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MAHIS -503

# History of Arunachal Pradesh (Early times-1972 AD) - I

MA HISTORY  
3rd Semester

Rajiv Gandhi University

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# HISTORY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH (EARLY TIMES-1972 AD)-I

**MA [History]**

**Third Semester**

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**RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY**

Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112



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## About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.



## **About IDE**

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education, Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14. The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

### **Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:**

#### (1) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

#### (ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

#### (iii) Contact and Counseling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

#### (iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

#### (v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

#### (vi) Subject/Counseling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counseling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University. The Counseling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counseling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

**SYLLABUS**  
**History of Arunachal Pradesh- 1972 AD-I**

**UNIT I: SOURCES**

- a) Literary
- b) Archaeological
- c) Oral Tradition

**UNIT II: GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT**

- a) Geographical Setting
- b) Pattern of Settlement

**UNIT III: AHOM RELATION WITH THE TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

**UNIT IV: BRITISH POLICY**

- a) Posa
- b) Show of Force
- c) Kotokies
- d) Markets
- e) Inner Line

**UNIT V: RESISTENCE MOVEMENT**

- a) Adi
- b) Nyishi
- c) Aka
- d) Khampti
- e) Singpho



## INTRODUCTION

On 15th August, 1947, when India became an independent nation, North East Frontier Agency commonly known as NEFA became an integral part of the Union of India. It was administrated by the Ministry of External Affairs with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President of India. The administrative head was the advisor to the governor

In 1972, the NEFA became a Union Territory when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister and acquired the name of Arunachal Pradesh. After three years, in 1975, it acquired a legislature. And finally, on 20th February 1987 statehood was conferred on Arunachal Pradesh when Rajiv Gandhi was the prime minister and it became the 25th state of the Union of India.

Area-wise, Arunachal Pradesh is the largest state of the North-East region of India. It forms a complex hill system of Shivalik and Himalayan origin and is criss- crossed by numerous rivers and streams. The state shares a total of 1630 kms of international boundary with neighbouring countries; 1030 kms with China, 160 kms with Bhutan and 440 kms with Burma (Myanmar). The McMahon line defines the international boundary between India and China. Administratively, the state is divided into fifteen districts. The capital is Itanagar in Papum Pare district. Itanagar is named after Ita Fort meaning fort of bricks, built in 14th century AD.

This book is divided into five units:

Unit 1: Describes different sources dealing with the history of Arunachal Pradesh.

Unit 2: Describes the geographical setting of Arunachal Pradesh.

Unit 3: Discusses the relationship of the Ahom relations with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

Unit 4: Covers British Policy as implemented in Arunachal Pradesh.

Unit 5: Introduces you to resistance movements that took place in Arunachal Pradesh.

This book-History of Arunachal Pradesh (Early Times-1972 AD)-has been designed keeping in mind the mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Unit Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to- understand manner, and is interspersed with 'Check Your Progress' questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary, Key Terms and Activity further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

# UNIT 1 BACKGROUND TO THE HISTORY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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## Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Literary Sources
- 1.3 Archaeological Sources
  - 1.3.1 Myth and Charm Associated with the Neoliths
  - 1.3.2 Inscriptions
- 1.4 Oral Traditions
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Key Terms
- 1.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 1.8 Questions and Exercises
- 1.9 Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Arthur Marwick in his book *The New Nature of History* (Palgrave, Hampshire, 2001, p. xiii) explains history as the 'production of bodies of knowledge about the past' and 'a collective enterprise'. He further explains that the exercise of writing history should be based on 'evidence'. Sources can be the evidence. These are generally classified into two types, primary sources and secondary sources. 'Primary sources are the sources which came into existence within the period being investigated'. This can be tested from the earliest period of history. For studying the beginning of the civilization and culture, one has to start with the Stone Age and subsequently proceed towards the Metal Age (finally Iron Age). Secondary sources include modern literature in the form of books and articles based on primary sources.

For the historical reconstruction of Arunachal Pradesh, the following broad types of sources have to be consulted and utilized:

- Literary sources (primary and secondary)
- Archaeological sources
- Oral traditions
- Oral history

One obviously cannot give a final judgement regarding the relative relevance of these sources. To reconstruct the historical account of Arunachal Pradesh, all of them are relatively important and, in fact, should be treated as complementary and supplementary to one another. Facts collected from one source should be corroborated by the evidence of other sources. Such an approach of handling sources in reconstructing history will help one to differentiate between history and 'fiction'. Imaginary, motivated and biased views, if tested by evidence and analysed on scientific and secular lines, will not hold as 'reliable historical truths'. Author of *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, Amrendra Kumar Thakur suggests, 'Studies made

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on such [secular and scientific] model(s) could alone present a comprehensive and balanced picture of the historical past of Arunachal Pradesh.'

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## 1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the literary sources related to the history of Arunachal Pradesh
- Describe the archaeological sources concerning the history of Arunachal Pradesh
- Explain the oral tradition associated with the history of Arunachal Pradesh

## 1.2 LITERARY SOURCES

Before the discussion on the availability of literary sources for the reconstruction of the historical past of Arunachal Pradesh, it is important to mention in brief the two important works dealing with the sources of the history of Northeast India and Arunachal Pradesh. The book *North-East India Interpreting the Sources of its History* (*op.cit.*), edited by R. Bezbaruah, P. Goswami and D. Banerjee, is a collection of twenty-eight articles, out of which two articles (S. Dutta's and Amrendra Kr Thakur's) deal exclusively with Arunachal Pradesh. The other book *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh* (Gyan, New Delhi, 2008), edited by S. Dutta and B. Tripathy, is a collection of twenty-four articles and all these articles cover the gamut of variety of sources and cover almost entire Arunachal Pradesh. Besides these, the *District Gazetteers of Arunachal Pradesh* and *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (Bani Mandir Publication, Pasighat, fifth ed. 2012), by Dr. D. Pandey, also provides a discussion, however brief, on sources of Arunachal Pradesh, including the literary sources. The article by Amrendra Kr Thakur, 'Reassessing Researches into History of North East India', in T. Mibang and M. C. Behera (eds.), *Tribal Studies Emerging Frontiers of Knowledge* (New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 2007, pp. 93-120) provides a detailed critique of the researches on the history of the region including Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to these works, the articles published in the *Proceedings of the North East India History Association* are also another very important source of the history of Arunachal Pradesh. The subsequent discussion on literary sources is largely based upon these works.

Literary sources, for the convenience of our study, may broadly be divided into: (a) ancient and medieval periods; (b) colonial period; and (c) post-Independence, post-Chinese aggression period.

### Origin of Arunachal Pradesh

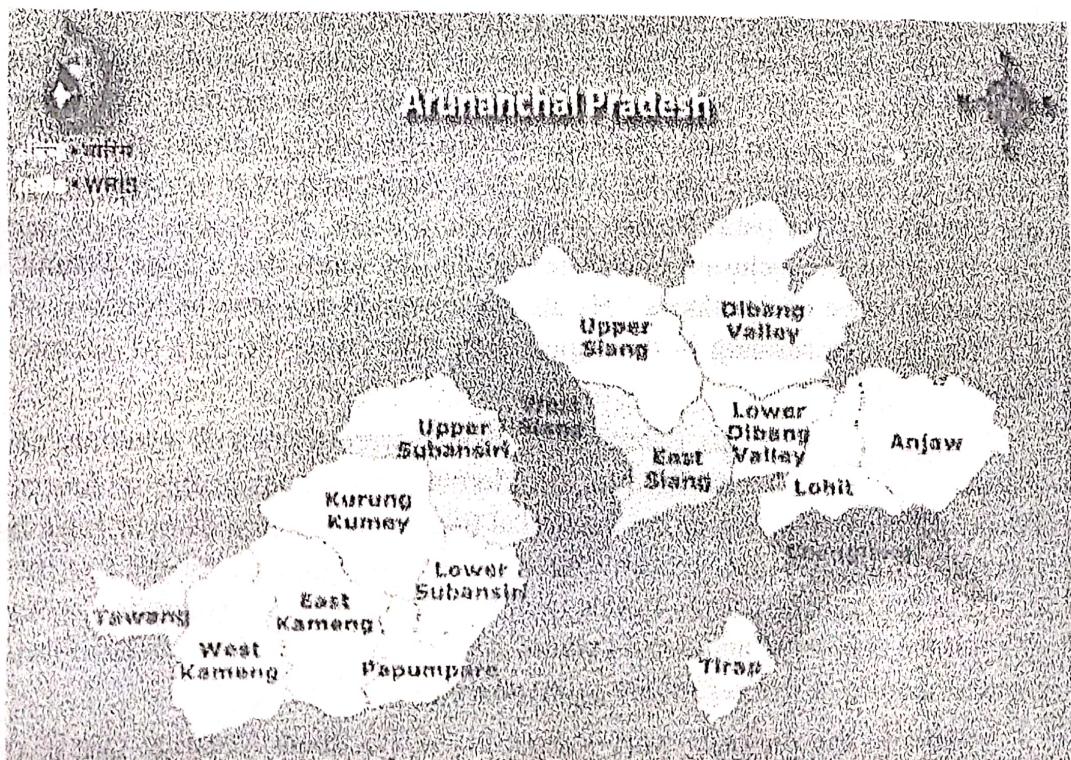
According to the Indian mythology, the region of modern Arunachal Pradesh was known as ancient Vidarbha. The existence of this area was mentioned in the Puranas. The historical records are available from 16th century onwards, when Ahom kings started ruling over Assam. The historical evidence indicates that not only was the area well-known, but also the people living here had close relations with the rest of the country. From the extensive ruins it can be presumed that the whole of the north bank of river Brahmaputra, upto the foothills, was inhabited by the people who were advanced politically, culturally and in various other aspects. Modern History, in Arunachal Pradesh, begins with the inception of British rule in Assam after the treaty of Yandaboo



concluded on the 24th February 1826. British, who made their way into the region and by 1838 had established a semblance of their rule here. Then this place was known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). In 1914 there was a treaty, called Shimla treaty, between China, Tibet and British rulers, under which the Tibetans and Chinese recognized the boundary between Tibet and NEFA. Before 1962, Arunachal Pradesh was constitutionally a part of Assam. Because of its strategic importance, however, it was administered by the Ministry of External Affairs and subsequently by the Ministry of Home Affairs through the Governor of Assam. Gradually, the region was separated from the Governor of Assam's control and placed under a Chief Commissioner, later a Lt. Governor, was created into a Union Territory. On February 20th 1987, Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged state of India as the policy of giving the tribal regions their separate identity, as parts of India, had by then become national policy.

### Literary Sources of Ancient and Medieval Periods

Starting from the earliest phase of Indian literary history, there are implied references to the non-Aryan autochtones like the Nishadas and Kiratas, and their settlements. Many of these accounts from the nature of their hints and description may well be construed as related to the areas and people currently representing Arunachal Pradesh and its inhabitants. The early and later Vedic literature, because of distance and lesser contact of the Aryans with this area, only vaguely mentioned this region. In course of time, however, because of eastward migration of the Aryans, greater knowledge about this area and people have been reflected in the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras* in the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra*. The 'Sabhaparva' of the *Mahabharata* refers to Bhagadatta, the king of Pragjyotisa in ancient Assam, with his Cina and Kirata soldiers, who supported the Kauravas in the battle of Mahabharata. Suniti Kumar Chatterji believes that the north-Assam tribes including the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh may be identified with the Kiratas.





The *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* also refer to the Kiratas. The mention of Parasuram Kund in the *Kalika Purana* as a sacred place is very important. The reference of the Kund in the *Yogini Tantra* is also very important. It says that a bath in the Kund washes away all sins. These two texts of medieval Assam also mention the Tameshwari temple in the Sadiya area of Arunachal Pradesh's foot hills. Thus, we can say that designated as the Kiratas, the people of Arunachal Pradesh are known in Brahmanical literature as the Kiratas.

Other works of both indigenous and foreign origin occasionally reveal awareness about this region. Early foreign accounts of the Indian subcontinent like those contained in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and Ptolemy's *Geography* (2nd century AD) are often found to incorporate references to the land of the Kiratas and the trade that was carried on with China. From Pliny's *Natural History* (1st century AD) we can easily make out that the people of Tibeto-Burman stock occupied this side of the Himalayas. The mention of the people such as the Syrites, Mandai, the Ornulae, Coribae and the Abali is important for the historical reconstruction of the region. Among them the Omulae and the Abali are identified as the Akas and Adis of Arunachal Pradesh, respectively. In Ptolemy's *Geography*, the list of tribes mentions the Aminakhai, which is identified as the Apatanis. River Sobanas is also mentioned which is identified as Subansire and Dihong as the Brahmaputra. Some of the hills mentioned by Ptolemy have been identified by Taylor as various hills of the present Arunachal Pradesh. In Hiuen Tsang's account (7th century AD) an idea is given of the hilly region east of Bhaskarvarman's kingdom (Assam). It was full of folks living amidst forests infested with venomous snakes, and herbs and extended till the border of China.

Muhammad Kasim, a Muslim historian, in his account states that in the days of Aurangzeb, the Nyishis (Dafalas) were entirely independent of the Assam Raja and plundered the country contiguous to their mountains whenever they found an opportunity. Shihabuddin Talish, who accompanied Mirjumla during his expedition to Assam (1662 – 63), left a detailed narrative on Assam. The portion translated by J. N. Sarkar of *Fathiyya-I-Ibbriyya*, and published in the *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Patna, 1915, p. 182 provides a detailed description of the same. The writings of F. A. Qadri also provide a description of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh based on the Persian sources. Mishmis and Miris and their trade with the neighbouring areas are also mentioned. Perhaps comparing with the other areas he writes, 'it (Arunachal) is another world, other people and other customs. Its roads are frightful like the paths leading to the nook of death. The seasons begin here at the time of their conclusion elsewhere and the sky sends down rains without the originating cause of the clouds.' He also incorporated available information about the tribal people residing in the region, now comprising the hills of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Ahom *Buranjis* (Chronicles), though were written as accounts of the Ahom rulers and functionaries, provide information about the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The relationship of the Arunachal tribes with Ahom monarchs have been recorded in detail which is useful for constructing the history of the Pre-British period of Arunachal Pradesh. Besides political relationship, the *Buranjis* also throw light on the economic and socio-cultural life of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Some examples in this regard are given subsequently.

Initially, the *Buranjis* were written in the Tai-Ahom language and in their own script. However, from the seventeenth century onwards, the *Buranjis* were



also written in Assamese language in the *Bengali script*. They are full of information of various happenings that took place from the early thirteenth century to the early nineteenth century. J. N. Phukan, an authority on Ahom history, in his article 'Ahom Documents and their importance as Source of History of Arunachal Pradesh' (S. Dutt & B. Tripathy, *op.cit.*) rightly writes that the information about Arunachal Pradesh or its people appears in the Ahom documents only in connection with the activities of the people of Arunachal Pradesh having bearing on the Ahom kingdom. Therefore, such information or accounts of Arunachal Pradesh are by no means systematic and complete. Nonetheless, being the first hand accounts and in absence of any other written account the *Buranjis* are an important source for the history of Arunachal Pradesh. Some important *Buranjis* are *Ahom Buranji*, *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, *Satsari Assam Buranji*, and *Purani Assam Buranji*, *Assam Buranji* found in Srijeet Sukumar Mahanta's family. *Harkant Barua's Assam Buranji* and *Naobaich Phukan's Assam Buranji* inform us about the relations of Ahom rulers with that of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The reign of Pratap Singha can be mentioned here when the Adis like the Akas, Nyishis and the Miris were given some villages in the plains whose inhabitants had to cultivate paddy for their masters. The *Buranjis* also mention the right to collect *posa* given by the Ahom rulers to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. D. Pandey also provides us some examples of the references of the *Buranjis* containing information about the people of Arunachal Pradesh. He writes that the *Jayantia Buranji* gives an account of the participation of the Nyishis in the Jayantia expedition. The Ahom-Mishmis relations can be studied from various *Buranjis*.

The Vaisnava literature of medieval Assam contains references about the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The *Katha Gurucharita*, a biographical work of the medieval Vaisnava Saint of Assam (later part of the 18th century), gives an exhaustive list of communities of Assam and the neighbouring areas. The list includes the Akas, Sherdukpens, Miris, Nyishis and other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. *Sri Sri Aniruddhadevar Charita aru Mayamara Gosain Sakalar Vamsawali* (1933) discusses the participation of Nyishi and Nyishi-Bahatias alongwith the Matakas against the Ahom rule in the Moamaria Rebellion.

Arunachal Pradesh has, again, a rich treasure of manuscripts. Illustrated and illuminated manuscripts containing painted portraits of Buddha and different forms of the popular Buddhist goddess Tara demonstrate artistic zeal as well as the sources of inspiration. The themes and portrayals vary in accordance with the difference of origin. Thus, the Tibetan version of Vajrayana Buddhist manuscripts, viz., the Kanjur (*Bksh hgyur*) and Tanjur (*Bstan hgyur*), found in the western and northern fringes of the state shows art-motifs totally different from the Kammavacha manuscripts of the Khamptis of the south-eastern region. These manuscripts, in the main, have been brought from outside. But certain texts, almanacs, accounts, books for the guidance of priest performing various rites, record books of different monasteries, etc., are the handiwork of local inhabitants and immigrants in their new land and refuge. Majority of the manuscripts deal with religious themes giving us an insight into the religious ideas and beliefs of the people as also the world of religious art.

