

**FOLK CULTURE
AND
ORAL LITERATURE
FROM
NORTH-EAST INDIA**



**Tamo Mibang
Sarit K Chaudhuri**

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Prof. A. C. Sinha

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AND
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Edited by
TAMOMIBANG
&
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PREFACE

This volume is an outcome of a two days national seminar on 'Oral Literature of North-east India with special reference to Arunachal Pradesh' sponsored by Sahitya Academy, Baroda. The seminar was inaugurated by the then Hon'ble Speaker of Arunachal Pradesh, Mr. Tako Dabi in the presence of former Vice-Chancellor, Prof. A.C. Bhagabati, Prof. Birendranath Datta, an eminent folklorist and many other scholars came from different parts of North-east India. As per the tradition of the Department of Tribal Studies, we have decided to publish most of the papers presented in the seminar. Of course, later on, we tried to incorporate a few invited papers to make this volume more comprehensive. Inspite of our endeavour we were unable to make the text representative of the whole north-east. This indicates an urgency to promote state folklore research of this region.

However, we are highly indebted to the participants of the seminar for raising vibrant discourse which became very useful for us while editing this slim volume on the oral literature from North-east India.

We are really grateful to the Sahitya Academi for extending financial support and also to the authorities of Arunachal University for providing full institutional support for organising the seminar. Thanks to P.T. Abraham and M.C. Behera for providing help in multiple ways to organise the seminar. We appreciate Mr. S.D. Pradeep's sincerity and patience for typing the final draft of this volume. Finally, we are grateful to the Mittal Publications who took a great interest and care to publish this book.

Editors

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INTRODUCTION

—TAMO MIBANG & SARIT K. CHAUDHURI

The study of folklore is no more confined to the study of past as the concept of 'folk' itself has undergone a significant change with the emergence of folkloristic as an established inter-disciplinary scientific discipline. This has been nicely dealt with by Alan Dundes in one of his celebrated books entitled "Essays in Folkloristic" (1978). He eloquently expressed, "Folk as an old fashioned segment living on the margins of civilization was and for that matter still is equated to the concept of peasant. The way in which folk occupied a kind of middle ground between the civilized elite and the uncivilized 'savage' can be perceived in the emphasis placed upon a single culture trait, the ability to read and write. The folk was understood to be 'the illiterate in a literate society'. This was opposed to the primitive peoples who were ethnocentrically labelled "preliterate'. More recently the term was changed to 'non-literate'." Besides such an evolutionary framing 'folk' is also perceived in contrast to the urban people. Redfield's (1941) notion of 'folk-urban continuum' or defining folk society as 'a part society and part culture' was an extension of the same popular cognition.

However, for last two decades plethora of works in the field of folkloristic throughout the world in general and India in particular, have countered such an anomalous perception. As a sequel to that, in the contemporary context, folk is perceived as a group of people having at least one or more common goal(s) or characteristic feature(s). Naturally, folklore means people's lore irrespective of any spatial limitation. In

the modern context emergence of 'Xerox lore' and 'E-mail lore' etc. can be taken as a pointer to this direction.

It is true that even folklorists used the term 'oral literature' on even 'folk literature' as a synonymous to 'folklore' itself because of some ambiguous researches which evinced that each and every elements of folklore are not orally transmitted. There is non-verbal folklore also. Naturally, looking at the variation or multiple existence - the lifeline of any folklore material, Richard Dorson's (1972) cognition about 'Oral Literature' is a more logical expression followed by other three broad components viz. material culture, local customs and folk performing arts. Of course, these are not watertight compartments rather remain in a continuum in case of some folk genres. According to him 'oral literature' includes those folk genres which are transmitted orally or verbally through transgenerational processes. It includes folk tales, folk songs, rhymes, proverbs, myths, legends, riddles, ballads, lullaby, folk speech, jokes etc. These are not static at all rather constituted out of reflective and refractive elements of a culture or tradition. Naturally, in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the culture of an ethnic group(s) we need to have an intimate understanding of their oral literature or in a broader sense, folklore.

