



**CASTE,  
TRIBES and  
CULTURE of  
INDIA VOL. 8**

**NORTH-EASTERN  
INDIA**

**S. S. CHIB**

Caste, Tribes & Culture of India

VOL. 8

# North-Eastern India



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## PREFACE

North eastern India has continued to enjoy a very vital, strategic and sensitive location in India. These characteristics assumed much more significance during Second World War when the Japanese started knocking at this corner. Nonetheless, partition of India and the creation of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh) in this part of the continent gave this region an unprecedented importance. Flanked by Bhutan, China, Burma and Bangla Desh the Northeastern India today attracts all eyes towards it. The partition of the country and creation of Bangla Desh, at a later stage as an independent nation, have given it many problems. There has been no year which has not witnessed a turmoil, clash, uprising, disturbance, riot and alike in one or other part of this region. The latest has been the Assam problem that has proved to be a fairly knotty puzzle. This vulnerable part of India with continuous occurrences of violence and reports of secessionist activities have created a potentially explosive situation in Northeastern India. The gravely disturbing situation in this part of our country has posed a major challenge to the country and its people. It is often said that the hypersensitive people of Northeastern India who have been for a fairly long time harbouring grouse and anger against the "aliens", are anxious to retain and strengthen their 'distinct identity' as well as 'cultural traditions'. Already one finds that Assam of yore exists nowhere. Some other political units have been created out of the body of that Assam. Notwithstanding these and other concessions, political and economic, one does not find peace in the region. What are the reasons for such chaotic conditions ? Reasons may be political or economic. Many attempts have been made to analyse the situation on these grounds but with no everlasting solutions. Would it not be worthwhile to view the problem in the context of the historical background and socio-cultural

patterns of the different tracts and castes and tribes inhabiting these tracts ?

The title in hand is an attempt to apprise the historical ups and downs and unique tribal customs and traditions of the people living in Northeastern India. Every socio-economic problem has its roots in history as well as ebb and flow of the cultural traits. And the problems of this region are no exception. To support this inference a case study of the current *Assam Problem* has been presented in the volume. It is hoped that academicians, administrators and researchers would find a new perspective to the problems of this region after going through this humble attempt.

It is the eighth volume in the *Caste, Tribes & Culture of India* Series. The earlier seven volumes have been written by Shri K.F. Bahadur, a scholarly administrator, and the same have been welcomed everywhere. I do not have a probing eye of an administrator yet, I have caught the thread from Shri Bahadur and I have tried to conform to the format laid down by him. I can claim no originality in my analysis and can also reach nowhere near Shri Bahadur but hope that readers would not be greatly disappointed. I have taken all care to present the society and culture of this region faithfully with mention of changes these attributes are undergoing with the passage of time. It is also hoped that readers may be in a position to appreciate the problems of Northeastern India in a better way once they are apprised of the socio cultural fabric weaved over the years.

I am grateful to different government and non-government agencies that have extended me help in compiling this title. I am thankful to my wife Mrs Shashi Chib for cooperating with me in every way in my academic pursuits. Similarly my children Pankaj and Shweta need to be mentioned here for not bothering me for many of their needs finding me busy in my academic efforts. Last but not the least, I own all the lapses that might have crept or sneaked into the volume notwithstanding all the care. I shall be obliged to such readers who enlighten me about such lapses.

August, 1984

Dr. Sukhdev Singh Chib



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## Introduction

The States and Union Territories of the Indian Union lying east of Bangla Desh collectively constitute the Northeastern India. The States of Assam (Capital : Dispur; a town near Gauhati), Meghalaya (Capital : Shillong), Nagaland (Capital Kohima), Tripura (Capital : Agartala) and Manipur (Capital Imphal) as well as the Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh (formerly popularly known as NEFA i.e. North Eastern Frontier Agency; Capital : Itanagar) and Mizoram (Capital : Aizwal) fall in this highly strategic as well as sensitive region of India. The region as a whole is surrounded by foreign countries on all sides. Bangla Desh, Bhutan, China and Burma are such countries. The region in areal terms is linked with the rest of the country through neck-like physiographic division (covering the district of Jalpaiguri) of West Bengal. Soon after the emergence of India as a politically independent nation, the region came to be characterised as strategic because of erstwhile East Pakistan's (now Bangla Desh) next door location. Chinese aggression of October-November 1962 during which a chunk of land of the then NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) was occupied by the aggressor, made the region highly sensitive. The struggle for the emergence of Bangla Desh and earlier continuously disturbed position of erstwhile East Pakistan sent wave after wave of