### Literary Sources of the Colonial Period

The commercial interests of the British in the areas of northeast India had attracted them to write about the land and its people, especially concerning the prospects of trade even before the political control. However, after the establishment of the British supremacy in Assam in the first part of the 19th century a large number of Europeans



started writing. The accounts and reports of civil and military officers, Christian, Brahmo and other missionaries, anthropologists and indigenous as well as outsider scholars started writing about the people of the region including Arunachal Pradesh. By the beginning of the seventies of the 19th century, the economy of Assam had become promising and trade and industry had made a good start. Tea, petroleum, coal, rubber and timber became flourishing industries and items of business. As all the districts of Assam bordered on some hills inhabited by the tribes, further growth and consequent profit of the industries greatly depended upon the administration's capacity to maintain law and order in the foothill areas. The tribes on the other hand, driven or restricted into the hills by British commercial interest in the foothills, sometimes had to fall upon the plains to draw their supplies, which they did traditionally. So, there was a need for the British to regulate a hill-plain relationship. For this they needed intimate knowledge of the tribes and their land.

Amalendu Guha in his 'Presidential Address' to the *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, 2nd Session, Dibrugarh, 1981, rightly mentions that the British administrators, travellers and explorers left behind systematic accounts of the tribes they studied. Their studies, however, were the results of politico-economic needs of the colonial state which reflected the 19<sup>th</sup> century outlook of these ethnographers with an unchanging attitude for the oriental societies in general and the societies of this region in particular 'with a view to projecting the British rule as the legitimate agency of progress.' Actually, the term 'isolation' was used to create a hill-plain dichotomy and to negate the symbiosis that existed between the habitats of the hills and plains for centuries during the pre-colonial period. The resultant monographs and studies followed a set standard pattern in which the tribes were depicted as 'isolates', 'ignorant', 'savages', 'uncivilized', 'culturally backward' and 'belligerents'. Similarly, by using the term 'savage' the tribes were depicted as the fossilized segments of humanity around whom the colonial construct of 'wanton aggression and impulsive behaviour' could be foisted. Works like Edward Gait's *A History of Assam* and P. R. T. Gurdon's *The Khasis* started the trend of writing about life and condition of people in the historical perspective. The people of Arunachal Pradesh, through colonial writings, have been the 'victims of negative writing' and subjected to 'dangerous generalisation'. Amrendra Kr Thakur has extensively analysed the nature and value of the sources of the British period in his articles.

Despite these limitations, the writings of the British period are an important source of history. Some of them may be mentioned here:

- Bucanon Hamilton (Francis): *An Account of Assam* (1807 – 1814)
- R.B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India* (1835)
- Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India* (1836)
- John M' Cosh, *Topography of Assam* (1837)
- L.A. Waddell, *Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley* (1837)
- William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam* (1837)
- E.T. Dalton, *Description Ethnology of Bengal* (1979), now printed with title *Tribal History of Eastern India*
- H.H. Rishly, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1872)



- W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam* (1979)
- J.F. Michell, *Report on the North East Frontier of India* (1883)
- Alexander Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India* (1884)
- E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam* (1905)
- L.W. Shakespeare, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and the North East Frontier* (1914)
- R.S. Kennedy, *Ethnographical Report on the Akas, Kwowas and the Mijis and the Mambas of Tawang*
- B.C. Allen and E.A. Gait, *Gazetteers of Bengal and North East India*
- Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontier*
- C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*
- G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*
- R. Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883 – 1941; Reports on the Administration of North East India* (1912 – 22), etc.

Apart from these works, various unpublished works like Political Proceedings, Secret Proceedings, Judicial and Revenue Proceedings, Official Correspondences, Census Reports, Military Reports concerning this area of the British period serve as primary sources for the study of the territory of Arunachal Pradesh. These unpublished documents can be studied in the National Archives, New Delhi; India Office Library and Records, London; West Bengal Government Archives, Kolkata; the Library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the National Library, Kolkata; Assam Secretariat Record Office, Itanagar Archive, etc.

### Literary Sources of the Post-colonial Era

Even after Independence, Indian scholars inherited not only the method of writing history from the British but also the topics and subjects of writings. The dominant trends of colonial historiography in relation to the tribes living in this frontier region or elsewhere in India took time for a perceptible change. Even till the 1970s, such an attitude was clearly manifested in the historiography of this region.

The post-colonial writings on the area require some reference here. Dr. Verrier Elwin's *A Philosophy of NEFA* (1957), the foreword of which was written by none other than Jawaharlal Nehru, is still considered as a classic on Arunachal Pradesh. His other important works on the state are: *Myths of the North East Frontier of India* (1998); *Democracy in NEFA* (1965) and *The Art of the North East Frontier* (1959). H.K. Barpujari's *Problems of the Hill Tribes of North East Frontier*, is of immense importance to understand the history of Arunachal Pradesh. S.K. Bhuyan's *Anglo-Assamese Relations* (1949, Second Edition, 1974) and Laxmi Devi's *Ahom Tribal Relations* (1968) have made considerable contributions in the understanding of the relationship of the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh with the Ahom rulers and the people of Assam.

Other works on the state are: Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of the Subansiri Region* (1947); *Himalayan Barbary* (1955); *The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours* (1962); G. Graham Bower's, *Hidden Land* (1953); N.K. Rustomji's, *Tribal Administration in the North East Frontier Agency* (1955); B.K. Roy Burman's, *Demographic and Socio-Economic Profiles of the Hills Areas of NEFA* (1961); B.C. Chakravarti's, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of*



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*Assam since 1858* (1964); J.N. Choudhury's, *Arunachal Panorama* (1973); S.M. Dubey's, *Modernization and Elites in Arunachal Pradesh* (1975); D.P. Choudhury's, *The North East Frontier of India 1865 – 1914* (1978); L.N. Chakaravarti's, *Glimpses of Early History of Arunachal Pradesh* (1979); M.L. Bose's, *British Policy in the North East Frontier-Agency* (1979); and *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (1997); Y.A. Raikar and S. Chatterjee's, *Archaeology in Arunachal Pradesh*; Subid Chatterjee's, *Comprehensive History of Arunachal Pradesh* (1991); Sachin Roy's, *Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture*; S. Dutta's, *Students Movements in Arunachal Pradesh* (1998).

The recent books from scholars from among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have thrown light on the history and culture of the region, which may be considered as insiders' scientific views on different aspects of the history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh. Noted among them are T. Nyori's, *The History and Culture of the Adis* (New Delhi, 1993); T. Mibang's, *The Social Changes among the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1995); N.N. Osik's, *The Anglo-Adi Relations* (1995).

The Directorate of Research of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has taken a lead in bringing out various books, booklets and pamphlets on different tribes of the state and their culture, religion and language. This was the result of efforts of a group of dedicated Research Officers and Directors of the Department. In this regard, the ethnographic works on various tribes along with the research papers published in the last thirty six volumes of the *Resarun*, the journal of the Research Department of Government of Arunachal Pradesh is very important. Besides, the other publications of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh containing historically important articles in *NEFA Information*, *Arunachal News* and *Arunachal Review* are also very useful for the study of the history of Arunachal Pradesh.

### 1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

To find out the archaeological remains of Arunachal Pradesh some individuals as well as the Department of Research of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh have been making very sincere efforts. Now after the publication of the book by Tage Tada, J. C. Dutta and Nabajit Deori, *Archaeological Heritage of Arunachal Pradesh: Discoveries from 1991-2011* (Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, 2012) a significant progress can be witnessed in this field of knowledge of Arunachal Pradesh. Prior to this, the books by Y. A. Raikar and S. Chatterjee, *Archaeology of Arunachal Pradesh* (Shillong, 1980) and L. N. Chakravarty, *Glimpses of Early History of Arunachal* (Shillong, 1989) besides a number of minor publications have highlighted this field. The artefacts along with the Neoliths have been recorded by B.P. Bopardikar in his report of first ever scientific exploration in the Daphabhum area of Lohit district in 1969–70. SN Rao of Dibrugarh University detected some objects which seem to be Palaeolithic in the Kamlang Valley of Lohit district in 1971. Y.A. Raikar of the Research Department of the Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh discovered chips of semi-precious stones from Vijayanagar of Tirap district in 1971, which he considered to be relics of Microlithic culture. These reports appear to be significant in the background of discoveries of Stone Age relics from the adjoining regions of Assam, Meghalaya and other parts of north-east India.

#### Check Your Progress

1. Name three *buranjis*.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_, a biographical work of a medieval Vaishnava Saint of Assam (later part of the 18th century), gives an exhaustive list of communities of Assam and the neighbouring areas.
3. Name two literary sources of the post-colonial era in relation to the history of Arunachal Pradesh.



The exploration in the different parts of the Kurung and Kamla valleys between 1982 and 1984, under the leadership of A.A. Ashraf led to the discovery of a number of prehistoric artefacts, of which some are quite rare and unique in the Indian pre-history. The whole area covers about 200 sq km from Palin towards north-west up to Damin in the Nyishi area. The first stone tool – a chipped cum polished Neolithic axe has been picked up from an eroded land-mass near the Sangram Inspection Bungalow. It may be mentioned that the tool was quite fresh without having any rolling affect. All these confirm that the tool might have found its way into this locality through a Neolithic folk who had stamped their presence even if they had not settled over it. It may be fairly said that the exploration at Sangram brought into light the missing thread of Nyishi pottery whose origin could be traced into the Neolithic past. It is in the Tamch village near Sangram where the traditional art of making pottery still continues and is found striking akin to the Neolithic potsherds encountered during excavation at Parsi-Parlo.

Some features of 'non-movable' evidences of human activities were found during the Parsi-Parlo excavation. These are the fireplace, soil colour difference, stratigraphic irregularities and other evidences of cultural origin. The nature of the deposition was similar in both the items, which consists of burnt-soil (pinkish), ash and charcoals. The thickness of the deposition was around 8 cm. No stone structure in or around the fire-circle has been found to designate it as hearth. From the character it appears that these were used as open fireplace, presumably, to get relief from severe cold and directly roast food. The pottery from Parsin-Parlo in lower Subansiri district from stratified deposits reveal its affinity with Chinese and South-East Asian pottery. We have no direct proof of an Iron or Copper Age culture in Arunachal. The technology behind the manufacture of certain Neolithic tools, however, is thought to be involved in the use of metal implements and thus A.H. Dani believes that the Neoliths themselves were perhaps products of the *Chalcolithic Age*.

The systematic archaeological exploration in and around Itanagar commenced in the Sampu-Pachin and Papom-Poma areas of the south western flank of Itanagar and continued to the Doimukh. No stone artefacts could be recognized except for a hand axe from a rivulet which runs north-south, about 30m beneath the south-western gate of Itafort. However, from the right bank of the river Simpu, a beautiful stone artefact, typo-technologically belonging to the Middle Palaeolithic Industry has been discovered during exploration. The tool had been lying exposed over a bog. This tool is a definite clue to spell the existence of early man into the locality. This region might have played a vital role in fixing the chronology of the Stone Age culture of the prehistoric man as it promises to yield fossilized fauna in the context of prehistoric culture. During exploration of the Papom-Poma area only a Neolithic Celt and a chopper were discovered. Two small but very interesting natural rock-shelters have been found along the left bank of Poma.

A large number of neoliths have so far been collected almost from all parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The details of the same are discussed as follows:

1. In 1870, E.H. Steel noticed a few neoliths made of jade in the villages of the 'Namsang Nagas' i.e. Noctes of Tirap district.
2. By the end of the 19th century, Capt. Gregony found one curvilinear rounded butt axe from Mishmi Hills. It is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



3. By 1917, Healy of Geological Survey of India collected one curvilinear faceted tool made of streaked and mottled jadeite. Though the actual find spot has not been recorded, typologically it appears to have come from the Sadiya Frontier Zone. It is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum.
4. About 1925-26, R.D. Banerji noticed in Padam Abar (Adi) Village.
5. In 1933, J.P. Mills found one curvilinear faceted tool and three rounded butt axe from Ningry, north of Nao Dihing river in Tirap district. These are now in Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
6. In 1935, J.H. Crace collected from Sadiya Frontier Zone three faceted tools, three rounded butt axe and two miscellaneous long implements, one made of gneiss and another of jadeite. The last one found from Ningry, north of Noa Dihing river. These are now in Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
7. In 1937, J.P. Mills found a rounded butt axe from Tigra (Minyong) Abar (Adi) hills. It is now in Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
8. One more curvilinear faceted tool made of dolerite and a rounded butt axe made of gneiss found from Sadiya Frontier Zone have been preserved in Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.
9. Between 1962-64, N. Sarkar noticed two triangular and two shouldered axes in possession of villagers in Singpho and Aka areas. Apart from these, he collected three chisels, ten complete axes and four broken pieces of axes from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh.
10. One polished chisel found from Bokar area in Siang by 1960 was in District Museum, Along. It was later transferred to the Central Museum, Shillong.
11. In 1968, M.C. Goswami of Guahati University collected three Neolithic Celts from Rupa in Kameng district. (Now in the collection of Anthropology Department, Gauhati University).
12. In 1969-70, in the excavation at Bhishmaknagar, Y.A. Raikar found four neoliths but without stratigraphic context. Three were triangular ground axes and one was a bar type polished broken celt. These are now in the Central Museum, Shillong.
13. In 1969-70, B.P. Bopardikar found, in course of an expedition in Daphabum area of Lohit district, the following artefacts: one unifacial and one bifacial choppers from Alubari near Chowkham; a broad rectangular flake with one side serrated near Chamba; a few cleavers, ovates and one neolith (chisel) from Kale; a proto-hand axe, a few cores, flakes and points from around Teehum; one ovate, cleaver, scraper, flakes and neoliths (a shouldered and a triangular splayed axes) near Glow; stone age tools including a side scraper near Chakhro; one unifacial chopper and a flake from Tawling near Hayuliang.
14. In 1971, Y.A. Raikar collected chips of semi-precious stones like chalcedony, jasper, etc. from Vijaynagar. (This indicates the possibility of getting more microliths in the valley of the Dyun, i.e. Noa Dihing river).



15. In 1979, D.K. Duarah reported three Neolithic Celts found from Damin circle of Subansiri district. Two of these are ground axes and one is a working part of an axe.

### 1.3.1 Myth and Charm Associated with the Neoliths

By and large, though the archaeological monuments have been neglected by the people, the Neolithic Celts apart from antiquarian values have generated varied interest in the local populace. The details of the myths have been highlighted by A.A. Ashraf ('Archaeological Remains and Further Prospects in Arunachal Pradesh', *Puratattva*, 28, 1997-98, pp. 64-76), Prabasu Sahu ('Neolithic Celt: Object of Charm for the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh,' *Puratattva*, 31, 2000-2001, pp. 153-154) and Amrendra Kr Thakur ('Pre-Historic Archaeological Remains of Arunachal Pradesh and Peoples' Perception: An Overview', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 65<sup>th</sup> session, Delhi, 2005, pp. 1185-96). The Nyishis consider themselves as descendants of a common ancestor Abo-Tani and believe in malevolent and benevolent spirits, the former exceeding the latter numerically. Hence, we find a number of beliefs woven around many objects and beings. The Celts are among them.

It is not only the neolithic discoveries that are important in the history of Arunachal Pradesh but the megaliths are also important. Earlier, only one megalith was found in the Jamiri village of West Kameng district; now from the book of Taje Tada and others (op. cit.) it is clear that new finds have been there from the Sherdukpen and Nocte areas.

#### Naksaparvat

Naksaparvat is situated on the left bank of the river Borgong. The occupations cover an area of about 3 hectares of land, respectively. It comes under the Sijusha Circle of the East Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. The Narsaparvat area comprises two main features – the foothills of the Himalayas and the plains of the Brahmaputra in north-west and south-east, respectively. The details of the same have been published in the form of a book by D. K. Bora, A. A. Ashraf and J. C. Dutta (Medieval Life of Naksaparvat, Itanagar, 1997). The upper settlements are distinguished by the presence of fortifications and elaborate structure. The lower settlement exhibits no distinct planning and could be traced back only by the presence of ordinary earthen plinth. An area covers about ten square metres in which heavy concentration of charcoal and iron slugs were found. It undoubtedly indicates the activities of blacksmiths. A huge quantity of objects in the form of nails, pegs, clamps, etc. found to have been used in building construction at Naksaparvat indicates that it is undoubtedly from these workshops that materials were supplied.

#### Forts

The two Bhismanagar and Rukmininagar forts usually represent the first Aryan kingdom of the extreme east of India, which extended to the plains between the Dibang and the Lohit rivers, as early as tenth century A.D. In the thirteenth century, it came under the Sootiyas and passed on to the Ahoms in the sixteenth century. The excavated evidence has shown that apart from classical fort architecture they knew wheel-turned pottery, terracotta art, and advanced metallurgy.