In Ramanujam's (1994) words, "Both public culture and domestic culture cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of the folk idiom. Every kind of Indian cultural practices, every kind of Indian cultural performance, whether it is the classical epic and theatre or modern film and political rhetoric, is indebted to oral traditions and folk forms The aesthetics, ethos, and worldview of a person are shaped in childhood and throughout early life, and reinforced later, by these verbal and non-verbal environments. In a largely non-literate culture, everyone whether poor or rich, high caste or low, professor, pundit, or ignoramus, engineer or street hawker - everyone has inside him a large non literate subcontinent".

Folklore or for that matter 'oral literature' can even be used for the reconstruction of history. In Indian context, as Bluckburn (1991) expressed, "Besides providing a 'cultural

critique', folklore can also internationalize the understanding of Indian tradition".

Unfortunately, such a valuable field of research is yet to receive proper articulation and institutional support in northeast India which it really deserves. It is true that under the leadership of some of the eminent folklorists of northeast India some valuable works had been done which has laid the foundation of folklore research in this region of our country though such endeavours are mostly confined to Assam, Meghalaya and to some extent Manipur. Remaining four states viz Arunachal, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, still remain as the virgin field of research specially from the perspective of contemporary development in the field of folkloristic. Of late establishment of some new institutions and forum may open up a promising horizon in this respect.

The present volume is a humble addition to the ongoing process of exploring folklore repertoire from northeast India. Most of the papers are related to the states like Arunachal, Assam and Meghalaya through a few deal with the northeast in general. Let us put a brief highlights of the papers to reflect the existing dimensions of oral literature incorporated in this volume.

Mr. Tako Dabi, Hon'ble Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, in his inaugural address pointed out that modern, heterogeneous and complex social structure are replacing the traditional life pattern. Therefore, he urged upon all experts and local talents to initiate proper documentation or rich oral literature of various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

Defining culture "as the aesthetic expression of man's responses to his physical and social surrounding, assumes a function to change the emotional content of human consciousness", Soumen Sen tried to analyse the existing crisis in the field of literary progress in own languages while the tribal people have shown their competence in various other fields. Examining Khasi (a matrilineal tribe of Meghalaya) situation he argued that the cultural development in the tribal areas of this region is still to reach a phase what modernity demands due to its weak material base. He opined that literature and art is incidentally shaped by such a development as human consciousness is not omnipotent.

Kishore Bhattacharjee in his brief and well articulated paper tried to address the issue of interpretation of already collected texts and also explored the interpretative value of those texts. Citing illustrations from the tales of Assam he tried to establish its importance for the better cognition of society and culture of northeast India. Finally, he reached to a conclusion that in old texts, one can explore the representation of the society at the time of collection and sedimentation of earlier periods. Whereas in cases of new texts field work is possible and it produces the best results.

N.K. Gogoi tried to examine the folk narratives of a new tribes of northeast India viz. Tangsa and Miji of Arunachal, Chang of Tuengchang district of Nagaland, Karbis of Assam, Puram Chothe of Manipur and tried to reveal explicitly how such folk narratives in one way are used for the formation of new clans/sub-clans or sub-tribes out of a single community or tribe, on the other way how such folk narratives can also provide a base for integration of two or more ethnic groups into one.

B.N. Singh in his paper argues how oral literature, despite the absence of traditional 'medium' and the authority of the author, enshrines in itself some intimate voices and dismantles the unitary authoritarian perspective in literature - the 'I' that names the world and imposes prescriptive definitions on the nature of reality. He further tries to show how these intimate voices, which are 'carnavalesque', popular and democratic and celebrate 'poetic democracy', emanate from Bihu songs which are the popular expression of the sentiments of the Assamese people.

Sucheta Sen Chaudhuri tried to provide a transparent idea about the new space which is created by personal names within the Bodo community. She further tried to establish that personal name as a component of study provides us valuable information about people's participation in the social movement and moreover, she also unearthed how the very idea of social movement percolated down to the mass and created a significant impact on people's mind. Undoubtedly, this paper is having a strong empirical base and venture into a field which largely remain untouched by the folklorists or even by the scholars of social movements.

S.K. Roy in his paper tried to reconstruct the existing social reality between Garo and Rabha as well as between Kumar and Hira of Assam. Through the analysis of legends and folktales collected from the Rangdani Rabha and the Pati Rabha of Goalpara and the Kumar potter community of a plains of Assam, he tried to establish his basic assumptions that very often cultural identity remains embedded in some material cultural items which reflects a community's past history.