refugees to this region and ultimately made the region more sensitive. Notwithstanding, explanations and counter explanations, it goes without saying that the Assam problem of today and the similar disturbed conditions in some other adjacent parts are the direct result of immigration from Bangla Desh. Excepting Brahmaputra Valley, elsewhere the native population consists of tribal communities. Tribal folk live independently in their own way and hardly brook any interference. Nonetheless, before any body else could enter the region for strategic or socio-economic reasons, some foreign missionaries had worked for socio-economic emancipation of some tribes. But they had a vested interest of converting animist tribes to Christianity. Thus the step resulted in the Christianisation of many communities. Apart from anything else, such communities became socio-politically awakened as well as active. Now when the region is being accorded priority in the field of development it is pertinent to study the socio-cultural spectrum of the people living in this region.

Shifting cultivation, popularly termed as *Jhuming* in the Northeastern India is the major vocation that provides sustenance to the people of this region. Not only that, the different hues of the socio-economic fabric of the tribal communities of Northeastern India derive that shades from this system. The songs, dances, folk tales, folk songs and many other traditions of these tribals overridingly revolve around *Jhuming*. In the present day world when concern for ecological balance is being felt everywhere, it is pertinent to have a meaningful glance over this system before other details which differ from area to area, are dealt with.

### **Jhuming**

Conklin<sup>1</sup> describes *Jhuming* as "any continuing agricultural system in which impermanent clearings are cropped for shorter periods in years than they are allowed to remain fallow." As

<sup>1</sup> H.C. Conklin, *The Study of Shifting Cultivation* in Current Anthropology, February 1961.



the name itself suggests a piece of land is cleared of its vegetative cover. The slash thereafter is allowed to dry at the spot and later on set on fire. The ash thus collected is spread on the entire patch before the onset of rains and works as manure in the *jhum* field. Afterwards seeds are dibbled in the soil with the help of pointed bamboo sticks or other primitive implements. The raised crops are protected against the ravages of wild birds and animals. On this land crops are raised for one to three years and after that when the soil is unable to support any crops further, the field is abandoned to get recouped naturally. The ignorant and innocent people in good old days abandoned the field on the pretext that it had come to be affected by ghosts and evil spirits. The people who were in those times completely animist and cut off from the developing world could be expected to have such notions. However, of late they have discovered the truth. Cultivation is shifted to another plot and the *jhumia* returns to the original plot after the completion of a cycle during which all favourable plots are cultivated from one to three years. Thus the cultivation moves in a circle, around the settlement which forms a permanent nucleus.

The history of shifting cultivation is as old as that of the agriculture itself. "On the basis of archaeological data and radio-carbon dating, the origin of shifting cultivation could be traced back to about 7000 B.C. in the Neolithic period which witnessed the remarkable and revolutionary change in man from food gatherer to food producer. The pre-historic shifting cultivation used fire, stone, axes and hoes, while in the present day shifting cultivation, the stone tools have been replaced by digging sticks, iron tools, iron digging sticks, *dao*, hoe and knives."<sup>2</sup>

This system of agriculture is based on low technology and under utilization of human resources. Such a practice is followed not only in India but many parts of the tropical rain forests and bush areas of Central America, Central Africa as well as South East Asia. It is the primitive form of soil utilization and is known by different nomenclatures in different parts of the globe. In our country itself it is termed as *Jhuming* in North eastern India, *Bewar* or *Dahuja* in Madhya Pradesh, *Podu* or