## Rukmininagar

The fort exists at the foot of Mishmi hills in the Lower Dibang Valley of the Lohit district. Very little is known of Rukmininagar (Rukmini Nati). But a hill fort extended over the two present Idu villages Chidu and Chinri north of Roing. The remains at Chidu have been completely washed away after the earthquake of 1950. Those at Chinri were excavated during 1973-74 and ruins of two brick rooms (10 m × 20.25 m and 12 m × 10.25 m) were brought to light. Brick ruins were located at different places in this hilly area. They are locally known by the Idus as Rukmini Nati - meaning bricks of Rukmini (others call Rukmininagar). The bricks and pottery at these sites are identical with those found at Bhismanagar. The evidence confirms that a large fort of the same period existed in the hills.

## Bhismanagar

The fortress of Bhismanagar, 24 km east of Roing, is built on a flat piece of land, jutting out towards the south, from the northern hills. It appears like a table land but is actually a gradual slope that silently merges into the plains below. In the north, the mountain wall provides natural defenses from three other sides, an earthen rampart (average height 4.5 m and width 6 m) runs for about 5 km in length, though broken in between. The fortress has an elongated semi-circular shape, extending over an area of about 10 sq. km.

## The Glory of Bhismanagar

Bhismanagar is a sacred heritage of the Idu Mishmis who inhabit the Dibang Valley. A faith very fundamental to the tribe is that Rukmini, the consort of Lord Krishna, belongs to their community and Bhismanagar was the home of her father. Thus, for generations they have venerated the monument as a mark of their union with the Lord. These forts have a special place in the oral traditions of the people. Copper-plate grants of Indrapala, ruler of Pragjyotisha, state that a kingdom existed towards Parasuramkund. This kingdom could be no other than that of Bhismanagar. If the dynasty was ruling in the second quarter of the eleventh century, obviously it must have existed much before that, which archaeological evidence supports.

## The Mud Fort near Tezu

This fort falls on the Sadiya-Tezu road, 6 km before Tezu. On both its inner and outer sides run two ditches about 6 m wide, which are protected by smaller bunds (1.22 m high) on their either sides. On the whole, there is a high degree of technical accuracy in the construction of the fort. At the very first sight, the mound appears to be manmade. Pot shreds could be noticed on it, and that was the evidence of the site being historical.

The Ita Fort is one of the five historical forts known in Arunachal Pradesh. Starting from west to east the other historical forts are: Bhalukpung (West Kameng district), Ita Fort (Papum Pare district or in the capital town), Rukmininagar, Bhismanagar and Mud Fort (Lohit district). All these need to be appreciated from the right historical perspective and geographic contexts. They are strategic spots, thoughtfully selected and intelligently fortified for defense, according to the needs of these times. The defense devices are partly natural and partly man-made. They were best suited for the nature of the terrain and warfare in those days. Essentially, they were hideouts concealed from the enemy's sight. Obviously, they were no



grand structures. The local geographical setting, proper position of vantage, adequate water supply, sufficient cultivable land to support the small population inside, secret routes for escape, the expected direction of enemy's attack, and the line of communication with the Brahmaputra valley have been major considerations in building these forts. They were vulnerable before a large-scale aggression. But no major invasion, as such, was expected in this remote hilly and forested terrain, and therefore, the forts were best suited for the purpose of their builders.

### **Bhalukpong**

In relation to the study of Bhalukpong fort, a very pathetic scene emerges on account of the non-existence of remains today. It is shocking to see that a road (connecting three districts of Arunachal Pradesh with Assam) passes through the fort complex and its bricks are used for other construction purposes. And, the entire area was levelled mainly for the construction of the government buildings and also for the private purposes. As reported, the fort was situated on a hillock 300 ft. high at the debouch point of the Kameng or Bhareli river. It was certainly on the trade route connecting Tibet and Bengal. Three sides were surrounded by a brick wall and on the fourth side the fortifications carried across to an adjoining hillock that sloped gradually to the plain. Hewn stone remains of plinths within the ramparts and a steep paved with stones leading to the eastern face of the hills also existed.

### **Malinithan**

Situated on a 60-metre-high hillock overlooking the plains of Brahmaputra, Malinithan is one of the important archaeological centres of north east India. It is situated on the Along-Sillapathar road. Malinithan was a cultural cynosure of India in the north-east in the remote past. More than 100 interesting discoveries mostly of stone were located. These included images of gods and goddesses, different animals, iron pins and clamps used in place of cement and mortar and few pieces of potteries. Yaksas in dancing postures, figurines, sculptured panels, animal motifs of bull, lion, elephant, etc. were the important finds at Malinithan. The most impressive find, however, was a life – size bull (Nandi bull) found seated on a platform near a smaller temple; it is indeed a rare work of art. There were figures of bearded sages, bearded gatekeeper (Dwarapala) and decorative lions. The interesting point to note with regard to the ruins found in this place is that these are entirely made of stone whereas at other sites in Arunachal Pradesh so far excavated all the ruins are of brick and there is practically no trace of the use of stone except at Naksaparvat discussed earlier.

Like a number of sacred places in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, Malinithan is also associated with the Krishnan legend. Traditionally it is believed that Krishna and Rukmini, daughter of King Bhismaka, rested here on their way to Dwaraka from Bhismaknagar. They were received by Siva and his consort Durga (Parvati) as guests and offered garlands of choicest flowers by the latter. At this, Krishna, in praise, addressed her as Malini (Mistress of the Garden) and from then the place came to be known as Malinithan or Malinisthan – the abode of Malini. The Goddess is popularly called 'Pupane' – the Adi version of Divine Mother. A striking feature of the remains at Malinithan is the frequent occurrences of Maithuna figures in various postures. These erotic sculptures are no doubt the survivals through Tantricism of the fertility cult of the primitive tribal society upholding the mother principal as the procreative power of nature.



## Tamreswari

Unlike an elaborate and magnificent temple complex at Malinithan, we have another centre of temple in Arunachal Pradesh about which very little is known. It is the Tamreswari temple and the Sivalinga in the plains of the Lohit district. Before archaeologists could study much about the former, it got hidden under an inaccessible marshy land full of *akra*. It so happened because of the deposit of silt in the river especially after 1959. The Sivalinga site, being on a mound, somehow survives. Hence, for the reconstruction of the Tamreswari temple we have to fully depend upon the literature available on it. The inscription found from the site is very useful in this regard. The roof of the Tamreswari temple was originally sheeted with copper, from which the name is derived. In 1848, when Dalton visited the site, he found the stone structure but the copper roof was already removed. According to the inscription at the site, the compound wall was constructed in 1441 AD. It certainly indicates that the temple was built long ago to it. Here we have definite epigraphic evidence, the only of its kind, in Arunachal Pradesh. The other epigraphic evidences from the area of Buddhist influence are yet to be deciphered for historical reconstruction.

## Brahma Kunda and Parasuram Kunda

From the *Kalika Puran* we learn that Rishi Jamadagni sent his wife Renuka to fetch water from the Ganges for his bath, but she made some delay in coming back. As a result, Jamadagni became very angry and asked his eldest son to kill Renuka. He refused to do it and so did the other three sons. Then the fifth son Parasuram, being asked by his father severed the head of his mother but as a result of the crime the handle of the axe got stuck to his hand. However, his father was pleased with him for carrying out his order and asked him to pray for a boon. Parasuram first prayed for bringing his mother back to life and then enquired how to get rid of the crime for killing his mother. The Rishi told him to visit the holy place. Parasuram acted accordingly and ultimately came to the 'Brahma Kunda' in present Lohit district. There he made a passage for the water of the Kunda to come out by digging the bank of the Brahma Kunda. Then he bathed there and the axe dropped out of his hand and came to be known as the 'Parasuram Kunda'. This 'Kunda' disappeared as a result of the earthquake of 1950 but the Government has revived it and every year a mela is held there when people from various parts of the country go there to take their bath in the Kundas.

## Buddhist Cultures

The discussion on the archaeological sources in relation to the history of Arunachal Pradesh will remain incomplete without a discussion on the archaeological remains influenced by Buddhism. Such types of monuments are mainly centred in the western and eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh. However, the two bear some differences in features, style, etc. It is so because the Western part – Tawang and West Kameng districts (the Monpas and the Sherdukpens) has the influence of Mahayana (in fact Vajrayana) features and on the other hand the eastern part of Lohit and Changlang districts (the Khamptis and the Singphos) is influenced by Hinayana. Apart from this, the establishment of the political control of the Deo Abbott over Tawang and subsequently to the other areas significantly contributed to the rise and growth of Buddhism in this area which has bearing upon the archaeological remains of the area.



## Tawang Monastery

The celestial paradise of the side chosen by a horse (*ta* means horse and *wang* means chosen or blessings), popularly known as the Tawang Monastery, was founded by Lodre Gyatso nicknamed as Mera Lama. He was a contemporary of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Nagwang Lobjang Gyatso), who gave him the mandate to establish the Monastery. It was constructed in 1680 – 81. In its life the building of *Dukhang* (*Du* means to assemble and *khang* means building) the main assembly hall or the main building housing the temple of the complex, has already been renovated five times. These renovations were necessitated mainly due to the decay of the wooden structure. Besides this reconstruction, the worn-out paintings, idols and mandalas have also been renovated. Thus, design was developed as a synthesis of the modern structural system and constructional technology with the features of traditional Buddhist art and architecture. All these were efficiently executed with trained artists of Buddhist art and architecture.

This Monastery is the largest of its kind in the country. It has a capacity for housing five to seven hundred Lamas. This Monastery provides spiritual leadership to the followers of the Gelungpa sect of Mahayana School of Buddhism and controls 17 Gonpas in this region. The sacred books are kept on pigeon-holed racks on the altar as well as on the northern sides of the hall. The library contains two printed sets of *Tanjur*; three sets of *Kanjur* and five volumes of *Changia Sungbum*. Each set of *Tanjur* contains 225 volumes. Among the three sets of *Kanjur*, two sets are hand written.

At Gorham in the Zimithang Circle stands one of the largest Buddhist chortens in Asia. Built in stone and mud plaster, it has a base of 120 ft. square and a height of about hundred feet. It took twelve years to build and is said to be earlier than the Tawang Gompa. The monument is yet to be studied from the architectural point of view. A number of other gonpas, chortens, etc. exist in this area but a survey of the monuments more than a hundred years old is still awaited. Apart from the chortens, the Dzong constructions at Dirang and other places are important for the historical reconstruction of Arunachal Pradesh. The Maneis around the Monpa villages are also important historical sources.

## Vijayanagar Stupa or Khamong

The Buddhist monuments with the influence of the Hinayana School can be seen in the Khampti and Singpho areas of the Lohit and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh, where the influence of Burma and Thailand is visible. The most important and probably the only one surviving site under the category is Vijayanagar in the easternmost corner of India, surrounded by the Burmese territory on three of its sides. A *stupa* was excavated there in 1971. It had an octagonal platform (2.44 meters each side) with relief designs, and the central tumulus being a campaniform super – structure, almost destroyed. Originally, it could be about eight metres in height. The area is full of burial mounds. Archaeologists have confirmed that the valley was inhabited by advanced Buddhist people like the Khamptis and Singphos at least since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that it was called Khomong.

### 1.3.2 Inscriptions

The inscriptions in Arunachal Pradesh are very short and fragmentary. Hence, these cannot be treated as independent source materials for history. Nevertheless, the



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intrinsic merit of epigraphic records compels the students of history of the region to fall back on them for verification and corroboration of information gathered from other sources. Viewed in this light, the few short inscriptions found so far from within the boundaries of Arunachal Pradesh also are of some importance. The earliest inscription discovered here till now is the *Paya Tamresvari (Dikkaravasini) Temple Inscription of Muktheadharmanara yana* dated Saka 1364 (i.e. 1442 A.D.) published by Dr. D.C. Sircar. It was found inside the temple situated in the Lohit district. The inscriptions are written in Sanskrit and Bengali-Assamese script of the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It records the construction of a boundary wall of bricks around the temple of Dekkaravasini by Muktheadharmanarayana, son of Vrddharaja.

### 1.4 ORAL TRADITIONS

In the book *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh* (Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 10-21) Amrendra Kr Thakur provides an 'Analysis of Sources'. He shows the importance of various sources in the historical reconstruction of Arunachal Pradesh. He is of the view that though the use of oral data was discouraged by traditional historians, initially, in serious historical studies, in the context of Arunachal Pradesh they can be utilized for proper contextual setting. The critics of oral sources in historical writings have doubted the authenticity of the same on many counts. They are of the view that oral source is mainly concerned with 'tangential issues', 'it looked into the irrelevance of the small scale', 'memory is notoriously unreliable and untrustworthy', and 'the form (of oral history) is not fixed, the chronology is frequently imprecise, the communication may frequently be unsupported' etc. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, oral sources are quite useful for the historical reconstruction of Arunachal Pradesh because in Arunachal there is practically no native writing. In this regard, myths of genesis, family histories, proverbs etc. can provide significant insider's view of the continuity and change in various social, economic, political and cultural institutions of Arunachal Pradesh. The other dimension of the oral source is very bright. It is said that the oral data have given voice in a humble way to those who are voiceless in the documentary records. Here oral source is to correct and comprehend other sources and perspective just as much as literary sources correct and comprehend it. The following writings are considered to be the pioneers in this regard. P. Thompson's *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 1978); J. Vansina's *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985); D. Henige's *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford, 1974). When we try to differentiate the oral tradition and the oral history, it is clear that the oral traditions take us 'back far beyond the living memory' where as the oral history is largely the 'oral testimony' or 'personal recollections'. Arthur Marwick (op.cit., p. 24) also discusses the same and is of the view that Traces of past exist too in the memories, traditions and ceremonies that are relayed from generation to generation. Much, of course, of what is preserved, celebrated, and passed on across ages may have only a tenuous relationship to the past as it really happened; much of it may well be 'myth' or 'fable'. Thus, the myths prevalent in societies become the part of traditions and shape the course of history.

Myths and legends represent quite an interesting and important source for the preparation of the history of Arunachal Pradesh. Paucity of written literature, documents and other material-remains invest them with additional significance for having direct access into tribal mind and tradition. Every village and community of

#### Check Your Progress

4. Name an important archaeological centre in north east India.
5. Tawang and West Kameng districts (the Moupas and the Sherdukpens) have the influence of \_\_\_\_\_ school.
6. The Tawang monastery is the largest of its kind in India. (True/False)



the state has a rich heritage of such legends regarding its ancestors, origin, migration, etc. which exist mainly in the form of oral tradition. British administrators and anthropologists have collected many of these. Folktales of Assam occasionally furnish helpful corroborative and supplementary material. It would, therefore, not be an exaggeration to state that the history of Arunachal Pradesh is mixed with legends, folklore, folk songs and traditional accounts.

Oral traditions nowadays are universally accepted as one of the necessary complementary sources for recreating or reconstructing the past. T. Tomba Singh, in his article 'Folk History and Historiography,' (*North East India History Association* (NEIHA), Proceeding Volume, 11<sup>th</sup> Imphal Session, 1990, p 28) writes that 'If history is the mother of truth, folklore happens to be the mother of emancipation and reconstruction.' T. Mibang, in a well-written paper 'Interpreting History through Ponung,' (S. Dutta (ed.), *History, Culture and Economy of Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 31-34), has echoed a similar view in these words, 'Oral information becomes the only reliable source in areas where the documentary evidences are inadequate and especially for a society like Arunachal whose history is yet to be written. Ponung (folk dance accompanied with songs of the Adi tribe) reflects the simple sun, the moon and the creation of the universe...' There may be certain fictitious plots in the tale of amuse and entertain the listeners. But then here certainly the genesis of Adi cultural life is referred to. It remains an account of the past connecting the missing link in our history. Verrier Elwin's book *Myth of the North East Frontier of India* (Shillong, 1958) and B. B. Pandey's (ed.) *Oral Literature of Arunachal Pradesh: Creation of Universe*, (Itanagar, 1999) acquaints us with various myths of the tribal which are of great importance for the study of social history of the area.

The Adis, Galos, Mishmis, Nyishis and other tribes have strong belief in the Sun, Moon and heavenly bodies. The Mikirs regard the Sun and Moon as divine, but do not specially propitiate them. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh we find comparatively little attention paid to these as deities. In the eastern areas or Buddhist areas, there is a strong cult of the great luminaries right through the central mountains, in the Lohit, Siang and Subansiri regions and in Eastern Kameng. The Adis of the Siang Valley, for example, visualize their life on earth as surrounded by a great company of good and evil spirits, above whom rises the majestic figure of the Sun-Moon, Donyi-Polo. Donyi-Polo is not indeed the Creator or the Prime Mover of creation. That dignity belongs to the enigmatic Kayum, the Great Mother, whose character and activity are shrouded in the mists of antiquity, who is not worshipped, who does not intervene in human life and who is rarely remembered except in the great genealogical songs of the Miris. From Kayum descended a line of beings down to Peddong-Nane, the living rock from whom Wiyus, men and animals were born. Donyi-Polo emerged rather late in the scheme of things. The Sun-Moon was created after the Wiyus and, according to some tradition, later even than mankind. However, in the contemporary period, the Donyi-Polo is the nearest approximation to a Supreme Deity known to the northern Adis and to some extent to the Abo-Tani groups as a whole. He reigns unchallenged in the heavens; he is the 'eye of the world'; he is as important to man as the eye is to the body. He watches everything; he is the witness; he shows men the way to go; he protects them; he shows them mercy. Above all, he is the lord of truth, and an oath taken on his name is the most binding of all.



