

VISIT OF TEAM UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, USA TO INDIA

As a part of the ongoing INDO – US 21st Century Knowledge Initiative award, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies(AITS), Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with School of Social Work, University of South Florida, USA and Research Institute of world's Ancient Traditions Cultures and Heritage (RIWATCH) conducted a nine days **International Workshop and Field Training on Cultural Resource Management** from the 17th to 25th May, 2018 at different venues at the Dibrugarh University, Assam and Roing, Arunachal Pradesh.

The nine days long workshop was divided into two phases. The first phase which consisted of three days i.e. 17th, 18th and 19th and conducted at the Conference room of Dibrugarh University Guest House included in class morning sessions, comprising of interactive sessions between all the participants, students and faculties alike. During the 1st interactive session all the participants were divided into groups of four, where none of the team members had either interacted or had known the other members. It was an ice breaking exercise, we were able to connect with the other participants on a personal level and gained perspective on the experiences that each team member had gone through to reach at this stage. This half an hour session which was moderated by Dr. Iraida Carrion was the initial process of the workshop. Similarly, before each day of the lectures began an interactive exercise was conducted which gave us further insight into how each playing member who belonged to different cultures had different worldviews and had different ways of looking for reasons and answers. It helped us training to keep our mind open to different situations and cultures. After the interactive sessions the more formal part of the workshop began by a series of lectures by the faculty members of AITS, Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) and University of South Florida (USF), on different topics ranging from History of Indigenous Communities, Folklore and Indigenous Communities, Language as a cultural Resource, to classes on Research Methods. The lecture series also included of an introduction to RIWATCH, its field experiences with working with the Idu Mishi community and projects that RIWATCH had undertaken. The lecture series concluded by a lecture on the Underestimation of Suicide: A study of the Idu Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Each lecture would begin and conclude with the filling up of a pre and post test questions. This simple exercise helped the students by first establishing a baseline on the lecture topic and then helped us compare with the information that was given to us.



RGU team interaction with the students of USF, Dibrugarh University

Apart from the lectures, field visits to others institutes were also organised. A visit to the Shiksha International School was arranged for, where a non formal interaction with the teachers and students of the school was held. The visit gave a glimpse of the Indian education system, especially to the USF team and it highlighted the differences and similarities between the education system in India and the US.



Interaction with the school children of Shiksha International School, Dibrugarh

We also visited the Psychiatric department of the Assam Medical College. Though there was no personal interaction with the patients in the various wards that we visited, however an interaction session was held with the staffs of the department. A very productive exchange was witnessed during the interaction session where questions relating to various issues like alcohol abuse, drug addiction, mental health, financial aid to patients, childhood trauma, childhood mental health, role of the state government and NGO's were taken up and addressed by the doctors and consultations of the department.

On the 20th of May the team visited the Golden pagoda at Namsai. An informal meet was held with the head monk of the Pagoda, who introduced us to the teaching of Lord Buddha and his tenants. On 21st the team left for Roing and the second phase of the workshop which included of field work and training began. The first part of the visit to Roing was held at the RIWATCH campus in Khinjli village. The committee members of RIWATCH welcomed all the participants and introduced the entire committee and staff members of the board. A visit to the RIWATCH museum was held where the culture of the Idu Mishmi tribe in particular and other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were on display. This four days training i.e. 21st- 24th May 2018, was a mix of various activities.

Visits were organised to many villages like Abali, where the team visited a traditional Idu Mishmi house and interacted with its owner Mr. Bismak Linggi. Mr Linggi warmly welcomed the entire team and patiently explained the structure of the traditional house, answered questions on his culture, explained how as a teacher he felt it necessary to also impart traditional knowledge and heritage to his students.



Mr. Bismak Linggi with RUG, RIWATCH and USF team at Roing

On 22nd the team visited the Deopani Tea Plant and factory at Iduli Village that was established in 24th December, 1997. Mr. Mahesh Dadechi, the manager of the factory took us on a tour of the estate and the factory. He highlighted on the wages and living conditions of the estate workers and how basic amenities like health care and education was available within the estate. Later in the day a presentation was made at RIWATCH by Mr. Satyanarayan Mundayoor, lovingly called uncle Moosa on the JOY OF READING, a library movement started in the year 2007. The project initiates at inculcating a reading habit in the children of the villages at upper and lower Dibang valley district. In absence of proper schools and low literacy levels in the local population, the living library movement tries and has been successful at establishing small libraries in remote areas of these districts like kaho, Walong, Chaglagam, Hawai and Anini.



Uncle Moosa explaining about the library to RGU and USF team

The children in these areas are taught the importance of education and habit of reading. The libraries are run by volunteers from the local community, which mainly comprises of school going children. The books and materials are donated by well wishers and patrons from all over the world. Uncle Moosa highlighted on the Challenges and difficulties relating to the project and how with the involvement of the community the project was successful.



A child receiving a children book form Dr. Clarion, USF

Much later in the evening the team took a tour of Kebali Village and the orange Orchard of Dr. Ishta Pulu. The visit brought to light the situation of the changes in farming practices within the Idu community in the last two decades. The community mostly practiced small scale farming, with the produce being mostly used for subsistence type of agriculture had come to adopt in the last few decades large scale farming of produces being brought from outside the area. Many traditional farmers were now cultivating Orange, large Cardamom, ginger, turmeric etc and were exporting the produce outside the district and state. This factor has brought in a considerable amount of change in the economy of the farmers.