2 Majid Husain, *Agricultural Geography*, 1979, Delhi, p. 62.



*Penda* in Andhra Pradesh, *Pama Dabi*, *Koman* or *Bringa* in Orissa, *Guida*, *Dungar Chas* or *Podu* in Southern Orissa, *Penda*, *Bewara* or *Depaa* or *Dahia* in Bastar, *Kumari* in the Western Ghats, *Valra* or *Waltra* in South eastern Rajasthan, *Khil* in Himalayan belt and *Kuruwa* in Bihar. Outside India this slash and burn or Bush-fallow type of agriculture is named as *Milpa* in Mexico and Central America, *Conuco* in Venezuela, *Roca* in Brazil, *Masole* in Central Africa, *Ladang* in Indonesia and *Ray* in Vietnam.

### Causes

The system came to be pursued in a natural environment which is inhospitable and rather hostile in many instances and inhabited by simple and backward communities. Land given to shifting cultivation is by and large confined to rainy lowland areas, dense rain forests, hills and other infertile tracts. The physical environment in such areas favours quick and luxuriant growth of tangled vegetation. Thus hardly any level pocket of land devoid of dense vegetative cover is available for cultivation. The hill sides contrary to the level tracts are comparatively thin clothed with forests and can be thus easily cleared. Soils cleared of trees and bushes and mixed with the ashes obtained by the burning of slash are obviously rich in organic matter and can support some crops for 1 to 3 years without being regularly manured. Therefore, such regions inhabited by primitive tribes that lack innovative devices and have an orthodox outlook towards life, have come to be infested with this type of agricultural system. The specific reasons, other than the one explained above, responsible for the system, may be summed up as :

- (a) History stands as witness that in many parts of the world the original inhabitants i.e. aborigines were pushed to inaccessible forest and mountainous areas by immigrants who were superior in arms and strategy. The aborigines were not only devoid of their fertile lands and other resources, but were also pushed to inaccessible, secluded and isolated areas devoid of new ideas, new schemes and general awakening for ages to



come. Being ignorant these people who are already the victims of acute poverty and socio-economic backwardness are obviously reluctant to shun traditions and learn better methods.

- (b) Many tribal communities have socio-cultural ties with the land and because of socio-religious bonds cannot dare to disturb or break the prevalent system. The *Baigas* of Central India take the earth as their Mother Earth and do not brook the idea of ploughing the surface of the earth. They believe, in that case, they are piercing the breast of mother Earth. Some of the tribes like Gonds and Bhuiyans take shifting cultivation as a mythological sanction and they consider it highly inauspicious to break the mythological barriers.
- (c) In these sub mountainous, mountainous, ravine infested, and rain forest areas there has been an utter lack of alternative means of employment. On the other hand a fairly high capital investment is needed for cattle, implements, manure and reclamation of land. The agricultural economy being in the traditional stage, it can not turn out capital required for having and maintaining settled cultivation. Thus the tribals are compelled by the vicious circle that originates from their inhospitable surroundings and ignorance, to pursue shifting cultivation.

### *Abuses of Jhuming*

Before it that the demerits of this system are analysed it is interesting to briefly examine the views of the protagonists of this system. Sivaraman has pointed out, "It is a mistake to assume that shifting cultivation in itself is unscientific land use. Actually, it is a practical approach to certain inherent difficulties in preparing a proper seed bed on steep slopes, where any disturbance of the surface by hoeing or ploughing will result in washing away of the fertile top soil. The tribal people, therefore, take care not to plough or disturb the soil before sowing. The destruction of weeds and improvement of tilt necessary for a proper seed bed are achieved with the help of the fire...In