## NOTES

Verrier Elwin in his book *Myth of the North East Frontier of India* (op.cit. pp. 103-107) also provides us with various popular myths about the origin of the first man. In the initial phase of the origin of man—woman or nature as a whole there does not seem to have been any real distinction between men, animal and spirit. A woman gives birth to twins, of whom one is human and the other is a tiger; animals talk and also often behave like men; of two brothers, one is the father of mankind and the other the father of the spirits. However, it is possible to sort out certain main traditions. In one, man is described as born of the union of Earth and Sky; in another, men come directly down from the heavens; in a third, men and women are made by a divine being as an artist would model clay. In a fourth tradition, human beings emerge out of the ground or, more commonly from a gourd or even the tusk of an elephant.' Among some tribes there is a tradition that the original race of men was destroyed by fire and flood, and the world was repopulated, either from a surviving human couple or by the direct creation of a new race.

Oral sources, however, have their limitations like subjectivity, personal biases and exaggeration. While using these sources, one should be careful to check and verify the facts in corroboration with other sources before arriving at any conclusion. In spite of its limitations, oral sources are a valuable supplementary source for an imaginative reconstruction of the past, especially for filling the gaps in our information. Though an initiative in this respect has been taken by scholars like Sachin Roy, T. Nyori, T. Mibang and others, much more is yet to be done in this field to set right some distortions even made by some current scholars.

## ACTIVITY

Make a collage depicting the political scenario of Arunachal Pradesh over the last 10 years.

## 1.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The book *North-East India, Interpreting the Sources of its History* (op.cit.), edited by R. Bezbaruah, P. Goswami and D. Banerjee, is a collection of twenty-eight articles out of which two articles (S. Dutta's and Amrendra Kr Thakur's) deal exclusively with Arunachal Pradesh. The other book *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh* (Gyan, New Delhi, 2008), edited by S. Dutta and B. Tripathy, is a collection of twenty-four articles and all these articles cover the whole gamut of variety of sources and cover almost whole Arunachal Pradesh.
- Starting from the earliest phase of Indian literary history, there are implied references to the non-Aryan autochthons like the Nishadas, Kiratas, etc. and their settlements. Many of these accounts from the nature of their hints and description may well be construed as related to the areas and people currently representing the region called Arunachal Pradesh and its inhabitants.
- The Ahom *Buranjis* (Chronicles), though were written as accounts of the Ahom rulers and functionaries, provide information about the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The relationship of the Arunachal tribes with Ahom

### Check Your Progress

7. Myths and legends represent important sources for the preparation of the history of Arunachal Pradesh. (True/False)
8. Verrier Elwin's book \_\_\_\_\_ acquaints us with various myths of the tribals which are of great importance for the study of the social history of the area.
9. What are the limitations of oral sources?



monarchs have been recorded in detail which is useful for constructing the history of the Pre-British period of Arunachal Pradesh.

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- The Vaisnava literature of medieval Assam contains references about the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The *Katha Gurucharita*, a biographical work of a medieval Vaisnava Saint of Assam (later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), gives an exhaustive list of the communities of Assam and the neighbouring areas.
- Even after Independence, Indian scholars inherited not only the method of writing history from the British but also the topic and subjects of writing. The dominant trends of colonial historiography mentioned above about the tribes living in this frontier region or elsewhere in India took time for a perceptible change. Even till the 1970s, such an attitude was clearly manifested in the historiography of this region.
- The details of the myths have been highlighted by A.A. Ashraf ('Archaeological Remains and Further Prospects in Arunachal Pradesh', *Puratattva*, 28, 1997-98, pp. 64-76), Prbasu Sahu ('Neolithic Celt: Object of Charm for the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh,' *Puratattva*, 31, 2000-2001, pp. 153-154) and Amrendra Kr Thakur ('Pre-Historic Archaeological Remains of Arunachal Pradesh and Peoples' Perception: An Overview', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 65<sup>th</sup> session, Delhi, 2005, pp. 1185-96).
- The discussion on the archaeological sources of the history of Arunachal Pradesh will remain incomplete without a discussion on the archaeological remains influenced with Buddhism. Such types of monuments are mainly centred in the western and eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh. However, the two bear some differences in features, style, etc. It is so because the Western part – Tawang and West Kameng districts (the Monpas and the Sherdukpens)—has the influence of Mahayana (in fact Vajrayana) features and on the other hand the eastern part of Lohit and Changlang districts (the Khampis and the Singphos) has influences of Hinayana.
- The celestial paradise of the side chosen by horse (*ta* means horse and *wang* means chosen or blessings), popularly known as the Tawang Monastery, was founded by Lodre Gyatso nicknamed as Mera Lama. He was a contemporary of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Nagwang Lobjang Gyatso), who gave him the mandate to establish the Monastery. It was constructed in 1680 – 81.
- In the book *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh* (Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 10-21) Amrendra Kr Thakur provides an 'Analysis of Sources'. He shows the importance of various sources in the historical reconstruction of Arunachal Pradesh. He is of the view that though the use of oral data was discouraged by traditional historians, initially, in serious historical studies, in the context of Arunachal Pradesh they can be utilized for a proper contextual setting.
- Myths and legends represent quite an interesting and important source for the preparation of the history of Arunachal Pradesh. Paucity of written literature, documents and other material-remains invest them with additional significance for having direct access into tribal minds and tradition. Every village and community of the state has a rich heritage of such legends regarding its ancestors, origin, and migration which exist mainly in the form of oral tradition.

Self-Ins.  
Materia



## 1.6 KEY TERMS

- **Archaeological:** Related to, dealing with or devoted to archaeology that implies the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts.
- **Microlith:** A tiny stone tool, often of geometric shape, made from a bladelet and mounted singly or in series as the working part of a composite tool or weapon, especially during late Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic times.
- **Oral tradition:** A community's cultural and historical traditions passed down by word of mouth or example from one generation to another without written instruction.
- **Vedic Literature:** Any of the most ancient sacred writings of Hinduism written in early Sanskrit; traditionally believed to comprise the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads.
- **Autochthon:** They are the earliest known inhabitants of a place, aborigines

## 1.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Three *Buranjis* are as follows:
  - (i) Ahom *Buranji*
  - (ii) Deodhai Assam *Buranji*
  - (iii) Satsari Assam *Buranji*
2. *Katha Gurucharita*
3. *Myths of the North East Frontier of India* (1998) and *The Art of the North East Frontier* (1959) are two literary sources of the post-colonial era..
4. Malinathan is one of the important archaeological centres of North East India
5. Mahayana
6. True
7. True
8. *Myths of the North East Frontier of India*
9. Oral sources have their limitations such as subjectivity, personal biases and exaggeration.

## 1.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the Ahom *Buranjis*?
2. The Narsaparvat area comprises two main features—what are they?
3. State the importance of Malinithan.
4. Briefly talk about the Tawang monastery.



5. Why can the inscriptions in Arunachal Pradesh not be used as independent source materials for history?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the literary sources of ancient and medieval periods related to the history of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. With reference to the history of Arunachal Pradesh, what were the literary sources of the colonial period?
3. What are the archaeological sources of the history of Arunachal Pradesh?
4. Write a short note on the Bhismanagar and Rukmininagar forts.
5. Discuss the oral tradition as a source of information of the history of Arunachal Pradesh.

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## 1.9 FURTHER READING

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Bose, Manilal. 1997. *History of Arunachal Pradesh*. Concept Publishing Company. Delhi.

# UNIT 2 GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT

## Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Geographical Setting of the Tribes
- 2.3 Pattern of Settlement
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Terms
- 2.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.7 Questions and Exercises
- 2.8 Further Reading

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The necessity of colonial administration made the bureaucrats undertake intensive study of the life and culture of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. However, to the colonial rulers, the alien subject population appeared only as savage and nothing but queer and exotic. Lacking the experiences of the heterogeneous realities, the approach to the study of the 'alien' tribes became an exercise in dealing with cultural isolates. Even after Independence, researchers inherited not only concepts, techniques, theories and methods of study but also topics of study from the early ethnographers. As far as the history of Arunachal Pradesh is concerned, the progress of historical researches was very slow till the 1970s; and it started gaining momentum due to the developments in the fields of higher education and researches at the university level much later. However, the formulation of tribes as cultural isolates continued in Arunachal Pradesh. The mention by M. L. Bose in his book (*History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Concept Publishing, New Delhi, 1997, p.15) is important. He is of the view that the tribes had restricted mingling; the tribes were separate from one another and 'The tribes living in this region had very little contact with the outside world and even today they are living in extremely primitive conditions.' He further writes (p.17) that the tribal people 'had no contact with the plains'. It is not only M. L. Bose but also a host of other scholars who write on similar lines. The uncritical citations in the article of S. Dutta are also important to be cited. (S. Dutta, 'Sources of History of Arunachal Pradesh: A Critical Survey', in R. Bezbaruah, P. Goswami and D. Banerjee (eds.), *North-East India Interpreting the Sources of its History*, I C H R and Aryan Books, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 11-23). Waddell's view, as cited by S. Dutta, clearly shows the bias. To quote, 'Driven into these wild glens by the advance of civilization up the plains and lower valleys these people have become hemmed-in among the mountains, where pressing on each other in their struggle for existence they have developed into innumerable isolated tribes.' The influence of such writings was such that even the first Lt Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, K. A. A. Raja echoes a similar view. Here comes the problem—these writers based their writings on the literary sources of the British period and after, and took them as objective and true representation of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, as far as their early life and condition was concerned.



The uncritical acceptance of the sources created the lacuna in the study of the history of Arunachal Pradesh. As discussed in the previous unit, the other sources, especially the oral sources (tradition and history) to be gathered from the field studies and consultation with the peoples were never an approach of the earlier generation of historians writing on the history of Arunachal Pradesh. The importance of this source and the method of using the same have been highlighted by Bernard S. Cohn in the first three articles of the book, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, with an introduction by Ranjit Guha, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 1-77.

To understand the land and its people, the *Gazetteers* of the British period and after are very important. The problem with the *Gazetteers* of the British period is the lack of information on the interiors of Arunachal Pradesh, as the areas were not known to them. A fairly true picture of the land and its people is provided by the *Gazetteers* prepared by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh after Independence. The earlier five were *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Lohit District, 1978; Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Tirap District, 1980; Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Subansiri District, 1981; Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Siang District, 1994* and *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, East Kameng, West Kameng and Tawang Districts, 1996*.

In this unit, you will study the geographical setting and pattern of settlement of the inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh.

## 2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the geographical setting of various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh
- Describe the pattern of settlement of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

## 2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF THE TRIBES

Arunachal Pradesh lies between  $-28^{\circ}26'$  and  $-30^{\circ}29'$  north latitude and  $-30^{\circ}91'$  east and  $-30^{\circ}97'$  east longitude along the north-east frontier of the Indian Union. Comprising an area of 83,743 sq kilometres in the region of the eastern Himalayas, the state is full of dense forests, high mountain ridges and deep valleys with torrential rivers and streams separating the inhabitants from one another. The population is 13, 82,611 according to the Census of India 2011, the density being 16 or 17 persons per square kilometre. Though on paper it seems that the state is very sparsely populated, in reality it is not so. The mountains and forests make large areas of Arunachal inhabitable for the people. Hence, the settlements have been sufficiently populated even during the pre-colonial period.

A series of ridges and spurs rise from the plains of the Brahmaputra valley in the south through the outer Siwalik type hills to join the Himalayan ranges forming the boundary in the north while the Patkai hills represent the dividing line with Burma in the south-east. The entire territory thus represents an undulating terrain with the highest peaks in the west and north having an elevation of about seven thousand metres, whereas the maximum altitude in the south-western side of the Tirap district is about two thousand metres. Arunachal Pradesh is the home to 110 tribes and sub-tribes, and there are twenty-five major tribes recognized by the State. The tribes of



Arunachal Pradesh are affiliated to the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages, and with regard to their racial affiliations, they have been described as Indo-Mongoloid, Proto-Mongoloid, Palco-Mongoloid and so on. The state is contoured by Bhutan in the west, Tibet/China in the north and north-east, Burma in the east and south-east and the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in the south. It has a total length of 1628 km of international boundaries separating it from Bhutan, Tibet/China and Burma. Its topography, flora and fauna offer a wide variety. We come across damp rain-forests at the foothills, belonging to the tropical and sub-tropical zone up to about 2134 metres with luxuriant vegetation and various orchids. Arunachal Pradesh is situated in a high seismic zone of India and tremors of moderate nature to violent upheavals are experienced by the residents from time to time. Twelve major earthquakes have occurred in north east India from 1869 to 1952 (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Earthquakes during the period between 1869-1952

Date and year	Magnitude on the Richter scale	Date and year	Magnitude on the Richter scale
10 <sup>th</sup> June 1869.	7.5	12 <sup>th</sup> June 1897	8.7
31 <sup>st</sup> August 1906	7.0	28 <sup>th</sup> August 1916	7.5
8 <sup>th</sup> July 1918	7.6	9 <sup>th</sup> September 1923	7.1
2 <sup>nd</sup> July 1930	7.1	14 <sup>th</sup> August 1932	7.0
16 <sup>th</sup> October 1943	7.2	15 <sup>th</sup> August 1950	8.6
17 August 1952	7.5		

**Monpa:** The Monpas of the West Kameng and Tawang districts generally regard themselves as migrants from Tibet and Bhutan. The major sub-tribes of the Monpas are located at Tawang, Dirang and Kalaktang. The Mahayana form of Buddhism is the religion of the Monpas, and they are one of the two tribes of the state having a written script (Bhoti) of their own. It seems that in the course of the trans-Himalayan trade which was traditionally current in the region in the pre-colonial period, they developed cultural and ethnic relations with their northern neighbours as well and were strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism.

There are legends, vague and often dubious, of Monpas migrating from the west, the north and also from the south. It is, however, certain that various sections of the Monpas did not migrate to West Kameng and Tawang all at a time in a single wave. The migration must have taken place over centuries, involving many groups who were on the move under unknown historical predicaments. A legend states that the Monpas migrated from the plains of Assam along the Udalgiri-Kalaktang route, frequented by traders. Another legend indicates that the Monpas of Tawang came from Sikkim and Phari. In all probability, a large body of the Monpas migrated from the west through Bhutan. It is also suggested that the Monpas of the Dirang area came down from north following the Mago route. According to some recent accounts, there was a population of the Monpas living in the Kameng region probably from the early days of the Christian era. With the passage of time, later groups of the Monpas entered this region in successive waves through different routes of migration. With the inception and spread of Buddhism in this region, or more particularly from the days of the second Dalai Lama (AD 1475 - 1542), the people from across the Himalayas trickled into the Tawang area.

**Sherdukpen:** The Sherdukpens (Shertukpens) also regard themselves to be migrants from Tibet. However, the British writers have written them from Bhutan.



Generally, they too are the followers of the Mahayana form of Buddhism. One important aspect of the Sherdukpens is that their entire society is divided into two classes, namely, the Thongs and the Chhaos. The Sherdukpens are mainly concentrated in a few villages of the West Kameng District, Bomdila, Rupa (formerly Roopai Goan), Shergaon and Jigaon are their important settlements. The Sherdukpens relate a story that a Tibetan prince married an Assamese princess and had two sons by her. The first son ruled in Bhutan and the second son named Japtang became the king of the area now occupied by the Sherdukpens. The present-day Sherdukpens are said to be the descendants of Japtang Bura and his followers. The descendants of Japtang Bura are even to this day known as raja or king to the neighbouring tribes. The people of Dirang call them Bapu, and the Akas and Mijis called them *Thongli-thongcheng* meaning raja. The Sherdukpens are also referred to as the Sat Raja, i.e., the seven rajas. Five of them were from Rupa and two from Shergaon, each representing one of the major clan. Amrendra Kr Thakur in his article 'Sat Rajas of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study' in J. B. Bhattacharjee and D. R. Syiemlieh (eds.), *Early States in North East India* (Regency, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 190-211).

**Aka:** The Akas called themselves as Hrusso. There are two main divisions of the Akas, namely the Kustum (Hazarikhowa) and Kovatsun (Kapahchors). They have a patrilineal clan organization and particularly, clans own villages. The term 'Aka' literally means painted. It is obviously an Assamese work that might have been originally applied to the tribal group, calling themselves Hrusso, because of their custom of smearing their faces with black resin. Their concentration in the West Kameng District is in the hilly area of Nafra-Buragaon Sub-division watered mainly by the Bichom (*Humschu*), Tengapani (*Hudju*) and Kheyang (*Khuwa*) rivers. The Kameng (Bhareli) river forms its eastern boundary. The legends seem to convey unambiguously the historical truth that the Akas were once settled in the plains of Assam and they migrated from there to the northern hills. Similar migration theory is also reported by R.S. Kennedy. He mentions that the Akas first settled near Bhalukpong, where, on the right bank of the Bhareli River their two chiefs, Natapura and Bayu, built their respective capitals. Bayu demanded Natapura's beautiful wife as a sort of tribute and, after number of adventures, the girl with a new-born child arrived at Bayu's court. The child Arima grew up to be a great warrior and finally killed his own father by mistake. Overcome with remorse he migrated to the present country of the Akas; it is from his children that the present-day Akas have descended. It is interesting to note in this context that, as stated earlier, the Akas also have a belief that legendary king Bhaluka, who had his capital at Bhalukpung named after him, was their progenitor.