Dilip Kumar Kalita basically stressed on the Ramkatha tradition among the Karbis of Assam, which is popularly known as the Sabin Alun. Referring different sources he tried to describe some of the unique elements of such a rich oral literary tradition of the Karbis. Similarly, he also mentioned about the *hai-i-alum*, a sacred ballad of the Karbis, which reveals cross-cultural interaction between the Karbis and the Khasis of Meghalaya.

Mrs. J.K.B. Rout in her paper tried to locate references of various plants in epics and also discussed about various folk beliefs of Assam and Orissa related to various medicinal plants.

Pratibha Mandal deals with the three versions of Garo creation myth very critically to locate the Christian features and of the features of big religious and the reason for such features. And finally she tried to inform about the degree of the Garo purity of the three versions of the myths under study.

Abhijit Choudhury seeks to look into the myth related to U Shyllong (Ka Pah Syntiew) in a comparative perspective of a few other myths of origin of the ruling families/ clans elsewhere. This particular myth provided an ideological base to the Syiemship of Hima Khyrim which was reflected in its institutional rituals and practices. He also attempted for exploration of the inner meaning in them within the frame of objective historical conditions to hint at the relation between the context of oral narratives and history.

Sumit Mukherjee tried to reaffirm the contribution folk tradition for the eco-conservation and urged the planner to take note of such local wisdom in order to promote scientific

In a South Indian folktales, also told elsewhere, one dark night an old woman was searching intently for something in the street. A passer-by asked her, "Have you lost something?"

She answered, "Yes, I've lost my keys. I've looking for them all evening."

"Where did you lose them"

"I don't know. May be inside the house"

"Then why are you looking for them here?"

"Because its dark in there. I don't have oil in my lamps. I can see much better here under the street lights".

According to Ramanujam, "Until recently many studies of Indian civilization have been conducted on that principle: look for it under the light, is Sanskrit, in written texts, in what we think are well-lit public spaces of the culture, in places we already know. There we have, of course, found precious things. Without carrying the parable too far....we may say we are now moving indoors, into the expressive culture of the household, to look for our keys. As it often happens, we may not find the keys we are looking for and may have to make new ones, but we will find all sorts of other things we never knew we had lost, or ever even had" (*ibid*).

Similarly this slim volume may not provide all those keys which a contemporary folklorist eagerly looks for but it may open up a window to him or her to search and research the existing embedded treasure of oral literature where lies the real essence of our cultural pluralism.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

—TAKO DABI

I take it to be a pride privilege for me to be associate with this august congregation of distinguished guests and scholars. It gives pleasure to me to meet this morning and to witness personally in discussion of ways and means to study and research of oral literature in works of art, songs, myths, tales, proverbs and riddles, legends etc. which remained in neglected condition in today's society.

This seminar has been organised by the Department of Tribal Studies, Arunachal University, whose laudable object is to persue such study to rewrite and trace out unrecorded history to enrich our literature. The rich treasure which is hidden in various proverbs, sayings and myths etc. are learnt and transmitted through oral tradition from generation to generation in our society. Oral tradition survives in a particular society only because it fulfils certain social function.

Today I find different people and distinguished scholars and academicians from remote places of India, particularly from other Universities as well as from our own University. This very attempt to popularise the study of different oral tradition of North-Eastern India and particularly of Arunachal Pradesh will bring us in more close contact with the people of other states. The attempts to translate the legends, songs and tales from each states will bring us closer to other in respect of inter-state amity and understanding.

In Arunachal Pradesh, there are wise proverbs, sayings, myths and legends. Kongku Rayo Agom (Proverbs and

sayings) of Adis transmitted through generation from time-immemorial and they are almost as precious as guidance for moral and social conduct of the people in their day-to-day life. The wisdom of the saying is found in such a people say:

Sone angkam em gekam

Sobue rebungem bumosu.

Meaning: A white spot on the body of a she mithun will remain as it is and never changed. On the other hand, a misformed horn of a male mithun can be grown and formed in perfect shape and size in due course of time.

Inner meaning of this goes as: A woman cannot change her character, but a man can change his past misdeed and unwanted character in course of a time. Myth is neither explanatory nor symbolic but statement of an extraordinary event.