most of the interior areas, where communication is not developed and not sufficient land suitable for terracing is available, *Jhuming* alone can be done for the present and as such every effort should be made to improve the fertility of the *jhumed* land."<sup>3</sup> Elvin Committee too did not view *jhuming* as a very serious problem. Sir S.H. Howard, while dealing with the question of shifting cultivation advised that instead of doing away totally with this method of cultivation a trial should be given by regulating it. He opined that if a longer period of rest is given between the fellings, there is little danger of soil erosion. J.P. Mills was of the opinion that wisely regulated *Jhuming* could probably be carried on indefinitely without causing deterioration.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars point out that *Jhuming* is practised on the slopes above 30° where terracing is not possible. High humidity and copious rainfall do not allow the soil to remain devoid of vegetal cover for a longer period. Sooner the surface is covered with some sort of vegetation. The cover thus obtained not only checks soil erosion but also acts as a factor that would ultimately add to the soil fertility. Non ploughing, non hoeing and non pulverization operations in *jhuming* keep the soil compact and resultantly the soil erodes relatively at a slow rate. Moreover, it is argued that in terracing operation the top soil which contains fertility and plant nutrients and is capable of growing plants, is lost. The top soil formation is a lengthy process and it requires sometimes decades for this purpose. Thus terracing forfeits the purpose for which it is done. Still others state that "*jhuming* is a way of life, evolved as a reflex to the physiographical character of land under the special eco-system. It is practised for livelihood and not without the knowledge of its adverse effects. The system, inspite of planning efforts, therefore, cannot be transformed easily."<sup>5</sup>

Fertility of soil can be regained to a large extent if the land is kept fallow for a number of years. With progressively growing

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Committee of Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, 1960, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Second Conference for Tribes and Tribal Areas, 1953, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Majid Husain, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.



population, the fallow cycle in *jhuming* has already shrunk from 30 to 8 years and it is still further shrinking. Thus there seem to be no chances of increasing the life of fallow span. As far as the wastage of top soil is concerned, the same can be scrapped and stored. Once the land has been terraced the stored scrapped soil can be scattered on the fields and this way there would be no loss of the top soil. Howsoever rapid may be the growth of vegetative cover, once the gullies through erosion are formed after the first clearance, the same would go on deepening rapidly and in a way would lead to the slow poisoning of the ecological system. This would ultimately result in a serious ecological imbalance. Moreover, in a country where farm acreage is already fast shrinking, the conversion of *jhum* lands into permanently terraced fields would appreciably increase the net sown acreage which would have a soothing effect on the food problem of the country. Thus it is worthwhile to have a glance over the abuses of this system.

- (a) The soil erosion that follows clearance of the vegetal cover makes the hill slopes completely barrea and denuded of soil fertility. Thus it leaves no chance for the land to regain its soil fertility.
- (b) The heavy amount of silt rendered by erosion is washed away by streams, rivulets and streams. This silt causes shifting of river courses in plain tracts and consequent floods leading to untold loss to life and property and drought conditions in other areas.
- (c) The ever increasing amount of silt in the artificially created water reservoirs has also threatened the dams and barrages. Frequent desilting of these water bodies is a difficult affair besides being a costly proposition.
- (d) The green gold lost in the form of forests devoids not only the human population of fuel wood, timber and gathering articles like flowers, fruits, honey, lac, grass etc. but also retards the wheel of human civilisation as many of the forest based industries (paper, pulp, varnish, paints, chemicals) are starved of their raw material.
- (e) Deforestation immediately leads to the depletion of



forest wealth and ultimately to the decline in amount of rainfall as also to rigours of climate.

- (f) Removal of forests and the resultant soil erosion drastically reduce the water balance of the subsoil and underground water. Consequently the springs and wells located at the foot of the hills go dry. In areas where the streams are not snowfed the drying up of springs in summer causes acute shortage of even drinking water. With the intensification of *jhuming*, the conditions may become unmanageable. The development of progressive farming needs lot of water and the drying up of springs etc. can effect a back gear.

The *jhum* fields give progressively poorer yeilds. This technique is thus both primitive and unprofitable. Nicholson pleaded with the *Partially Excluded Areas Enquiring Committee* (Orissa) that "the damage done to the forests by shifting cultivation was serious and that only under certain conditions where the area of land available is large and population small, such cultivation does little harm." This system of uneconomic agriculture is gravely detrimental to the Indian economy at large. Viewing the whole picture related to the techniques and abuses of *Jhuming* it is pertinent to have a look on the suggested remedial measures.