**Mijis:** The Mijis of the West Kameng District called themselves Dammai (or Dhammai). According to their tradition, they were originally inhabitants of the plains and had connections with the Ahom kings of Assam. It is, however, not known to them at present as to how they came to settle in the Bichom Valley crossing the hills.

The Miji country lies to the adjacent north of the Akas. The two tribes have a long tradition of close neighbourly relations. The Mijis have many traits in common with the Akas, and are known to intermarry with them.

**Baguns:** The Baguns – popularly known as Khowas earlier – are mainly scattered over Thrizino, Tenga Valley and Jamiri Circle and some villages in the Nafra Circle of West Kameng district. In a note, C.R. Stonor suggests that the Sulungs (now Purioks) of East Kameng district and the Beguns came to their present country from the north-eastern part of the East Kameng district. According to the Buguns, they once lived together in a place named Moffi, which they say was in heaven and



from Moffi they came down to earth and began to settle in a place called *Zamkham* which might be somewhere to the north of the present Chayangtajo administrative circle of East Kameng district. In course of time, they dispersed to and eventually arrived in their present habitat. A Sulung (Puroik) legend tells that the tribe originated from *Khornghkiys*, their ancestor in heaven, and from heaven they directly came down to earth to begin to settle in a place where the wild sagoplams (*Bey-muwang*) grew in plenty and from there gradually dispersed in course of time to other parts of the country. In a legend of the Akas, the Buguns have been described to have descended through bamboo ladder, while the Akas are believed to have ascended from the golden ladder. They were under the supremacy of their neighbouring Akas and Sherdukpens for whom they had to work, of course on the basis of exchange of material for labour, but now the supremacy of the Akas and Sherdukpens no longer prevail. B. B. Pandey in his book *The Buguns: A Tribe in Transition*, Itanagar, 1998 provides the details of the tribe.

**Nyishi:** The Nyishis also referred to as Nishi or Nishing or Bangnis or Daflas are the most populous tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and are the inhabitants of East Kameng, Papum Pare, Karum Kume, and Lower Subansiri districts. They occupy vast stretches of hills and forests extending from the eastern parts of the Kameng district to the territory of the Hill Miris in the Siang district. The Nyishis trace their descent from a mythical ancestor called Abo Tani (Abo Tani). Generally, the Nyishis believe that they descended from Abo Tani, a mythical ancestor, and lived at a place called Supung which, they say, exists somewhere in the far eastern Himalayas. Later they come to Narba and drifting from village to village through Begi, Bolo, and Yalang successively crossed the Shinit or Subansiri river, and then the Kumme or Kamla river. Here they appear all over the hills lying between the Kamla and Khru, and later made their way to the Palin and the Panior hills. While coming to these hills they brought with them animals like mithuns (*bos frontalis*) and pigs, and such articles of value as *majis* (Tibetan tongue less bells) and *talus* (metal plates) and beads. They wore their hair in a bun called *podum* and know even at this early stage weaving and agriculture. The two recent books Tob Tarin Tara's *Nyishi World* (Itanagar, 2005) and Tana Showren's *The Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh* (New Delhi, 2009) provide Nyishis a comprehensive picture of the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Tagin:** The Tagins are an important tribe of the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The identity of the Tagins fluctuated between the Nyishis and the Adis. It is believed that the ancestors of the Tagins came from Pui-Pudu believed to be located in Tibet. From there, they came to Pumte and then to Dibeh. Abotani was the first to come and died at Nide-Lankin. The Tagin from Dibeh to Nari and Nagi to Nalo. In the course of movement, their ancestors had crossed Subansiri and Khru rivers. As per the oral tradition, Abo-Tani was the common ancestor of Nyishis, Adis, Apatanis, Hill Miris, Tagins and Mishings. Therefore, as per this version all the Tani groups of tribes must have migrated together to Nide-Lankin. Ashan Riddi in his book *The Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh* (New Delhi, 2006) provides us the details of the tribe.

**Apatani:** The Apatanis are an enterprising and industrious tribal community and are unique in the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. They stand apart from other communities in having a highly developed system of agriculture. The Apatanis have developed a community of their own in the small area of around 35 sq. kms., to which they are confined mainly to the Lower Subansiri district. A tradition current among the Apatanis tells that their ancestors came from a country to the north of north east situated near the two rivers known as Supunad-Pudpumi. These names may refer to



two tributaries of the Subansiri, but neither the Apatanis nor anyone else is likely to identify this legendary country of origin. All Apatanis agree, however, that at one state in their migrations they crossed the Subansiri river from north to south and came to a place in the Sipi valley called Karr, which lies beyond the Pij Cholo, a peak of 8,417 feet rising from the north bank of the Kamla river and visible from the hills surrounding the Apatani country.

**Galo:** In the post-independence records and writings, the Galos have been mentioned as the Gallongs and till the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were clubbed together with the Adis. Generally, they reside in the West Siang district. The prevalent oral traditions suggest that long ago the Galos lived on the fringes of the Indo-Tibetan frontier. Streams of migrating families came down from time to time from upper areas and, in the absence of adequate geographical knowledge, they followed the easiest track. Gradually, the lower areas gave them shelter and they slowly established permanent settlements. Marauding raiders from beyond the frontier raided their settlements very often, and, as they were, at the time, not very powerful in their military prowess, in comparison with the raiders, they had to emigrate. There are no written records available, and we have, therefore, to depend on the people's own traditions. The Karka Galo, for example, had their original settlements at pa-Pigru, near Tadadege just at the Indo-Tibetan frontier. Having migrated from this place they came down via the Bori area, through Pero, Kambang, Karbak, Boje, and Bole to Yomsha. Yomsha became their next permanent settlement for decades. But with increase in population, the village could not accommodate all, and consequently, from here also different migrations took place in different directions. Lombi came to Jirigi and finally settled in Lomti. Tirbin came direct to Tirbin. Gamlin came to Kadai and then to Gamlin. Esi came by the bank of the Rimi river.

**Ramos and Bokars:** From the legends available, it appears that the ancestors of the Ramos and the Bokars were brothers. The Ramos descended in a direct line from Dungram, the elder brother of Dumgumi, the ancestor of the Bokars. The ancestors of the Ramos left their original settlement, moved from place to place and finally came to Tadadege area and settled there. Their last migration from Tadadege to Rapum, which they still inhabit, took place long ago. The ancestors of the Bokars due to pressure of population started migrating and settled near about Tadadege, in a place which is at present known as Pui. Another version claims that their ancestors came down from north and settled near the Simang River, presumably near the source of the Sike River, a tributary of the Siyom. They were a trade link between the communities of the area.

### Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh at a Glance

- **Adis:** The Adis have two main divisions, (the Bogum and Bomis) and under each there are a number of sub-tribes. The Minyongs, Karkos, Shimongs, Bomdo, Janbos, Paggis, Pailibos, Bogum, Padams, Milangs and so on from one group; while the Gallong and seven other groups constitute another group of Adis. The Adis by nature are democratic and have organised village council called Kebang. Their traditional dance called Ponung is famous in the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. Dances are very popular among them. Adi villages are situated generally on the spurs of hills. Polyandry is unknown but polyandry is practised. Adi women are very good weavers and weave cloth with highly artistic designs.
- **Apatanis:** The Apatanis are settled agriculturists inhabiting the valley around Ziro-the headquarters of Lower Subansiri district. The older men-folk tie the



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hair in top-knots and tattoo the faces. Wearing of circular nose plugs and tattooing of faces is the most characteristic aspect of ornamentation of older Apatani women. However, new generation of Apatani men and women have stopped this practice of tying hair knot, nose plugs and face tattooing since early 1970s. The Apatanis are good cultivators and practice both wet and terrace cultivation. Paddy cum fish culture is very popular among them. Unlike other tribes of Arunachal their economy is stable.

- **Buguns:** The Buguns or Khowas are gentle, hospitable and affectionate people. They are agriculturist and perform a number of rites and ceremonies for their welfare.
- **Hrusso:** The Hrusso or Akas have a custom of painting their face with black marks. They figured frequently in old historical records. Their popular belief is that they were related with the Ahom Kings. They are keen traders and trade mainly in cloth, blankets, swords etc. They have come to some extent under both Hindu and Buddhist influence.
- **Singphos:** The Singphos represent a section of the Kachin tribe of Burma. They live on the banks of Tengapani and Noa Dehang rivers. They are agriculturists and expert blacksmiths. The ladies are good weavers too. They follow Buddhism but at the same time believe in a host of spirits.
- **Khambas and Membas:** Khambas and Membas inhabiting northern part of West Siang are Buddhist by religion. Polyandry is prevalent among them. But it is more in vogue among the Membas. Agricultural activities are popular among them. Millet and Maize are their staple food. They grow cotton and barley also.
- **Mishmis:** Mishmis form the bulk of the population of Lohit, Upper Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley districts. There are also the Khamtis, the Singphos and a few Adi settlement. The Mishmis are divided into three main groups namely- Idu or Chulikatas, Digarus or Taroan and Mijus or Kaman. A section of the Idu Mishmi are also called Bebejia Mishmi. Their women are expert weavers and make excellent coats and blouses. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. By nature they are traders. Since very early days the Mishmis had relations with the plains of Assam. The chief items of trade are deer –musk, wild medicinal plants, animal skins, Mishimi – tita, etc.
- **Monpas:** The Monpas are simple, gentle and courteous people. They are friendly and possess a rich heritage of culture. They dress well in artistically designed clothes. Their communal life is rich and happy. They follow Buddhism and profess Mahayana Buddhism which centre round the Tawang Monastery. Each house has a small chapel attached to it.
- **Nyishis:** The Nyishis are the largest groups of people inhabiting the major part of Lower Subansiri district. Their menfolk wear their hair long and tie it in a knot just above the forehead. They wear cane bands around the waist. They believe that after death the spirit of a dead travels to the 'village of the ancestors'. The Sulungs or Puroik are considered to be one of the oldest of the tribes in the area. Their dress and costumes are simple, and the religion is a form of the primitive 'spirit culture'.
- **Sherdukpens:** The Sherdukpens are a small tribe. They are good agriculturist but their main interest is trade. Their religion is an interesting blend of Mahayana Buddhism and tribal magico-religious beliefs.



- **Taglus:** The Taglus are the main inhabitants of Upper Sunansiri district. Their main occupation is agriculture. Polygamy is customary among them. Their dress is very simple consisting of only one piece of cloth.
- **Khamtis:** The Khamtis are believed to have migrated from the Shan states of Burma. They are the only tribe in Arunachal who have a script of their own. They are Buddhist ( Hinayana cult) by religion, and bury the dead in a coffin. They include Khamyang tribe.
- **Wanchos:** The Wanchos inhabit the western part of Tirap district, bordering Nagaland. They are a carefree, cheerful and hard-working people. Head hunting was one of the customary social activity. It was connected with many of the social activities of the tribe. Their society is divided into four classes – the Wanghams ( chiefs ), the Wangpana , the Wangau and Wangaas . They have a strict sense of discipline and the law and order of the society is maintained by a village council. The entire tribe is divided into forty confederacies of villages. Tattooing is a social custom among them. They believe in the existence of two powerful deities, Rang and Baurang. The women are good weavers but the art is restricted to the members of the chief's families only. They are expert in wood carving also.
- **Noctes:** The Noctes inhabit the central part of Tirap to the east of the Wanchos. They are organized under powerful chief—those of Namsang and Borduria. They profess Vaishnavism and are disciples of the Bareghar Satra of Nazira, Assam. Naga Narottam who was a close friend of Shri Ram Dev Ata, the founder- satradhikar of the Brehar satra, become his first disciple. Noctes are famous as salt producers which is their chief item of trade and barter. They are agriculturists. They also cultivate betel leaves on a commercial scale.
- **Yobin:** The Yobin, also called Lisus, are a small group of people inhabiting the remote easternmost corner of the Tirap district. They are simple and gentle people having their own culture , religion, faith and beliefs and dialect.

**Simongs:** The Simongs seem to have migrated very late. From their original home somewhere on the other side of the great snow ranges of the Himalayas, they came down to the Nigong valley. They could not move further south beyond the present Simong village, as the Minyongs, the Padams and the Pangis were already in occupation of that area. Thus, in course of time, they had to turn back northwards as far as Jedo.

**Adi:** The Siang districts (East, West and Upper) are practically populated by the Adis. During the Ahom and colonial periods, the Adis were called Abors but this term has now been discarded. The word Adi comprises a large number of tribal groups, united by a language that in spite of dialectical variations, is fundamentally everywhere the same. Adis include the following communities: (i) Pallibo, Milang and Tagin of north-west Siang; (ii) Ashings, Minyongs and Shimongs of central Siang; (iii) Karbo and Bori of western and central Siang; (iv) Adi-Bori of central Siang; (v) Minyongs, Pasi and Pangi of eastern Siang; and (vi) the Padams of southern Siang. These communities are broadly divided into two sections. The Minyongs, Padams, Shimongs, Milangs, Pasis, Karkos, Ashings, Pangis, Tangams and Boris may be grouped into one section and the Ramos, Pallibos and the Bokars into the other section.

It is said that the Padams came from the north and were originally the inhabitants of Bomi, a place near Ramsing. The ancestors of the Minyongs used to live on some snow ranges near about Telilidung. In their southward migration, they did not follow



the course of the Siang. Instead, they came down the Angong valley to Mini-Pere and crossed the Takek-Adi near Dibok and finally settled at Riga past Pangkang. Later, they managed to cross the Siang near Tayek – Puigo near Riu and spread over the areas from Kebang, Yemsing and Pangin as far as Ledukm.

A study of the legends relating to their original home would suggest that the Adis came from the north across the Himalayan barrier. The real cause of their immigration cannot be ascertained at present. It may have been occasioned by some great natural upheaval in their homeland or by large scale racial movements set in motion by political happenings in those regions. Nor can it be said whether they came in a single mass or gradually in small batches in successive waves through centuries. In the former case, it is just possible, they might have come in a sweeping mass down to the plains of Assam and been driven back afterwards into highland, they occupy now, by a superior power. Anything definite cannot be said upon this point; but it is comparatively easy to picture their later dispersion. Once they had settled in the mountainous regions below the Himalayas, growing communities would be forced to send out colonies in search of lands. These colonists would establish settlements which, in turn, would find others. It may be taken for granted that, in the initial stages, the expansion was from east to west, particularly, in the Siang area. The southward expansion occurred later, when this area was fully occupied and could not accommodate any further settlement. Sachin Roy in his book *Aspects of Padam Minyong Culture* (Shillong, 1966) and T.K. Bhattacharjee in his article 'The Adis-Their Origin and Migration' in *Resarun*, 1975 provide us some details in this regard.

**Membas and Khambas:** The two tribal groups, the Membas and the Khambas, are perhaps ethnically allied to the Monpas of the Tawang and West Kameng districts, and are similarly Buddhist by religion. They live along the northern borders of the Upper Siang district and have experienced a profound socio-cultural impact of Tibetan Buddhism on themselves. They are markedly different both ethnically and culturally from the Adis to their south. The Khambas are inhabitants of the Yang Sang Chu valley and are famous for their colourful dances. The Membas are found across Gelling where, as mentioned, the Dihang or the Siang river cuts across the Himalayan range and enters the frontier of our country. They too retain their dances. The Membas living in the Mechukha sub-division of East Siang district are believed to have entered in the valley from different parts of Tibet, Bhutan and Tawang. D.K. Dutta viewed that the Ramos, Membas and many other tribes of Tibet believed in animism. The Lamas of Tibet guided them to accept Buddhism.

**Mishings:** The Mishing, also known as Miri, live along the foothills of the East Siang district. The Mishing have close ethnic affinities with the Adis, and they usually practise settled cultivation in the level areas inhabited by them. In the past, like the Hill Miris, the Mishings mostly acted as go-betweens the Adis and the people of the plains of Assam.

**Mishmi:** Like the Adis of the Siang districts, 'Mishmi' is the name given to a cluster of small communities sharing a more or less common culture but having different dialects. The communities included in the Mishmi group are the Idu, Taraon and Kaman, also called Miju. The Taraons are also sometimes called Digarus and Idus as Chulikatas. These Mishmis are spread all over the Sino-Burma and Indo-Tibetan border area of the Lohit district and probably represent different waves of migrations from beyond the eastern borders of India. The term 'Mishmi' has originated from the plains people 'Akam' (Assam). The Akam (Assam) people were called *Misha-Meeshi*, later foreign explorers termed them *Misha-mee* and finally it settled

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to Mishmi. The first British explorer Lt. Burlton, in 1825, mentioned 'Misha-mah'. And Rowlat in 1844 mentioned *Mishmee*. The Mishmi traders in olden days were known to the plains people for the wrong reason, as these hill tribesmen would often deviate from their words agreed upon in barter business. So, as an expression of anguish upon these hill tribes, the plains people often used the word 'Misha-Meeshi', meaning liar. This abusive word might have finally settled down to Mishmi in due course of time. Dimso Manyu has given the details of the same in *Arunachal Review*, July, 2009.