Abo Tani is regarded as the common ancestor of the Tani group comprised of the Adis, Apatanis, Nyishis, Tagins and Hill Miris, of Arunachal Pradesh. He is the cultural hero of the Tanis differently pronounced as Abo Tani, Abutani and Aboteni. Innumerable myths are associated with Abutani and each differs from other, yet one common belief among all the Tani group is that Abotani is their common ancestor.

The legend of Boum Kakir and Lubo Rayi is popular among the Adis. In this legend one finds how Boum Kakir and Lubo Rayi were neglected by their society due to the poverty and in course of a time they could become the richest men in society and owner of large herd of mithun. The Adis always prefers to give the example of Boum Kakir and Lubo Rayi. Myths and epic reflect, and reveal the power and deeds of mythical heroes to the people, for instance, the stories related to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata etc. reveal the culture and civilization of their time.

The North-Eastern region constitutes a very important part of our country. This region is important because of its strategic location and the homeland of a vast multiplicity and rich socio-culture heritage of the country. This region comprises of seven states and covers an area of 2.55 lakhs sq. km and has the largest concentration of tribal population in the country.

The multiplicity of tribes are evident from the demographic structure. In Arunachal Pradesh there are 25 major tribes some of which has 4 to 5 sub-tribes. In Nagaland, there are 16 tribes with more than 30 sub-tribes. Similarly, almost the entire population of Mizoram is tribal. Manipur has as many as 6 major tribes and in Tripura about 5 different tribes are living. In Assam, there are number of tribal groups distributed in the hill and plain areas.

The tribal groups, of the region are colourful. Each tribe has a distinct identity of language, culture and way of life. All tribes, together present a scene of wider socio-cultural diversity and a unique cultural mosaic which is a most attractive feature of the Indian culture. The people are great lovers of songs and music and because of their intimate relations with the nature as they have sense of colour and beauty. Dance and music are not only the characteristic features of tribal life of North-Eastern region; they also create things of beauty like textile, handicrafts, wood carving etc.. Each tribe has number of festivals and colourful dances associated with such festivals. A true brotherly attitude towards this region and scholarly studies in North-Eastern region would make us feel more akin to the rest of the country which would make everybody know-how much, we the tribal and non-tribal people of this region, contributed for the growth and development of an Indian culture and thereby an Indian mind in the North-Eastern corner of our country. May I most humbly appeal you to view the history and culture of this part of your country from this angle.

Arunachal Pradesh has stepped into a new but significant chapter of her socio-cultural life with the attainment of Statehood on February 20, 1987. Arunachal has a long search for an identity, a socio-culture identity of its own but at the same time a logging for getting merged into the national mainstream. An area that remain secluded and neglected for centuries is the abode of a tribal population with deep cultural roots.

The cultural pattern that obtain in the region are rich and they reflect originality, cultural virility and artistry of the people. The question is therefore, preserve the tradition the

oral tradition of the people and besides its music and dances. The Arunachal Government have undertaken concrete steps in this direction. In almost all district headquarters, a responsible officer is posted to look after the cultural activities. Who is responsible for encouraging growth and preservation of existing beauty of local tradition. There is an Adi cultural and literary centre at Pasighat which imparts training to the local talents on traditional folklore, dance and music and similar efforts are being taken in other district also. All these measures are taken to respond to the popular urge for revival of traditional culture of the people.

The contents of the local myths and sacred lore are symptom of the depth of the Philosophy of their life. They mostly deal with the oral description of origin of the earth, human evolution etc. Late Dr. Verrier Elwin in his introduction to his delightful book entitled "MYTHS of the North East Frontier of India" wrote, "The NEFA stories of the origin or creation of the world and the sky, and the heavenly bodies have an almost Miltonic grandeur of conception. Earth and sky are lovers and the sky makes love to the earth and every kind of tree and grass and all lying creatures come into being. But the lovers must be separated for so long as they cling together there is no where or their children to alive".

The interest in oral art is very old. It has always existed and people have welcomed and sought information about the tradition, stories, myths of the community. Today modern, complex, heterogeneous forces of transformation are replacing the old life pattern. In promoting such literature, efforts should no longer be limited to a few aspects. In this respect, I would like to call upon you, all experts and especially local talents to come forward to organise and conduct both intensive and extensive study for proper documentation of rich oral literature, more particularly of various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There are also other organisation like NGOs, social workers, autonomous bodies with the co-ordination of nodal agencies who can organise themselves, provide different types of training programmes and spread research on this aspect. Apart from the policy of evolution of a common language in Arunachal Pradesh will extremely be of useful in formulation of oral tradition into written form.