### Remedial Measures

Measures meant for controlling shifting cultivation should aim at the preservation of forest wealth, conservation of soil, settled terraced farming etc. on the one hand and providing alternative as well as supplementary means of livelihood to the poor *jhumias*. Any solution desiring the conversion of *jhum* fields to terraced fields should secure (a) acceptability from the natives, (b) full protection against deforestation as well as soil erosion, and (c) maximum use of existing land resources.

I. The only way of simultaneously utilising the existing agricultural land without creating large scale erosion is to convert the *Jhumland* into terraced fields in a phased manner. The state governments in the affected areas have undertaken the task of



building terraced fields. Besides granting subsidies and loans the governments are also extending technical assistance to the farmers. However, in view of the time factor and expenditure involved the achievements are far from satisfactory. Some hurdles have cropped up and have impeded the desired rate of progress of the scheme. So as to overpower these hurdles it is worthwhile to launch an effective and massive programme of educating the people about the abuses of the system nursed and enriched by their ancestors and the merits of the proposed system. Tribals all over the world are tradition bond people and they are least responsive to changes in their traditional system. It would be in the fitness of things to start one demonstrative farm in each village.

II. Terraad farming needs adequate irrigation facilities. It is no use of expanding terraced acreage if there are no steps to artificially irrigate the terraced fields. To preserve and enhance the fertility of soil it is essential that chemical fertilisers are properly used and their use needs water. *Jhuming* or shifting cultivation is practised in areas that are hilly to mountainous. Barring parts of Rajasthan, all other tracts are served by numerous streams and rivulets. There are many sites potentially suitable for the construction of small dams and weirs across some of the streams but a close and intensive study of the streams is required. All such schemes need to be planned prudently so that the diversion of water may not adversely affect other areas already depending upon the water of these streams. If cheap power is made available in the areas steps can be taken to accelerate the lift irrigation scheme, so far limited to some valleys only. Currently there is a provision of extending subsidy to the farmers for building contour channels. This subsidy of course at enhanced rate should be continued. Apart from that the Government should own the responsibility of constructing dams and weirs. The efforts of the State in this field have so far been quite unsatisfactory.

III. Bunding, gully plugging and trenching etc. apart from terracing can go a long way in conserving soil.

IV. The success of the soil conservation measures would, however, depend upon the extent, some of the communities move from their present settlements located on steeper slopes.



Traditionally in view of tribal strategy the tribal groups in the past chose their present habitats. In those days a tribal community had to defend itself against the periodic raids of other tribes. Thus the vantage point of a hill top definitely had a significant value. But this led to the non cultivation of gentle gradient and valley flat-areas located away from the settlements. Today when the dangers of raids have almost disappeared and interclan rivalries abandoned, settlements can move to other areas and take to settled farming. Once again for this uphill task to be achieved in a tradition bond society Herculean persuasive as well as demonstrative efforts are warranted. Once the persuasive efforts of the government start bearing fruit the same are likely to have spread effects that would help in the phased disappearance of *jhuming*.

V. At present the fallow period on the *jhumlands* is wasted. Only secondary growth of shrubs, grasses and bush species appear on the fallow land. Besides offering some resistance to erosion the only other benefit rendered by this secondary growth is of providing manure when scorched into the soil at the time of second crop. If during this period plantation crops with shorter maturity period (wattle, blue gum etc.) than the *jhum* cycle are raised it would yield far greater benefit. These crops would add to the protective cover against soil erosion. The grasses can be put to some better use. Moreover the plantation crops would provide an additional source of income. This method has already been gainfully employed in the Arkan region of Burma, that lies adjacent to Northeastern India, a region heavily and adversely affected by shifting cultivation.