**Khampti:** The Lohit district is the home of the Mishmis, the Khamptis and the Singphos. From the point of view of language which has affinities with Shan, Kachins and Chin, the Khamptis and Singphos had plough cultivation and advance knowledge of metallurgy. They were successful traders too. Some scholars have pointed out that the original home of the Khamptis was Bor-Khamti near the sources of river Irrawady. They are the followers of the Hinayana school of Buddhism and are one of the two tribes in the state who have a script of their own, originally derived from the Tai language. By all accounts, they first settled on the banks of Tengapani river. The Khamptis and the Singphos came in the successive waves and settled in areas of Arunachal Pradesh. With regard to the Khamptis, Dalton noted in 1792 that they immigrated to Assam from a country known as Bor-Khampti near the sources of the Irrawady. They crossed over to Assam from their original home as a result of a tribal feud between different clans. The Khamptis were on the move from north Burma (now Myanmar) towards India probably from the forties of the eighteenth century. Alexander Mackenzie referred to the Bor-Khamti area as the mountainous region which interposes between the eastern extremity of Assam and the valley of the Irrawady. They first entered Assam and in due course of time settled in Tengapani (in present Lohit district) and had a friendly relation with the Ahoms.

**Singpho:** The Singphos migrated to Arunachal Pradesh from Upper Burma. The Burmese call them Kakhyens, and they are from a branch of Kachins of Upper Burma. Like the Khamptis, the Singphos are also the followers of Hinayana school of Buddhism, but side-by-side, the elements of primitive religion are also present. These two tribes had developed iron technology and settled agriculture. On their arrival through the Patkai Pass, the Singphos first came across the Khamptis whom they ousted from their settlement in the Tengapani area, east of Sadiya. Gradually they spread out and occupied the whole level tract of the country watered by the Burhi-Dihing and the Tengapani rivers. E. R. Leach in his book *The Political System of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London, 1970) provides us the details of the two tribes.

In addition to these tribes, some Padams belonging to the Adi group are also settled in the Roing and Dambuk areas in the foothills. Some groups of the Miris, Deories and Kacharis also lived in the district. The Deories inhabit the Namsai area in the southern parts of Lohit district adjoining Assam and the Miris are settled along the foothill areas.

**Tangsa:** The Tangsa occupy the eastern Himalayan hills. Their main concentration, north-east of the Nocte area is the Tirap and Namchik river basins, extending from the Patkai ranges in the south to the borders of Assam in the north. Their racial tradition points the source of migration to beyond the frontiers of Patkoi. The word 'Tangsa' means hill people ('tang' for hill and 'sa' for people). The Tangsa story of migration eludes the fact that search of cultivable land and inter-tribal feuds impelled them to migrate from their abode across the Patkai and settle in the present



place a few centuries ago. The memories of migrations lived for generations and they are still fresh in their minds. Though the Tangsas for generations have been settled in their present home, there are, however, indications that they actually migrated from Burma some hundred years ago. Their habit of dress such as wearing the lungi indicates a definite affinity with the Burmese. Moreover, some of the Tangsa tribes have memories of their friends and relatives left behind in the villages of Burma, whom they called Ajanti (people from a land not well known). As per legend, all the sub-tribes of the Tangsas have their own tale to tell. The Ron-Rangs believe that they originated in the hill called Masoi Sinrapum. They are said to have migrated in the quest of better land for cultivation and need to evade the frequent attacks and raid by Loomtos, Garans and others. The Mosangs, on the other hand, are said to have migrated from Masoi Sinrapum to a hill called Wantokpum first. Before settling down permanently in the different villages they are now occupying, they kept moving from one place to another. Narayan Singh Rao has written extensively on the Tangsas.

**Lisu:** The Lisus have migrated into Arunachal Pradesh in very recent times. Their ways of living seem to have undergone a remarkable change during the decades following their migration. They have settled along the Nao-Dihing River in the Vijoynagar area. They are believed to have originally migrated towards the south from the borderlands of China and Tibet. They are called 'Yowin' or 'Yobins' by the Burmese and the Singphos. The Lisus, a small ethnic group inhabiting the remote easternmost corner of Changlang district popularly in Gandhigram. Earlier, the Lisus were scattered in smaller habitats such as, Daodi (Vijoynagar), Gwamidi, Chidudi, etc. Before Gandhigram was formed, the whole area was popularly known as Shidi (Shi – thatch, di – plain area). Their religion is part animist and ancestor worship. The Lisus believing in traditional religion called themselves Maha-Lisus. However, the Lisus who were believed to have migrated from the Patkai Hills are generally Christians and are called Ha-Lisus.

**Nocte:** The Noctes inhabit the south-western and central parts of the Tirap district. The Nocte area is roughly bounded by the Tirap River in the east and the Tisa river in the west, the Patkor ranges in the south and the plains of Assam in the north. The most important aspect of the Noctes was their production of salt from the salt wells. The availability of salt wells and the technology to produce salt provided the Noctes an upper hand in the social formation and this was one of the reasons for the struggle between the Nocte chiefs and the Ahom rulers. The latter always wanted to control the wells, since salt was in great demand in the neighbouring areas. The name 'Nocte' means village people (Noc – village, te – people). The Noctes trace their descent from a remote ancestor named Khunbao, the chief. Khunbao had two sons – Khunlung and Khunlai. They were succeeded by Tangthok and Tankam. The claim of the Nocte chiefs to royal descent is based on this genealogy. The Ahom chronicles bear evidence to the fact of Nocte settlements in the district of Tirap as early as the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the Ahom period and the early British period, the Noctes were referred to as various groups of people known as Bordourias, Paniduarias, Namsangias and Jaipurias, etc. The legends of migration of the Noctes as recorded by Parul Dutta in his book *The Noctes* (Itanagar, 1978) opines that each village relates its own story of migration by traversing the Patkai through different routes. Some villages say that they came from Hakhi Haja in Burma (Myanmar), others say that they were from Hukong and Mankong and others from Ngaimung, Rangkhon, Sansik, Phanyu, Tangnu or Sansit.

**Wancho:** The Wanchos live in the Longding area, in the south-western corners within the Tisa River in the east, Burma in the south, and east, Nagaland in the west

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and south and Assam in the north-west. They are spread over 36 villages, grouped into 11 confederacies called *Jan*. Previously, they were known to be fierce head-hunters. The Wanchos, like many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, have their own traditions about migration. According to one tradition, original place from where they came in Nyannu Ofan. Another tradition traces the courses of their migration to their present abode through Tangnu and Tsangnu both in the Tuensang area of the present Nagaland. It is not known when they actually migrated. The Ahom *Buranjis* and the early British records, however, suggest that they came and settled in the south-west part of Tirap some hundred years ago. A detailed description of the life and condition of the Wanchos is provided by Parul Dutta in his book *The Wanchos*, (Itanagar, 1990).

### 2.3 PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT

M. L. Bose in his book *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (op.cit. pp.6-8) provides us the settlement pattern in brief. He is correctly of the view that at least three major climatic zones can be recognized on the basis of temperature although temperature, pressure, precipitation and winds vary with altitude. The foothill area is hot and humid and has a sub-tropical climate, the lesser Himalayas enjoy cooler or micro-thermal climate, and finally in the higher region a Himadri type (alpine) climate is found. The flora and fauna of the province vary with the climate and soil. The forest types range from tropical evergreen in the foothills, through temperate evergreen in the middle ranges, to the coniferous in the higher elevations and the high Himalayas in the extreme north.

The altitude of these hills is comparatively lower except in the north than the other hills of this region of the Himalayas. The hills in the lower region on the plains are steep and inaccessible. The pass leading to Tawang along the Kameng valley and then through Bomdila and Sela lead through higher altitude. At Sela the elevation is 4680 metres but the Tawang region is relatively lower and the altitude of the Tawang itself is 3000 metres above sea level. The climate of these hills is humid upto 1200 metres, temperate upto 2100 metres and cold with heavy snowfall beyond that. Rich with evergreen deciduous forest, the hills in the upper region are dressed in pine, oak and fir. Carpeted with wild strawberries and a display of rhododendrons and a score of other multicolour flowers, these hills are the most picturesque of all the Arunachal hills. Much of the land in the northern region of the greater Himalayas has remained virtually empty, the middle zone is moderately populated, but the foothills and valleys are relatively closely populated and are characterized by the scattering of population clusters.

Geography has influenced the cultural development of the province to a great extent. The northern region had little contact with the lower region, particularly the valley of the Brahmaputra, and has been greatly influenced by the Indo-Tibetan culture. For many centuries, the Tibetan traders crossed the borders and traded in the region, many of them settled down in the valleys of the greater Himalayas. This accounts for the large Buddhist settlements in the Siang districts and the Buddhists impact is visible in the way of life in the higher regions. The southern belt of the foothills has had similar contact with the plains of Assam. The results are manifested in the religion, language, clothing, food habits, and the mode of agriculture. But the middle zone has remained comparatively backward and both Tibetan and Assamese influences are visible in their ways of life. The tribes living in this region had very little contact with the outside world and even today they are living in extremely primitive conditions.

As groups, even though partially, settled at a place to practise agriculture, a system of complex socio-economic relationships appeared which was remarkably

#### Check Your Progress

1. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are affiliated to the \_\_\_\_\_ group of languages.
2. The Monpas of the West Kameng and Tawang districts generally regard themselves as migrants from Tibet and Burma. (True/False)
3. Sherdukpens (Shertukpens) are the followers of the Mahayana form of Buddhism. (True/False)
4. What are the two main divisions of the Akas?
5. The Mishings have close ethnic affinities with the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ occupy the eastern Himalayan hills.



different from those in primitive economies. In these agricultural settlements, food stockpiling played a decisive role. This role led to an increase in the density of the group whose base was not limited to the small family. This represents the permanent aggregation of a family as its base gets wider. Some members thus, though only partially, are able to work on things which are not directly linked with the search for food. This ensures a wider division of labour as the number of members in the functional group increases. These members apply techniques that make them share the burden of the 'specialist' in techniques whose economic utility is not immediately obvious. Obviously, this does not happen drastically and suddenly as the specialist was not freed abruptly.

Other factors also played an important role such as the change in the pattern of settlement and periods of food production. The new economic equations such as the invention centres upon methods of defense of the agrarian equipment (fortification and metallurgy), storage (basket weaving and storage pits), and the preparation of grain (grinding mills and pottery) determined the 'creative urge'.

Thus, this creates a network of needs and possibilities in the functional group that constitutes the village practising agriculture and other techniques. This group is not limited to a single village but includes geographical areas that aggregate in size with the passage of time and lead to the interaction of a number of similar villages. Antithetical to the primitive economy, this network of relationships is dynamic in nature. In this network, the volume of the resources has a direct impact on the increase in population. Technology thus evolves rapidly as the number of extra-alimentary relationships increases in relation to the number of human beings and the 'humanized' area. Thus, a direct relationship exists between the formation of a dwelling place in which the population survives the increase in the density of the population, new techniques, and the social configuration. All these elements must be examined simultaneously in order to understand the settlement pattern and technological evolution of a population. Amrendra Kr. Thakur provides the overview of this approach in his project report 'Technology of the Tribes of Northeast India with Special Reference to Arunachal Pradesh', Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi, 2012.

The stages outlined above are applicable to the people of Arunachal Pradesh. During the pre-colonial period in Arunachal Pradesh, there was the growth in surplus production. Consequently, we have the evidence of pre-modern centre formations. This is also reflected through the presence of a structured society, formation of state (regulations of social, economic and political conditions), internal as well as external (long distance) trade and technology which play a crucial role in the life of the people.

In the reconstruction of the past R. A. Buchanan's view is important enough to be cited. He opines that – Together with local history, architectural history, archaeology, historical, geographical and several other types of study, the history of technology cannot avoid emphasis on fieldwork. What all of these spokesmen for physical history agree is that the physical evidence available through fieldwork to the senses of sight and touch has a vital contribution for historical scholarship. Where written evidence is lacking or inadequate – and these conditions pertain for our knowledge of all periods except for the most recent – physical evidence, properly recorded and judiciously interpreted, can provide supplementation, while in such areas as the archaeology of prehistoric societies it becomes paramount. ... physical evidence can supply a missing dimension. Most particularly, it can give the student a sense of identity with the past that no amount of book-learning can inculcate ('History of Technology in the Teaching of History', *History of Technology*, Vol. III, 1978, pp.13-27). Thus, without the field



studies the comprehensive picture of the life and condition of people of Arunachal Pradesh, free of any bias, will not emerge.

Amrendra Kr Thakur in one of his papers 'Ecology, Technology and Societies of Arunachal Pradesh' in the *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Tura Session, 2010 (published Shillong, 2011, pp.103-114) dealing with broadly the pattern of settlements and the geographical condition etc. has discussed the relationship in details.

Historians in India have used the Marxist tool of analysis for understanding our past and applied it meaningfully to uncover the linkages between society and technology (mode of production). For the scholars social institutions were closely bound up with the contemporary techno-economic apparatus. They realized that the moral problems do not change rapidly, but the behaviour of the society is fashioned in accordance with the instruments that the material world offers. In other words, the available technology decisively shapes the society, lends its form to emerging institutions and normally breaks the traditional normative of the group. Technology, therefore, directly interacts with the society, shapes it and provides it with a sustenance base, a point aptly made out by Leroi-Gourhan: - With man, the relationship between the individual and society varies as a direct function of the evolution of techno-economic structures, and in order to understand certain characteristics of the social body in the various stages of evolution, these techno-economic structures must be defined. The most direct impact of the level of technology on the social group is related to the very density of this group. From the moment that intellectual evolution created values characteristic of *homo sapiens*, the relationship between technical level and social density became the principal factor of progress. Thus, the nature of technological know-how and the level of social development constitute the two variables of a society and even a civilization and it is this interaction that has to be laid bare in any study pertaining to the role of technology in social formation.

### Three Cultural Groups in Arunachal Pradesh

Broadly the people may be divided into three cultural groups on the basis of their socio-religious affinities. The Monpas and Sherdukpens of Tawang and West Kameng districts follow the lamaistic tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. Noted for their religious fervour, the villages of these communities have richly decorated Buddhist temples, locally called 'Gompas'. Though largely agriculturists practising terrace cultivation, many of these people are also pastoral and breed herds of yak and mountain sheep. Culturally similar to them are Membas and Khambas who live in the high mountains along the northern borders. Khamptis and Singphos inhabiting the eastern part of the State are Buddhists of Hinayana sect. They are said to have migrated from Thailand and Burma long ago and still using ancient scripts derived from their original homeland.

The second group of the people are Adis, Akas, Apatanis, Bangnis, Nishis, Mishmis, Mijis, Thongsas etc., who worship Sun and Moon God namely, Donyi-Polo and Abo-Tani, the original ancestors for most of these tribes. Their religious rituals, largely coincide with phases of agricultural cycles. They invoke nature deities and make animal sacrifices. They traditionally practice jhumming or shifting cultivation. Adis and Apatanis extensively practice wet rice cultivation and have a considerable agricultural economy. Apatanis are also famous for their paddy-cum-pisciculture. They are specialised over centuries in harvesting two crops of fish along with each crop of the paddy.



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The third group comprises Noctes and Wanchos, adjoining Nagaland in the Tirap District. They are known for their strictly structured village society in which hereditary village chief still plays a vital role. The Noctes also practise elementary form of Vaishnavism.

Besides the mode of production, the mode of resource utilization is also important for understanding the social life of Arunachal Pradesh, because, the social formations of the past in various ecological settings and technological niches were also the result of resource utilization than solely of the mode of production (slave or feudal or capital, etc.). Whatever resources were available to the people, they utilized them accordingly-developed/adopted/adapted the technology and all these contributed to the social formations (the base and superstructure). As an impact of the Marxist framework of analysis the interest in the processes of production and therefore in the history of scientific and technological development began. Usually, this is in the form of the economic 'infrastructure' – the so-called relations of production and productive forces – without investigating the ecological context, i.e. the altitude from the sea level, surface communication network, soil, water, animal, mineral and vegetative bases of society in which the infrastructure is embedded. The most major lacuna in existing scholarship is inadequate appreciation of the ecological infrastructure of human society. We therefore propose to complement the concept of modes of production with the concept of modes of resource to look into the social formations in Arunachal Pradesh.

Among several important criticisms made of the mode of production scheme, we single out three. The first, made by Marxists themselves, related to the relative lack of emphasis in this scheme on political structures and struggles. In his widely noticed interventions in the 'transition' debate, Robert Brenner argued that the form and intensity of political conflict, rather than changes in production technology or expansion in trade, better explain the nature of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in different parts of Europe. Second, the European model of feudalism does not, for example, fit the Indian experience. Finally, there are the criticisms of non-Marxists (and non-economists). These lead to the view that, irrespective of the merits of the mode of production concept while explaining differences in economic structure, this concept is of little use when interpreting differences in the religious, cultural and ideological attributes of different societies. Further, the mode of resource use concept, like the mode of production concept, is at the bottom of an 'ideal type'. Hence, the identification of distinct modes does not preclude the existence of more than one mode in any given social (or, more accurately, socio-ecological) formation. Still it is usually possible to identify the dominant mode within a socio-ecological formation. Second, our treatment is largely restricted to human uses of living resources – i.e., flora and fauna – both husbanded and in their natural state. This is the framework in which the paper has been developed.