To strengthen this, early introduction of a separate discipline of linguistic studies in Arunachal University will definitely create a new vista of academic opportunities for different local talents of different communities of this multi-lingual state.

I feel that the efforts of the organisers will be successful in creating interest and enthusiasm in your minds by the various academic talks and discussion on the precious theme of the seminar.

I am extremely glad to see that you have a very impressive agenda to go through. At the same time, I would like to congratulate the organisers particularly, the department of Tribal Studies, Arunachal University, for the tireless efforts they have taken in organising this highly valued academic seminar. I offer my best and sincere wishes to all the participants and particularly resources persons of this seminar.

Thanking you all.

SEQUENCES IN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

—A Perspective for Tribal North-East India

—SOUMEN SEN

Culture, understood as the aesthetic expression of man's responses to his physical and social surrounding, assumes a function to change the emotional content of human consciousness. The sequences of cultural growth of a given community is thus linked up with the sequences of its material development. The latter proceeds the former. The individual achievement in culture depends upon the group's material positions. The caveman's art, one of the evidences of this culture, differs from that of a peasant. The hillman's response to nature and social requirements which finds expression in his culture will be different from that of the valley-dweller as much as the cultural stimuli of the primitive differ from the modern.

As artist acts consciously what he creates has an end in view. In the primitive world and in folk societies, the artist's emotions were surcharged with an urge to adjust himself and his group to the social reality around him. In the opposite pole of the modern capitalist order the artist, being disgusted with the system built around, wants to discard it. His aim is to show the appalling devastation. He assumes the role of a critic, sometime a crusader. His individuality, his alienated

self inevitably leads him to a tragic guilt - the longing for a lost unity becomes inextinguishable. Even in his romanticism, when he longs for a lost unity and dreams of a future, he cannot but remain a critic. That is inevitable.

But the ancient artist's endeavour was to adjust, to share his aesthetic experiences with his fellowmen, which, to him and his fellowmen, was a guide to unity in action. This demanded a vision of a fantastic reality which was a far greater reality for him and his community because it provided a stimulation for action. His art was the result of a functional purpose - in hunting or in harvest - to bring nature to man's aid, to integrate man to a corporate will and action, being himself integrated in the process. He used the magical power of the spoken word, the mimetic dance and his ochre and charcoal, to come to the aid of his fellows to use their tools. Art then was a life substitute.

A case at hand is the Garó epic lore, *Khatta Agana*. It is described as a 'free expression in beautiful poetical imagery of the age old tales of peace and war, of the elemental longing of man and woman for one another, of love and hate, of hope and despair, of bravery and cowardness, of the passions that tear man's souls and so on'. (Rongmuthu 1967: 07). Besides being a beautiful piece of entertainment, this epic lore of the Garos, sometimes recited or sung for hours together, also assumes a function of modulating and emotional content of consciousness. It ministers to the abundance of life and initiates the young minds to their social roles. Sung in *Nok phante*. The bachelor's dormitory, it helps nourishing the youth in the values and ethos of the Garó society. The *Khatta Aganipa*, thus plays a responsible role of considerable social utility. The young mind is tuned to the glorious heritage of his society and country:

The heavenly Central Land,
The child of salgra, the God of Light
And the High one,
The Land of the Rising Sun,
The country of silver pillars,
Where billions of gold are piled,
Where the mother of rice pours out of her

in-exhaustible store,
't is the country of the goddess of gold, the
Watering place of the Sangdhu river.....

(Rongmuthu 1968:19).

Even in the love song, *ajea*, sung during the *wangala* festival, one finds the typical folk temperament of combining individual longing and joy with social spirit. The imageries are down to earth - harvesting and individual love get mingled. The young lover significantly addresses his girl as mother, she addresses him as father.

The young man sings:

My mother, thou growest like the banyan tree.
Like a grain of new pounded rice art thou, my dear.
Before the sun shouldst thou have created.
From what motherhood art thou?
I, by asking, shall know, whether
To pluck the Majingka creeper
From the tree,
And cook and eat or not.

