999) provides us an interesting critique of many of Elwin's works. The other research works worth mentioning are: L.N. Chakraborty's *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam* (1964) and *Glimpses of the early History of Arunachal* (1973), Sachin Roy's *Aspects of Padam and Minyong Culture* (1966), N. Sarkar's *Dances of Arunachal Pradesh*, (1974), M.L. Bose's *British Policy in North East Frontier Agency* (1979), J.N. Chaudhury's *Arunachal Panorama* (1973) and *Arunachal through the Ages* (1982).

Some of the recent research works that deal with different aspects of the changes taking place among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are: Gurudas Das, *Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in Transition* (1995) N.C. Roy & P.K. Kuri, *Land Reform in Arunachal Pradesh* (1998) and J.L. Dawar, *Cultural Identity of Tribes of North-East India: Movement for Cultural Identity among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh* (2003). Dr. Dawar's book deals with the official nationalist discourse of integration and its dialogue with the newly emerging intellectuals among the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh since 1950's. In the process of this dialogue emerged an agenda of resistance against the officially sponsored cultural hegemony and a process of identity formation. However, the book argues that the identity formation is a process and therefore it brings forth a healthy critique on the essentialist concept of identity.

The indigenous scholar's contribution has immensely enhanced our understanding of the various aspects of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They have provided deep insight into the processes of transition taking place in the society. To mention some of these scholars: Tai Nyori, *History and Culture of the Adis* (1993), T. Kani, *Advancing Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh* (1993) T. Mibang, *Social Change in Arunachal Pradesh* (1994), and N.N. Osik, *Modern History of Arunachal Pradesh* (1999).

As far as the research work on Nyishis is concerned, a special mention may be made of B.K. Shukla's book, *The Daflas of the Subansiri Region* (1965), as it is the only book so far written on Nyishi tribe. Shukla's work is basically descriptive in nature and does not take into account the changes taking place in the society.

The other work on this tribe is my own M.Phil. dissertation entitled, *Socio-cultural life of the Nyishis* (1997) (unpublished) where I dealt with the basic aspects of traditional Nyishi society and I had tried to correlate it with the modern changing society. Neelam Taram's *A Glimpses into Baptist Churches in Arunachal* (2001) and Toko Kach's *Growth of Baptist Churches and Impact on Socio-Cultural life of the Nyishi Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh* (2002) are compilations of various documents relating to the development of Christianity in Subansiri region.

V

Methodology

My work is ethno-historical in nature. I have used both extensive archival sources as well as oral sources. I had consulted the archival sources available in National Archive at New Delhi and in the State Archive at Itanagar. The tour diaries, memoirs and reports of the early administrators relating to NEFA (Now Arunachal Pradesh) were examined. In addition to the formal sources and government records, the records of NGOs and memoirs, reminiscences or views of socio-religious leaders are also taken into account.

The most important primary sources have been generated through oral literature by conducting an exhaustive fieldwork. Needless to say, that, the oral literature has become as important a source as archival, especially in the context of studying the tribes. In the absence of written historical documents, I have used an extensive interview (both structured and unstructured) method with an added emphasis on old generation Nyishis that helped a lot for construction and reconstruction of socio-religious realities. The views of younger generation and upcoming intellectuals are also examined so as to correlate the changing pattern of the society under the impact of modernity and outside religions.

I have also used 'participant observation' method by joining in the important occasions like social and religious functions, community gathering, group discussion and individual interaction. My own experiences or reminiscences as a Nyishi over the considerable period from childhood onwards are also reflected in this study.

It is to be noted that since the study is purely qualitative in nature, statistical enquiry is thoroughly avoided. As the data is basically qualitative in nature, no attempt has been made to analyze them in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, in some cases, where data

were amenable to quantification, a simple presentation of data in tabular form is used with a precise analysis.

VI

Structure of the book

The structure of this study is designed to understand the problem in a religio-historic perspective. In general, the tribal way of life is holistic one; there is integration of social, economic and religious institutions. In other words, the secular and sacred aspects are indistinguishable. In the second chapter an attempt has been made to study the traditional belief system, faith and practices prevalent among the Nyishis. The crude nature of religious belief and their popular concept of the origin and evolution of universe including man are thoroughly narrated. In the world of uncertainty amidst people's strong belief on *Weyi* and *Oram* (spirits - both malevolent and benevolent), priest plays a pivotal role by offering himself as a liaison between the human being and the unseen powers. In this chapter a special emphasis has been given on the institution of priesthood and also other related socio-religious practices in the context of traditional Nyishi society.

Chapter three examines how Nyishi's economy has been undergoing change as a result of the modernization and development during the post-independent period. A brief account of the factors responsible for the emergence of Nyishi identity is dealt in the fourth chapter. The emerging new educated social group and their role in taking the society to new direction have also been taken into account. Chapter five concentrates on the history of Christianity in the state and especially among the Nyishis and consequent emergence of new and separate identity. Since the archival sources relating to the spread of Christianity, its impact on the society and the people's response to it are scarce, therefore, I had to utilize primarily the tools of oral history.

In chapter six an attempt has been made to study the formation of religious identity based on indigenous traditions. The intellectuals among the Nyishis in particular and indigenous tribals of Arunachal in general had perceived threat from alien religions especially from Christianity and Hinduism. Therefore, they had been seeking their identity from their tradition through an indigenous religious movement. Attempt has been made among this group to reinterpret their religious traditions and in the process certain practices were sought to be eliminated and certain practices were selected, thus giving birth to invention of certain tradition. Only those aspects of religious tradition

were selected which suited the needs and requirements of the contemporary society. This chapter is devoted to the analysis of this process of selection and rejection of certain traditions among the Nyishi. The concept of *Donyi Polo* - an indigenous religion and its certain point of commonality and differences are taken into account. A special section has been devoted to scrutinize the influence of Hinduism on indigenous religious movement.

NOTES & REFERENCES

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