Besides, the above discussed two views related to the relationship between ecology, technology and society some other views are also important enough to be discussed. Some scholars believe 'technologies as an environment rather than as a collection of tools' whereas, some see 'technological development as an essential indicator of human progress.' Technology is seen as the material expression of man's ambition to dominate Nature, with the subjugated natural environment as the victim of its detrimental impacts. Ecology is the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature – the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its organic and to its inorganic environment: including, above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact – in brief, ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.



## NOTES

Our use of technology has changed and continues to change the natural environment. While technology – medicine, transportation technologies and information technology and so on – can help us to prosper, there is also no doubt that the production and use of technology can have a negative impact on the environment and therefore on us. The pollution of rivers, oceans and the air poses an immediate threat to the health of humans; and the build-up of greenhouse gases, depletion of the ozone layer, and deforestation may each pose a threat, not only to the health of humans, but also to the survival of the human species. On the other hand, innovation within technology can also be used to remove or mitigate some of these man-made threats, and to minimize the impact of some non-man-made threats such as huge meteors, volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and diseases. The scholars working on the themes related to technology and ecology also look from gender and feminist perspectives. This opens up a vast arena and rightly needs a separate detailed discussion on the lines the works are going on in other parts of the world and India.

### ACTIVITY

Make a poster containing different pictures of people belonging to different tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

### Check Your Progress

7. Geography has influenced the cultural development of the province. (True/False)
8. Besides the mode of production, the mode of \_\_\_\_\_ is also important for understanding the social life of Arunachal Pradesh.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is seen as the material expression of man's ambition to dominate Nature, with the subjugated natural environment as the victim of its detrimental impacts.

## 2.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Arunachal Pradesh lies between  $-28^{\circ}26'$  and  $-30^{\circ}29'$  north latitude and  $-30^{\circ}91'$  east and  $-30^{\circ}97'$  east longitude along the north-east frontier of the Indian Union. Comprising an area of 83,743 sq. kilometres in the region of the eastern Himalayas, the state is full of dense forests, high mountain ridges and deep valleys with torrential rivers and streams separating the inhabitants from one another.
- Arunachal Pradesh is the home to 110 tribes and sub-tribes, and there are twenty-five major tribes recognized by the State. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are affiliated to the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages, and with regard to their racial affiliations, they have been described as Indo-Mongoloid, Proto-Mongoloid, Paleo-Mongoloid and so on.
- The Monpas of the West Kameng and Tawang districts generally regard themselves as migrants from Tibet and Bhutan. The major sub-tribes of the Monpas are located at Tawang, Dirang and Kalaktang.
- The Sherdukpens (Shertukpens) regard themselves to be migrants from Tibet. However, the British writers have written them from Bhutan. Generally, they are the followers of the Mahayana form of Buddhism. One important aspect of the Sherdukpens is that their entire society is divided into two classes, namely, the Thongs and the Chhaos.
- The Akas called themselves as Hrusso. There are two main divisions of the Akas, namely the Kustum (Hazarikhowa) and Kovatsun (Kaphachors). They have a patrilineal clan organization and particularly, clans own villages. The term 'Aka' literally means painted.
- The Mijis of the West Kameng District called themselves Dammai (or Dhammai). According to their tradition, they were originally inhabitants of the



plains and had connections with the Ahom kings of Assam. It is, however, not known to them at present as to how they came to settle in the Bichom Valley crossing the hills.

- The Mijis of the West Kameng District called themselves Dammai (or Dhammai). According to their tradition, they were originally inhabitants of the plains and had connections with the Ahom kings of Assam. It is, however, not known to them at present as to how they came to settle in the Bichom Valley crossing the hills.
- The Buguns – popularly known as Khowas earlier – are mainly scattered over Thrizino, Tenga Valley and Jamiri Circle and some villages in the Nafra Circle of West Kameng district.
- The Nyishis also referred to as Nishi or Nishing or Bangnis or Daflas are the most populous tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and are the inhabitants of the East Kameng, Papum Pare, Karum Kume, and Lower Subansiri districts.
- The Tagins are an important tribe of the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The identity of the Tagins fluctuated between the Nishis and the Adis. It is believed that the ancestors of the Tagin came from Pui-Pudu believed to be located in Tibet.
- The Apatanis are an enterprising and industrious tribal community and are unique in the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. They stand apart from other communities in having a highly developed system of agriculture.
- The Hill Miris occupy the lower Kamala valley and their settlement extends to the bank of Subansiri River adjacent to the plains of Assam. The tribe is divided into broad groups often distinguished by separate nomenclatures, such as the Ghyghasi, Sarak, Panibotia and Tarbotia Miris.
- In the post-independence records and writings, the Galos have been mentioned as the Gallongs and till the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were clubbed together with the Adis. Generally, they reside in the West Siang district. The prevalent oral traditions suggest that long ago the Galos lived on the fringes of the Indo-Tibetan frontier.
- From the legends available, it appears that the ancestors of the Ramos and the Bokars were brothers. The Ramos descended in a direct line from Dungram, the elder brother of Dumgumi, the ancestor of the Bokars.
- The Simongs seem to have migrated very late. From their original home somewhere on the other side of the great snow ranges of the Himalayas, they came down to the Nigong valley. They could not move further south beyond the present Simong village, as the Minyongs, the Padams and the Pangis were already in occupation of that area.

## 2.5 KEY TERMS

- **Ethnic:** Of, relating to, or characteristic of a sizable group of people sharing a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage
- **Migration:** It is the movement from one place to another
- **Undulating:** Wavy in appearance



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## 2.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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1. Tibeto-Burmese
2. False
3. True
4. Kustum (Hazarikhowa) and Kovatsun (Kapahchors) are the two main divisions of the Akas.
5. Adis
6. Tangsa
7. True
8. Resource utilization
9. Ecology
10. Technology

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## 2.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. Who are Mijis?
2. Who are Baguns?
3. Where do the Nyishis stay? Name the popular sources of information on the Nyishis.
4. How is the mode of resource utilization important for understanding the social life of Arunachal Pradesh?
5. State the difference between technology and ecology.
6. State two criticisms of the mode of production scheme.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the geographical features of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. Write a short note on the Monpas, Sherdukpen and Akas.
3. How are the Nyishis the most populous tribe of Arunachal Pradesh?
4. Write a short note on the Galos.
5. Write a short note on the Mishings.
6. Discuss the pattern of settlement of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

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## 2.8 FURTHER READING

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- Amrendra Kr Thakur. 2008. 'Historical Studies of Arunachal Pradesh: An Overview', in R. Bezbaruah, P. Goswami and D. Banerjee (eds.), *North-East India Interpreting the Sources of its History*. New Delhi: I C H R and Aryan Books.
- Bose, M. L. 1997. *History of Arunachal Pradesh*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing

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# UNIT 3 AHOM RELATIONS WITH THE TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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Ahom

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## Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh: Nyishi, Adi, Mishimi, Bhutia, Khampti and Akas
  - 3.2.1 Policy of Subjugation (Use of Force)
- 3.3 Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh
  - 3.3.1 The Akas-Ahom Relations
  - 3.3.2 The Nyishis
  - 3.3.3 The Abors (Adis) and Miris (Mishings)
  - 3.3.4 Mishimis
  - 3.3.5 The Khamptis
  - 3.3.6 The Singphos
  - 3.3.7 Khasis
  - 3.3.8 Jaintias
  - 3.3.9 Kacharis
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Terms
- 3.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.7 Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Reading

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## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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The Ahom people had come to the region of Assam and had begun their rule. It was not an easy task as they had to subjugate and keep under control those, who had been residing around those areas prior to their emergence in the region. They mostly had cordial relations with every tribe of the region, except with the Jaintias who kept defying them and locking horns with them. Even though the Kacharis were defiant, they were not much of a trouble for the Ahoms.

Let us look at the kind of relations the Ahoms managed to keep with various tribes of the region.

In the hill-plain relationship during the pre-modern period, 'trade and raid' had been a universal phenomenon. The people living in the hills always needed a formal or informal market/ *haat*/ place to exchange their goods with the people of the valleys/ foothills or the plains. The two always depended on each other for products. This was a mutually accepted practice. In this system, mainly to minimize the language barrier and facilitate trade, some institutions of middlemen and frontier officers were formed. This section of people (Kotokis and others), besides playing an economic role, also played the role of middlemen in the political relations between people living in the hills and those living in the plains. Till technological progress of the two areas reached similar levels, there was, it can be said, a peaceful co-existence. However, with development at the social and higher levels of polity

Self-Instructional  
Material





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formations (in case of Assam the emergence of Ahom kingdom) among the people of the valleys, people living in the hills were suppressed or restricted into the confines of hills. On the other hand, the people living in the hills were always making efforts to retain their previous rights and privileges in the foothills or the plains. The gamut of relationships between Ahoms and tribals, in general, and between the Ahoms and other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, centres around the same as you will learn in this unit. However, it was not always the principle of war or conflict; there are also evidences of policies of conciliation and respect for the rights of the people living in hills by rulers of the valleys. The overall Ahom policy towards their neighbours was based on four well-known principles of the Indian political philosophy, viz., *Sama-dana-danda-bheda*, i.e., establishment of relations of equal status, establishment of subservient suzerainty, by awarding punishments and driving wedges between neighbours.

For a comprehensive view of the topic, a brief overview of literature is important. It will help readers understand the historiography of the same. E. A. Gait's *A History of Assam* (reprint Gauhati, 1997 and first published 1905), though mainly a book on medieval Assam, could devote only a few paragraphs on the relation of the Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. A detailed study appeared much later; Lakshmi Devi wrote *Ahom-Tribal Relations (A Political Study)*, (Gauhati, 1968). In addition to these two pioneer works, the *Gazetteers* of the British period and after, have also dealt with the subject. Some modern and contemporary historians too have written on the same, however, not in the form of books. These have mostly been written in the form of articles on certain themes. Amalendu Guha's book *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy* (A collection of his papers published earlier in Calcutta, in 1991) is an important book to comprehensively understand the developments of Assam in the period. The textbooks written by D. Pandey, C. M. Nayak and some other authors provide easy reading of the topic. All these provide a comprehensive picture of the relation of tribes with Ahom rulers. At the outset, it is important to mention that sometimes we witness the bias, either in favour of the people of the hills or the plains or sometimes, the continuance of traditional colonial historiographical approach in these works. This unit is based on these writings.

In the process of foundation and extension of the Ahom kingdom and especially after extending its control to the northern bank of Brahmaputra, they came in direct contact and consequently in conflict with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Noctes were the only exception. While coming to Assam, the Ahoms had already crossed the hills where the Noctes lived and had encountered them in the early years of the 13th century. The tribes such as, the Noctes, Nyishis, Adis, Miris (Mishings), Mishimis, Khamptis, Singhphos, Sherdukpens and others developed relationship with the Ahom rulers.

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### 3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Interpret the policy of the Ahom rulers towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh
- Discuss the policy of peace, conciliation and mutual co-existence



- Describe the policy of force used by the Ahoms against the tribes
- Explain the relations of the Ahoms with the Nyishi, Adi, Mishimi, Bhutia, Khampti and Akas tribes of Arunachal Pradesh
- Compare the relations of the Ahoms with the Nagas, Khasis, Jaintias and Kacharis

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### 3.2 TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH: NYISHI, ADI, MISHIMI, BHUTIA, KHAMPTI AND AKAS

#### 3.2.1 Policy of Subjugation (Use of Force)

Apart from their conciliatory approaches, the Ahoms did not desist from displaying their power over the tribes. Regarding Sukapha, it is said that he adopted policies both of peace and terror. He first went with peace proposals towards local tribes. When it failed he used the most brutal methods to suppress them. But before the actual application of force, the Ahom government banned the commercial facilities given to the tribes of the hills. Sometimes only this method worked to bring them to terms.

It has now been well established that the Ahoms were a section of the Tai race. Historically, these people are known for their valley-dwelling and wet-rice-growing character. The particular branch to which the Ahoms belong is known as the Tai-mao, or the Mao section of the Tai but widely known through the Burmans as the Shan. Ahom chronicles, or *buranji*, make specific mention that the Ahoms were led by Prince (Chao-lung) Sukapha who left Mong Mao-lung in 1215 AD. Sukapha's followers included several nobles (thao-mong), a number of officers of various ranks, nine thousand men, woman and children. After a westward march for thirteen years and staying at several places for periods ranging from one to three years, they arrived at the Patkai in 1228 AD. Posting a governor at the Khamjang valley, their first territorial unit, situated on the shore of the Nongjang lake, Sukapha and the rest of his party at first followed the Namrup, then the Buri Dihing (Nam-jin), thereafter the Brahmaputra, and the Dikhow before finally arriving at Charaideo, which became his permanent capital. On the way, he also organized several other *territorial* units along the bank of these rivers. In this way a small kingdom bounded by Patkai, the Buri Dihing, the Brahmaputra, the Dikhow and the Naga hills was founded in Upper Assam over which Sukapha ruled till his death in 1268 AD. This territory was peopled chiefly by the Morans and the Borahis, and a few villages of the Chutiyas and the Kacharis evidently of Bodo origin; Nagas were also included in the hilly region of the Patkai. Sukapha won over the chiefs of Morans and the Borahis, and even encouraged intermarriage with them, and appointed some of them in various capacities in the royal household.

#### Commercial Facility

The Ahom rulers by allowing free commercial activities further facilitated the trade relations with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There were the frontier wardens known as *Datiyalia Bisayas* and *Duarias*, who looked after the interest of traders. The Ahom government established several *haats* (small markets) near the foothills and the *duars* (mountain passes), where the tribes of the hills could come and



exchange their commodities with those of the plains. The Sherdukpens could bring silver, woollen cloth, Chinese silk, ponies, gold dust and rock salt to Udalguri and Doimara. They exchanged them with items such as iron, lac, rice, Assam silk, dried fish and buffalo horns. The Noctes brought salt, cotton, and elephant teeth to the markets in and around Sibsagar. The Mishimis brought to the Sadiya market the Lama swords, spears and Mismi *tita* (a medicinal herb). The Adis and the Hill Miris exchanged copper, wax, madder (dye), and jim cloth (cotton blanket) for the products of the plains. The Singphos brought ivory, copper and silver. The mutual benefits emerging out of this transaction helped in creating good feelings between the people of the hills and plains. The participation of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in trade activities has been studied by A. K. Thakur in this article 'Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: A Reconstruction of Economic History', *Resarun* Vol. XXVII, 2001, pp. 17-27, Journal of the Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, special issue on Golden Jubilee of the Department of Research, Itanagar, 2002.

### Payment of *Posa*

Braj Narain Jha in his article 'Politics of *Posa*: A Case Study of Pre and Post Independence Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam' (*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 57th session, Madras, 1996, pp. 446-58) analyses the background of the origin of the *Posa*, its nature and provides the gamut of historiography related to its nomenclature. The bias in the writings of the British period and even after (especially from the Assam centric history writing) and equating the *posa* with 'blackmail' etc. have also been critically analysed by Jha. This article situates the problem of *Posa* comprehensively. The term '*Posa*' literally means a collection of subscription for a common purpose. When this term is used to explain the payments made to the tribes of the hills, it represents the subscription which was collected by the villagers in order to meet the customary demands of the hill people. In the official glossary of terms of the British period the term is explained as the 'allowances paid to certain tribes of the hills inhabiting the hills on the northern frontier of Assam bordering Darrang and Lakhimpur, on account to commuted 'black mail', or in consideration of the abandonment by them of their claims with regards to certain duars.' In general, the term '*posa*' came to be applied to all payments made to the tribes of the hills by the Governments; whether it was in commutation of blackmail or compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh. It can neither be compared with 'blackmail' nor 'the *chauth* of Marathas', nor a 'barbarian cupidity'. It was the outcome of a well negotiated policy initiated by the Ahom rulers between the subjects of the plains of Assam (*paiks*), hill chiefs of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom rulers. A triangular relation existed among the Ahom State, the Paiks and the tribal chiefs receiving *posa*. The recipients of *posa* paid tribute to the Ahom king and in lieu of that they were granted the right to collect a fixed annual amount of *posa* from the paiks of the adjoining foothills of Assam and also provided their services, sometimes to particular chiefs. For fulfilling these obligations, certain remissions in the state demand were given to those paiks. All the payments were made in kind.

Jha rightly concludes '... the nature of *posa* (was) based on the socio-political realities of the contemporary period of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh .... it has often been wrongly interpreted as blackmail.' Knowingly or unknowingly most of the writers of the history of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam regard the *posa* system as blackmail, to meet the need of the hills. Contrary to these approaches, S. Dutta in



his article 'The *Posa* System: A Historical Analysis' (S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.), *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Gyan Publishing, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 161-82) and Amrendra Kr Thakur in his article 'Sat Rajas of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study' (in J. B. Bhattacharjee and D. R. Syiemlieh (eds.), *Early States in North East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 190-211) also provide some other details of the *posa* system.