The girl replies:

Father, together let us die, or as one run away
With the same strip of bark let us hang ourselves.

(Sangma 1983: 9-10)

In a Mizo lovesong the composer may find himself drowned in the pit of loneliness when his love leaves him, but he braves the wild bear and eagle — that is the life:

Below my Jhum I killed the wild bear,
And with a shot I downed the eagle.
My sons are on the track of the wounded beast.
What was it? A buffalo or an elephant?
Oh, I did kill a bear with its sharp tusks.
But what, my love has left
Drowning me in the pit of loneliness —
It makes me cry out.

(Goswami 1976: 13).

This is folk-life; this is folk consciousness which finds aesthetic expression in their art and literature and it is universal.

Here is a Nepali song *khiyali*:

I shall tend and I shall reap
The field of the queen.
But o ye cruel clouds, why don't you break?
Let the rains come,
I shall be able to see the land of my parents.

(Gurung 1967:91).

Culture, understood in its elements or evidences such as art and literature, 'as a kind of emotional stimulant' (Eliot 1962:14) was then 'a magic tool, a weapon of the human collective in its struggle for survival'. (Fischer 1963: 36). It served man in mastering nature and developing social relationship. The folk poet and the folk artist, the social man, found and enriching life. His consciousness was the mirror of a collective of which the individual had been a particle only. Such is an Adi song from Arunachal Pradesh:

This evening today our mother village here
With community *Hilana* warm me up and cheer
With general merry making
Marry wives and guests of visit
Come join in common joy
Guest and wives partake in common joy
From the bosom of the villa
We grow like Kapu spread.

(Dasgupta 1983: 36).

In the preceding section I have stated that the cultural growth of a community is linked with the sequences of material development and the latter proceeds the former. Folk literature cannot be produced in a milieu where collective has been replaced by individuality. Loss of collective has been replaced by individuality. Loss of collective and growth of individuality, however, is not to be taken as the loss of cultural identity since for preservation of cultural identity a modern man cannot but revert back to folk tradition of art and literature. This is an impossibility in view of the material development of social forces.

This creates a crisis situation in some milieus such as the north-eastern region of India. Describing this milieu it has

been argued by an observer that 'a serious situation of cultural crisis has arisen as the implication of a discrepant nature of development and progress. While the hill people of north-east India have amply proved their competence in various white collar, jobs, in bureaucracy, professions and in politics and diplomacy, the literary progress in their languages is rather inadequate.' (Sinha 1982). He has also observed a wide gap in the progress made by Assamese language and literature on the one hand and that made by Khasi and Garo on the other although both Khasi and Assamese were accepted as independent subjects (MIL) in the Calcutta University in 1918 and Garo in 1936. Sinha believes that as an unattended implication of development the cause of literature of the hill communities of north-east India has suffered seriously. He argues that the absence of adequate new literature is indicative of a *zeitgeist* (mood of the time) where the people are busy in withstanding to tenaciously preserve their cultural heritage but in the process are still busy in transliterating the old folk literature of adapting translations. (Sinha 1982). Sinha's observations seems to be valid since we cannot legitimately conceive a static social life for all time and change in cultural patterns along with material growth in a national social fabric is to be accepted as an inevitable reality. Dynamics of social change determine the process.

I have also discussed elsewhere (Sen 1985) how too much dependence on religion and folk tradition in the name of preservation of culture retards the growth of modern literature. It must be realised that modernity in literature and art would demand an analytical dissection of immediate reality.

A glimpse into the modern Khasi literature will be indicative. It must be admitted that among the tribal languages of North-east India, experience in Khasi is somewhat encouraging. In Khasi, we have U Soso Tham in whose poetry we see that touch which reveals a distraction from the legendary. It is modern in the sense that individual consciousness has started emerging. Take for instance:

Of sweetest water-spirits I drink,
In deepest slumber, nightly sleep,
On me harsh Winds of sorrow never beat
Why then should I ever grieve.

The 'I' appears here, a blind street singer of Shillong in the twenties of this century, who sings:

Although I see nor moon nor sun,
Because my eyes are closed,
To me they shine, both night and day,
With brightness I alone can know.