On the 23rd May 2018, the nongovernmental organisation *Amyaa* made of presentation of its activities and mainly highlighted it “I Clean” project. The NGO brought into light the need for a cleaner and greener Roing and how it had through various cleanliness drives and awareness camps made an initiative at bringing about a change in the mentality and habit of the community at large for a cleaner, healthier environment. The main targeted areas of *Amyaa* were health, environmental protection, human rights of women and children, livelihood and education. It planned to bring about changes into these targeted areas with the help of the community members and the local self help groups.

Later in the day an interaction programme was held with the *Enjalu Menda* Women’s group. The group stated in 2010 with a few members whose main aim was at bringing about changes in the situation of the women and children of the local community. It fought for issues pertaining to domestic violence, adolescence education for children and drug abuse. The women’s group carried out awareness campaigns and community programmes in schools and villages highlighting on the issue of drug abuse. It identified persons involved in drug peddling and took legal actions. Most cases that they dealt with were of domestic violence and abuse. In such a situation the groups would intervene only if help was sought for by the victim. Legal aid was provided to such victims and it was ensured that in case of separation or divorce the women received her fair share of property and right over her children.

A visit was paid to the Namgarh for an experience of devotional songs and worship of the Assamese community in Roing. The experience was unique and it was astonishing to see the cultural assimilation of the Assamese style of devotion and the traditional Hindu style of devotion. After the Namgarh visit the group went for a formal meet with the Deputy

Commissioner of Lower Dibang valley, Smt. Mitali. N. Singh. The Commissioner highlighted various issues that the office dealt with. Issues relating to law and order were mainly dealt with by the Deputy Commissioner's office. Revenue collection, tourism, fund allocation for agriculture, monitoring of government subsidies, education projects like Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan, Madhimik Siksha Abhiyan were taken up by the district administrators.

In the evening another trip was made to keballi village in order to experience traditional Idu Mishmi food and lifestyle at the home of Mr. Shiko Tapu and his wife Mrs. Hille Elaphra Tapu. The visit also provided for a very interesting interaction session with the Keballi Self Help Group (SHG). The SHG was formed in 2007 with five members initially. The membership had now grown to eleven married and unmarried women, each member belonging to the Below poverty Line (BPL) group. Mrs. Ameya Lingi, a member of the SHG spoke on behalf of the group and informed us about how the group was formed with the help of Mr. Vijay Swami, of RIWATCH. She informed about the various activities that the group undertook and how it had helped in uplifting the economic status of the women of the village, and how funds for the education of the village children had improved.

On the 24th of May 2018, a social service drive was conducted at the District Hospital, Roing. Each member of the Rajiv Gandhi University team and University of South Florida team planted tree saplings within the hospital campus. It was surprising and a delight, on visiting the various wards and chambers of the hospital, to witness how clean and well maintained the hospital was, comparing that this was not the same for most district hospitals within the state. Later on an interaction programme was held between the hospital administrators which included the District Survey Officer (DSO), District Reproductive Child Health Officer (DRCHO), District Medical Officer (DMO), Medical Superintendent and the visiting RGU and USF team. Various health issues pertaining to the community was taken up and largely explored. Different governmental health programmes like Tobacco Control Programme, AIDS Control Programme, National Vector Borne Disease Programme etc were brought to light. Further the role of ASHA's and Anganwadi workers were highlighted upon as to how they carried out the function of health givers in the Community Health Centres (CHC) and Primary Health Centres (PHC). Matters of Immunization programmes, global eradication of malaria, issues of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Tuberculosis Programmes were taken up and probed into. This session threw light into health

sector of the district in particular and the country in general and it brought out the stark differences between India and the United States in regards to the health sector.

The team was then taken for an informal meet with the Ex governor of Pondicherry and the current Member of Parliament Mr. Mukut Mithi at his private residence. He shared with us his experiences of his travels to the United States and how he was associated with RIWATCH as a community member. Upon asking the MP highlighted issues with regards to the rampant growth of drug abuse in the community and how it had become a menace. The problem of illegal migration from the neighbouring country of Bangladesh and how it had come to drastically change the demographic composition of the local population was also talked upon.

Later in the evening a visit was paid to the Mipi Pene Centre, locally known as the *Igu* (Shaman) museum. There was a display of the *Igu* heritage and culture of the Idu Mishmi's. The museum was an effort of the community at preserving the Shamanistic traditions of the *Igu*'s of the Idu community. An interactive session was held with the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary society (IMCLS), a community based organisation made up of the educated youths of the community. The society aims at documenting the traditions and culture of the society. It informed us of how in the absence of a structured institution it was a difficult task of preserving and carrying the traditions of an oral based society like the Idu mishmi's. The committee also made efforts on preserving the Idu language by forming a Language Development Committee that focused on developing a grammar sketch of the language to be taught in schools at the primary level. Again issues of opium cultivation by the locals, drug addiction among the youths and efforts to preserve shamanistic traditions were discussed upon. After the discussion, a certificate distribution ceremony was held where all the participating members were given certificates and the programme came to an end.



RGU and USF team at Igu (Shaman) Museum, Roing



RGU student receiving certificate of participation from uncle Moosa

Overall the entire trip was a very fruitful journey. It made us realise how outsiders and those not from our community looked upon our culture and traditions and it made us take a closer look at our own culture and what we had been blessed with and how much we took things for granted. The interactions between the RGU and the USF students answered many questions on both sides and made us realise that though each one of us belonged to different cultures and backgrounds we were all the same in some ways and the aspirations and the dreams that we shared were made up of similar experiences.



RGU and USF team