VI. After having a bumper crop from the *jhum* field it can be converted into a fruit orchard. Oranges, lemons, pears, peaches, apples, apricots, pineapples, *leachies*, bananas and beverages (tea and coffee) can be easily grown on these slopes. The experimental plantations of apple orchards in some areas have already met with success. The orchards shall provide an extra source of income. It has, however, to be observed that like a common Indian peasant, a tribal *jhumia* accords top priority to the production of cereals. This over-riding consideration with a *jhumia* stands in the way of expansion of horticulture. Moreover in these isolated and secluded pockets of



the country there are marketing problems also. In this respect following suggestions may be examined.

- (a) In orchards inter culture of cereals (like maize, jowar, barley, buck wheat) etc. can be raised. Thus such a practice would minimise the danger of food shortage to a great extent.
- (b) Now when in view of the sensitive and strategic location of some tribal tracts, military and para military forces are stationed, a ready market is available in such areas. Military and para military forces which are present in this region, mostly depend upon the canned fruit or imported fruit. They would gladly go for the fresh fruit produced in the region itself.
- (c) In these and other tribal areas as a result of spread of means of transportation, the villages are being interlinked and also linked to nearby urban settlements by way of all weather roads. The state governments have already drawn plans for the industrial development of such neglected pockets. It would, therefore, be good to start mini fruit based plants. Juice, sausages, tinned fruit, vinegar, alcohol and even ultimately wine can be produced locally. The market for all these products as well as fresh fruit is likely to expand in view of the natural population growth and in-migration of technical as well as non technical staff required for carrying on the socio-economic development of these areas.
- (d) Once a common tribal is convinced about the efficacy as well as authenticity of monetised market, he can be persuaded to trade the fruit for cereals outside the region also. So far it has been observed that an ordinary tribal is shy to enter this sort of trade. But now when many of the stuffs to the people are being supplied by outside agencies he has shown favourable inclination and it is worthwhile to launch a programme of expanding horticulture.

VII. The *jhumia* cultivators should also be trained in subsidiary as well as alternative economic pursuits. Apart from



giving fillip to the indigenous handicrafts, it is worthwhile to start and promote the vocations like bee keeping, sheep rearing, poultry farming, duck keeping, dairying, piggery and fisheries. For such purposes cooperative and marketing facilities can be extended to the farmers. Let them be diverted from subsistence economy to a relatively lucrative economic order.

VIII. Last but not the least, it may be cautioned that the flat stretches thus created by way of terracing would also be potential ground for the activities of burrowing animals. As already practised by some tribal communities, the community pools together its human resources for a combat against the wild birds and animals. They should be encouraged to fight pests etc. on the same pattern. The government should provide them with insecticides and pesticides and some technical know-how.

On the whole it must be borne in mind that all the suggested measures require time and resources financial as well as human. The organisation of collective *jhuming* should be exploited to the fullest since individual families may not achieve gainful results. On the other hand it has to be remembered that economic and social growth is a function of time. "Any attempt to telescope the growth process is fraught with danger. A quick transformation of a poor and stagnant economy into a complex and sophisticated one carries with it grave risks. But to refuse to take these risks is to abdicate responsibilities. There will be some kind of shocks, but if advanced action is taken to absorb the shocks, then there need not be much apprehension. Such action would mean the establishment of responsive administrative machinery to protect the tribals against exploitation of all kinds, to promote educational programmes with a view to condition them for a changed way of life and to carry out constant research for adopting modern methods of production to their social and cultural patterns."<sup>6</sup> Until and unless the governments provide all the assistance, incentives and means of bringing about socio-economic transformation, it would be useless to make piecemeal efforts as that would badly disturb the ecological balance and create more problems than it solves. "The shifting cultivation is a way of life and there are cogent reasons behind

<sup>6</sup> *Techno Economic Survey of Nagaland*, NCAER, New Delhi, p. 2.



the customs and practices of the tribal people. The climate, the terrain, their food habits, their needs, their self reliance, all have a say on shifting cultivation. The whole gamut of primitive society is inter-woven with the means of food production. In others words their way of life, training of youths, social and political systems, the ceremonies and festivals, in brief, their philosophy of life are the products of *jhuming* system of economy. This is why many of the new methods of cultivation, recently introduced in the tribal areas are yet to generate the process of cultural acceptability. Transforming of *jhuming* cultivation into sedentary farming, therefore, should be gradual and smooth, causing least disturbance and human ecological imbalances to the *jhumers* who are still in the relatively primitive stage of culture.”<sup>7</sup>