(Simon 1981: 405-406)

The diction of the poem is far apart from the folk or legendary diction. Here the imageries are not fantastic, no lesson is carried; one speaks out one's personalised emotion and individuality emerges suggesting as well as structural change from folk poetry.

But more than half a century has passed since. The post-Thamian poetry has not been that significant with fresh diction. Rather a trend has been noticed (Sen 1985) what Sinha has described as transliterating the old folk literature. The situation in other hill areas of the region is no different.

Modernity means that society has separated itself from itself. This statement, however, must not be misconstrued as the negation of the interplay of social forces. What I mean to say is that the integrating forces of a folk society gets rather weak and new social forces emerge depending upon altered social relations. These are the implications of development. The tribal mode of production and the simple-tool economy cannot sustain in the event of the introduction of modern development techniques. This brings new social relations and what Eliot said, greater occupational specialisation when religion, science, politics and art become abstractly conceived apart from each other (Eliot 1962:24). The end of mythology is the end of undifferentiated tribal life. (Caudwell 1956:36).

What is then the discrepant situation Sinha talked about? Why new literature has not adequately developed in the hill region of north-east India? Why creative prose literature (novel especially) is conspicuously absent?

The answer is to be found in the tardy development of the region. In the colonial period, the colonial rulers kept the tribal areas deliberately out of whatever little change there was in non-tribal areas. Education was doled out; literature

was encouraged under missionary patronage. Whatever literature had emerged was principally religious and to be precise, biblical. The non-Christian efforts were also limited to religious revivalist movement. The apprehension of a loss of culture due to Christian proselitisation motivated the establishment of Seng Khasi in Khasi Hills in 1899. But in an attempt to preserve the traditional culture, major emphasis was put on a religious revival and all the major literary publications patronised by Seng Khasi were on religion (Sen 1989).

In the post-independence period, the national leadership has also done very little. In fact, there was a hangover of pre-independence polity for a considerable time. Even after the establishment of separate states and union territories in the hill areas of north-east, the central policy continues to be a policy for a considerable time. Even after the establishment of separate states and union territories in the hill areas of north-east, the central policy continues to be a policy of subsidising the economy without providing a fillip to growth from within. The tribal efforts were also directed more towards political hegemony in their own domain and in the process sharing political power with the core leadership than on modernising the tribal economy. The middle class, which has grown significantly by now, and which should have been able to provide a new direction to both a wholesome development and a new literature and art, could not as yet fulfil its historical task, what could be legitimately expected. Instead, this new middle class has all along been championing the retention of traditional mode of life including culture. This role of the middle class in Khasi-Jaintia Hills, what I have discussed elsewhere (Sen 1988:63-82) can safely be taken as the role of middle class in the entire tribal belt of the north-east.

What I intended to argue here is that the cultural development in the tribal areas of this region is still to reach a phase what modernity demands, due to the absence of a wholesome material development. Literature and art is incidentally shaped by such a development. Human consciousness is not omnipotent.

The discrepancy between growth and political-cum-professional achievement is to be understood in the light of a paradox. In order to accelerate economic progress there is a need to galvanise the process of development so that the people's life standard can be improved. The paradox is whether economic and industrial growth will not remove the rich cultural traditions. A change in the socio-economic fabric will invariably bring a change in the cultural fabric. In fact, this fear of the loss of cultural identity has prompted the tribal leadership in the region to oppose schemes of industrialisation. True, there may be a partial loss of traditional culture due to rapid urbanisation, spread of education and interaction with national and international urban cultures. This will also cause partial stagnation of folk culture due to the absence of continuous vitality which the folk society provides to folk culture and folk culture, in turn, provides to folk society.

In the face of this paradox, the challenge is two-fold: first the galvanising process of development must be from within and second, the continuity and change must be synchronized by a leadership, social and political, prepared for accepting the challenge of change. The lesson of history is that no culture in the world has ever lost all its traditional mooring by modernising economy and society. It happens, though not totally, when change is imposed from without. New literature and culture, truly indigenous, drawing inspirations from living traditions and accepting modernity, can only grow with changes in the material base. Modernisation is not to be dreaded. The new literature and art must be the suitable vehicles of the times. The old is to be absorbed and transformed into the new as there is always a continuity in change. This is the cultural history of the world.

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