The native population of Northeastern India consists entirely of tribal people. The word tribe has varying usages. Once this term tribe was applied to a bewilderingly large number of Indian communities. Even the *Jats* and *Rajputs* were considered as tribes along with the primitive communities. Ironically, inspite of a lot of hue and cry in India related to the economic emancipation and social uplift of the tribals, no satisfactory definition of ‘tribe’ has been given officially. However, it appears from studies that the term ‘tribe’ is normally ascribed to the community which has all or many of the following characteristics.

- (i) The community lives in isolated as well as remote habitats usually located in inaccessible mountainous surroundings or jungles. They normally live away from the civilised world.
- (ii) Till recent past the community did not have any free contacts with the economically advanced sections of the population living outside. There was also lack of inter community communication.
- (iii) The community is one of the oldest if not original inhabitants of India.
- (iv) The community is not only economically backward and poor but also suffers from many other inhibitions. They

7 Majid Hussain, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.



normally pursue primitive occupations like fishing, hunting, gathering and slash and burn cultivation. It professes an animistic or near animistic faith and believes in untold superstitions, ghost cult as well as witchcraft etc. Elsewhere their faith is overlain with animistic rituals.

- (v) Community is very fond of music, songs and dancing and is almost carnivorous. Some of them have nomadic habits.
- (vi) The people are either of Proto Australoid (Bihar and Orissa), Negrito (South India), Mongoloid (Northeastern India) or Mediterranean (Western and Central Himalaya) origin. The tribals of South India in fact carry strains of Australoid, Negroid and Alpine origin.
- (vii) Community has no knowledge about its complete history. Its remembered history of four to five generations generally gets mixed up with myth.

The National Council of Applied Economic and Research sums up the definition of an Indian tribe in this way, "Generally tribes are considered to be the oldest ethnological sections of the population. They have a distinct old culture which either stopped changing, centuries ago, or which changed at an incredibly slow pace. Further, they live in relative isolation. Generally, their religion is animism; they give equal status to women; they love song and dance; organise work and leisure on a cooperative basis, have their own forms of self government based on customary law. They use techniques of production which are extremely primitive depending on a minimum of tools. Wealth distinctions exist but as money is not used, accumulation for investment is rarely practised and economic stagnation prevails."

Before the Aryan speaking people came to India, the pre-Aryan indigenous autochthonous people lived in many parts of India. After the Aryans there followed waves of immigrants at different periods of history. Such immigrants were the Armenians, the Hellenistic Greeks, the Parthians, the Romans and nomadic pastoral (the Sakas, the Mongols, the Turks and the Huns) tribes of Central Asia. Thereafter came the waves of rural semi agricultural Tibeto Burmans. Most of the tribals of



Northeastern India owe their origin to these Tibeto Burman immigrants. The influxes of the Arabs, Iranians and the Abyssinians were also among the later immigrants. The foreigners being superior in arms and strategy dislodged the original inhabitants and forced them to live in isolated, secluded, remote, and inhospitable parts of the country. Their non interaction with the rest of the country made them to have a unique culture and society. Such people were given the nomenclature of tribals. Excepting the Tibeto-Burman immigrants who chose to live in seclusion from rest of the country the other waves had inter community activity. Resultantly the Tibeto-Burman stock for retaining its ages old customs and near primitive way of living have been included among the tribal communities of India. Strangely the Buddhists of Ladakh and Sikkim continue to be non-Tribals. On the other hand the inhabitants of Lakshadweep (overridingly Muslims) have been included among the tribals of India. It is at the discretion and pleasure of the President that any community can be scheduled as tribe. Nonetheless, it is high time that a foolproof definition can be given by the Government so as to avoid any bickerings that recently crept up on the issue of declaring the people of Ladakh and Kargil districts (J & K) as scheduled tribes.