The observation of A. Mackenzie (*The North East Frontier of India*, reproduced 1999, Mittal, New Delhi, p.21) is relevant to be mentioned about the nature and system of *Posa*. He writes, 'It is a mistake to suppose that the *posa*, which, as we shall see, was paid to most of the tribes of the hills bordering on the plains, was an uncertain, ill-defined exaction, depending in amount upon the rapacity of the different hordes who might descend to levy it. It was really a well ascertained revenue payment, on account of which a corresponding remission was made in the state demand upon the ryot satisfying it. It may have had its origin in encroachment, or it may have been based upon customary and primeval rights asserted by the hill men, but it was a distinct feature in the revenue system of the country when the British annexed Assam.'

In this way the *posa* system originated due to certain exigencies of the time. The Ahom king pratap Singha, gave to it a formal shape. The *posa* was granted to the Bhutias, the Akas, and Daflas, and the Miris. The Ahom king Gadadhar Singha conciliated the Daflas 'by assigning to them a number of paiks in the *duars*. They were called Dafla Bahatias, or the serfs of the Daflas. Every ten houses of the Dafla Bahatias used to pay to the Daflas per year on double cloth, one napkin, one *dao*, ten heads of cattle, and four seer of salt. Similarly, each family of Bahatias assigned to the *Hazari khowa*, the Akas used to pay a portion of female dress, one bundle of cotton thread, and one napkin. They also serviced as labourers under Akas.

Consequential to the commutation of *posa* to cash by the British, the annual receipts of the various beneficiaries were estimated as follows:

Nyishis (Daflas)	₹	1020/-
Bhooteahs (Sherdukpents of Rupa and Shergaon)	₹	2526-7/-
Tagee Akas Raja and Kuppachor Akas	₹	580/-
Hazaree Khoa Akas	₹	88/-
Thebengia Bhooteahs (Bapus of Thembang)	₹	145-13.6/-
Tawang Raja	₹	5000/-

### Grant of Land and the Origin of the Kotokis

The policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is also reflected through the measure of the grant of fertile land (*Khats*) in the foothills to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh especially to the Noctes (generally mentioned in the contemporary literature as the Nagas) for cultivation. The Ahom rulers also considered the tribes inhabiting the area south of Sibsagar district of Assam, such as Namchangias (Namsangias), Bardurias, Banferas, Chagnois, Tablungias, Panidurias, etc., as their subjects, and claimed its right to share with the Nagas the produce of the salt manufactured in the Lower hills. In the *Buranjis* it is mentioned that Naga chiefs used to pay tributes to the Ahoms and received grants of *Khats* and of *bheels* or fishing waters in the plains in lieu of the same. The Naga chiefs were also allotted paiks like the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom nobility.

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The Ahom king, Pratap Singha (1603-41), started the institution of Katakis in order to regulate his relation with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and other neighbours. The British found this mechanism useful and continued the same. The Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-41) highlighted the importance of the Kotokis in these words: 'Kotokis should be like shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth.' The Kotokis who were employed to deal with the tribals were familiar with the customs and dialects of the tribals. The Kotokis were the agents of the Ahom government who conducted political and diplomatic relations with the neighbouring powers. The role of the Kotokis in the Ahom-tribal relation as 'go-between' or of the 'intermediaries' between the Ahom and other powers is a well-known fact. It was possible mainly because they were very intelligent and educated persons and in most of the cases, their capacity to argue and present facts was the decisive factors. The services of the Kotokis were also utilized 'to carry and to explain the letters, orders, request, etc. of the Ahom monarchs to the neighbouring powers'. We have, however, enough evidence to suggest that they also played an important role in determining the terms of agreement between the tribes of Arunachal and Ahom. The Ahom government appointed a number of *Katakis (or Kotokis)* to look after and manage the Khats. The *katakis* were appointed mainly to maintain a 'channel of communication between the government and the tribes.' 'They also kept a watch over the movement of the hill people' and 'were paid by a remission of the poll tax.' One important feature of the tribal-Ahom relations was the role played by the Kotokis in promoting and maintaining these relations. Gait clearly writes (p.113), 'In order to stop the acts of oppression committed by the Miris and Daflas, *Katakis* were appointed to watch them and keep the authorities informed of their movements. In this connection, however, it should be mentioned that in 1615, when reprisals were attempted after a raid perpetrated by these hill men, the Ahom forces were obliged to beat a retreat.' He further writes (p.114), 'Hindus were often appointed as envoys (*bairagis* and *katakis*) in preference to Ahoms....'

Pratap Singha, through the mediation of the Kotokis, was able to normalize relation with the Miris and the *posa* was given to them. Again in 1665 A.D., one Kalia Kotoki was sent to negotiate with the Miris. The Miris also utilized the services of the kotokis and sent their message through them to the Ahom officials. Likewise in the struggle between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the Katakis played an important role. The *Posa* with the Nishis was settled with the help of these officials and they again negotiated with the Nishis during the reign of King Sutyingpha in 1648 and again in 1678 during the rule of Udayaditya Singha (1669-73). The services of the Katakis were also used in the Ahom-Mishimi confrontation 1675. Chaodang, a Katakis, was entrusted the duty by the Ahoms to negotiate with the Mishimis. Though the Adis never came in direct confrontation with the Ahom and as such the Kotokis did not approach them directly, we must remember that the Miris who acted as the agents of the Adis were in constant contact with Kotokis and as such were a key factor in establishing the Adi-Ahom relations.

The socio-cultural developments of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh too made the institution of Katakis important in the dealings with the Ahom rulers. The tribes of Arunachal, except for the Khamptis and the Monpas, did not have any written language and often communicated through dialects that varied from tribe to tribe. Assamese was the *lingua franca*. The sole responsibility of representing the case of



these tribal to the Ahoms and vice versa, therefore, rested with these Kotokis and it was here that their ability to persuade the tribal was tested. On the occasions when these Kotokis failed to persuade the people of Arunachal Pradesh, they were punished by the Ahoms, as was done by King Rudra Singha, when the Kotokis were charged with a traitorous neglect of their duties. These two Kotokis who had been sent to negotiate with the Nyishis in 1713-14, could not bring satisfactory results, were put to death by the Phukan on orders from the king. The Kotokis, therefore, certainly played a key role in determining the relation of the tribal with Ahoms.

The Ahom rulers had advanced war weapons (matchlocks and guns), large surplus production and the *paiks* to aggressively pursue their imperial policy. Though the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh had mostly the traditional tribal war weapons (daos, spears, bows and arrows, etc.), the Ahoms avoided straight military fight against them mainly due to the geographical reasons. The reason behind the same was also the indigenous system of defence mechanism of the villages and the guerrilla and ambush mode of warfare of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. On the other hand, a hill campaign was always difficult due to bad communication to the hills, narrow paths or tracks over precipices, were the only means to reach the hills. In such inhospitable conditions the policy of conciliation was the best choice. The Ahom rulers generally avoided complete subjugation of the tribes. It was very difficult for them to rule over the hill. So they were always cautious in shaping policy towards tribes of the hills. The Ahom policy can be summarized like this: 'Conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries as far as possible. If they indulge in wanton pillages; pursue and capture the miscreants, but never overstep the limits'. Under this policy the Ahom rulers initiated many measures which are described in the following section, in short.

### 3.3 TRIBE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

In the 13th century, with the rise of the Kingdom of the Ahoms, a contact between the Ahoms and the Nagas was established. Originally from Burma, the Ahoms entered north-eastern Assam, via, the North Eastern Frontier and the Patkai range. Slowly, they established themselves in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. Sukapha was the first Ahom ruler of Assam and he succeeded in establishing the Ahom paramountcy over the tribes of the hills though he could not introduce Ahom rule amongst them.

It has been opined that the Ahoms were looking for food when they first attacked the Naga villages. Undoubtedly, the Nagas who despised interference in their affairs resisted the Ahom advance, but were not powerful enough to face repeated efforts of the Ahoms. This led to the subjugation of some tribes but whatever rule was established, did not last for long.

The retaliating Nagas even raided territories which were under the control of the Ahom kings. The tribes that the Ahoms subjugated lived near Assam's plains and were: Ao, Lotha, Konyak and Nocte. Despite defeating these tribes, no rule was established by the Ahoms over the Nagas, instead, they were pushed into showing their allegiance through payment of a tribute. A treaty between the Nagas and the Ahoms gave the Nagas an exemption from paying rent for the region meant for the purpose of fishing. The right to *posha*, a kind of tax, was granted to the Naga chief. According to J F Michael, 'Present inhabitants are the remains of the hill regions

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enlisted by the rajas of Assam and had been given the present lands as their reward of good service.'

The Nagas are of the opinion that though the Ahom rulers entered some Naga territories and compelled the Nagas to pay tribute, they were never under the Ahom rule. The forceful relations were always of a temporary nature. According to Butler, the supremacy of the Ahoms had been accepted by the Nagas, but they had been granted the exercise of freedom as far as their internal affairs were concerned.

However, it does seem that compulsion and force was used to keep the Nagas in a relationship with the Ahoms. Lakshmi Devi is of the view that when in the 17th century, Lotha Nagas rebelled against the Ahoms, T C Phukan had severely dealt with them. This led to the Lothas agreeing to be under the Ahom rule.

In the beginning of the 18th century, due to various reasons, the Ahom Kingdom had weakened. Taking advantage of this, the subjugated Nagas freed themselves. Following this, they began to raid the Ahom subjects.

The warlike tribes in the interiors never came in contact with the Ahom rulers. The Ahom rulers changed the policy they would follow with frontier tribes based on political exigencies, but more so on the ability of the tribe or the tribal chief. It is known that at the beginning of their rule, the Ahom rulers followed a policy of slow but steady penetration, occasionally attended with revolting cruelties. With a view to terrorizing the tribal people, the Ahoms followed the policy of terrorism and committed atrocities compelling the relatives of the Nagas to eat the flesh of their roasted brethren. This was the reason they did not get the support, faith and cooperation of the Nagas, instead got their enmity. When Nagas were raided by the Ahoms, their houses were burnt down, following which, they submitted and were pardoned and given compensation for the losses inflicted on them. The tribal chiefs were captured and beheaded.

These instances make it clear that there never were peaceful and friendly relations between the Ahoms and the Nagas. In times of declining power, the Ahoms followed a policy of appeasing the tribes of the frontier region. Post Pratap Singha's death, those who succeeded, failed at keeping the tribes subjugated. With decline of the kingdom, the tribes, along with the Nagas rose to take revenge for the excesses committed on them by the Ahoms, when they became powerful.

### 3.3.1 The Akas-Ahom Relations

The Akas are comparatively small in number, and call themselves Hrusso. They inhabit the area between the Bharali river and the Buddhist tribes of the West Kameng and Tawang districts. The Akas, who lived in the hills north of Charduar, comprised mainly two clans - the *Hazari-khowas* (means 'eaters at a thousand hearths') and the *Kapachors* (meaning 'thieves who lurk amid the cotton plants). The Ahom government had granted right of *posa* to the *Hazari Khowas* to prevent their aggression of the plains. But the *Kapachors* were more troublesome. According to the records of 1825, the Akas were entitled to receive from each house of their allotted Paiks, 'one portion of a female dress, one bundle of cotton thread and one handkerchief.'

It is worth mentioning here that only the Hazarikhowa clan of the Akas was entitled to receive *Posa* and no such right was given to the *Kapachors*. It is suggested that the name Hazarikhowa came into use because a thousand *gots* or paiks or individual groups of revenue payers were set aside for the collection of *Posa* by the



Akas. The Kopachors, on the other hand, simply extorted some articles from the cultivators in the plains. It is also suggested that the Kopachors were not considered separate from the Hazarikhawas and the latter were supposed to share a part of their *Posa* with the former. This goes on to suggest, therefore, that though originally the Kopachors were not entitled to receive *Posa*, they began to assert their right to collect the same and compelled the Hazarikhawas to share it with them. In addition to the *Posa* given to the Akas, there cannot be any doubt that like many other tribes, they also collected paddy from the paiks assigned to them. One important thing about the Aka-Ahom relation is that throughout the entire period of Ahom rule over Assam no conflict ever took place between the Akas and the Ahoms.

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Fig. 3.1 The Ahom King Sukapha

### 3.3.2 The Nyishis

The Ahom-Nyishi relations has also been studied in detail by Lakshmi Devi (op.cit., pp. 217-234). The Nyishis are mentioned as the Daflas in the contemporary Ahom documents and consequently the British documents as well as the historians of the post-Independence period used the same term for the Nyishi. This terminology is, however, not used nowadays. The Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh are settled mostly in the hills north of Nao Duar (the nine passes) in Darrang and Che-Duar (the six passes) in Lakhimpur. Those who resided on the border of Darrang were known as '*Paschima* or *Western Daflas*', and those on the border of North Lakhimpur were called as the '*Tagin* or *Eastern Daflas*'. On the west, the Akas were their neighbours and on the east lived the Galo, Adis and the Hill Miris. They occupied the territory situated between the Bhorali river on the west and the upper courses of Subansiri river on the east. The Nishis were divided into two broad categories. The eastern members of the tribe living on the borders of Lakhimpur, called themselves Ni-Sing or Nyising and were called Tagin Daflas by the Assamese. In the western branches, settled near the plains and foothills of Darrang, they were called Bag-ni or Bang-ni and the Assamese called them Paschima Daflas.



One important feature of these Nyishi tribes was that they were not organized in one or two single groups, but were rather a collection of small clans which were independent of each other, and as such rarely resorted to any combined actions. The number of chiefs who were recognized by the British government for the grant of *Posa* clearly shows this. The total number of such chiefs was 238. The form of government of the Nyishis was oligarchical and there were 30 to 40 chiefs in a single clan. The Ahoms came into contact with the Nyishis only after the annexation of the Sutiya territories (1522-23).

We get the first reference of any contact between the Nyishis and the Ahoms in the year 1614 during the reign of Pratap Singha in Assam. Provoked by the attack of the Nyishis in the plains, the king ordered Lako Borpatra and Bharali Gohain to proceed against the Nyishis on the frontier of Darrang. However, this expedition resulted in heavy losses for the Ahoms and a number of soldiers were killed by the Nishis, and the two Ahom officers were compelled to return back. Thus in the very first contact between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the latter realized the ferocious nature of the former. It was, therefore, thought proper to follow a policy of give and take by the Ahoms and in order to put some check to the raids of the Nishis, Pratap Singha constructed a Dafla-garh (fortification) in the eastern parts of the Tezpur sub-division of Darrang division which was also known as 'Rajgarh'. The Nyishis were also granted *Posa* by the Ahoms. A number of Paiks were assigned to the Nishis in the duar areas who became known as Dafla-bahatias or the serfs of the Daflas and an officer known as Dafalaparia Phukan was appointed to look after these men. In the relations with the Ahoms the Nyishis proved to be the most formidable. The Ahom Prime Minister, Atan Burhagohain's, acceptance that 'it was impossible to capture the Daflas' and 'The Dafla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat-hole' clearly indicates the strengths of the Nyishis. In 1562, the Nyishis (along with the Koches) invaded the plains. The Ahom king Sukhampha, the Khora Raja (1552-1603) adopted defensive measures by constructing forts and appointing a new officer called Salal Gohain to keep the Daflas and Akas in check. King Pratap Singha had also got constructed a fort called the *Dafla Garh* in Darrang. This step was taken after an utter failure of the Ahom expedition against the Western Daflas in 1614. Pratap Singha even granted '*posa*' to the Nyishis in order to conciliate them. From an account of 13th May, 1825, we know that every year from every ten houses of Dafala-bahatias, the Nyishis were entitled to receive one double cloth, one single cloth, one handkerchief, one *dao*, ten heads of horned cattle and four seers of salt. In addition, the Nyishis must have received some paddy which is stated by Padmeswar Singh Naobakha Pukan and also by Col. White. Because of this, the paiks were given corresponding concessions in the tax which they paid to Ahoms.

These measures could not stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory. Sutyinpha's (1644-1648) expedition of 1646, and King Sunyatpha's (or Udayaditya Singha, 1670-1672) expedition, (1672) against them could not bring success to the Ahoms. The Nyishis were supported by the Hill Miris in their fight against the Ahoms. King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) pacified with the Daflas by placing at their disposal a number of people (known as the Dafla-Bahatia). King Rudra Singha (1696-1714) was also successful in invoking the Nyishis to send their troops in his proposed invasion of Bengal. The Western Daflas, numbering six hundred, came down from the hills north of Darrang to join the Ahom army. But after Rudra Singha's



death in 1714, their relationship again turned hostile. King Siva Singha (1714-1744) subdued the Daflas in 1717.

King Rajendra Singha (1751-1769) also tried to prevent the Dafla raids. He erected forts and put restrictions on Daflas entrance to markets. The Daflas suffered badly due to the ban. At last, their delegation came for agreement. But the Ahom king was not satisfied. He got the members of the delegation arrested. The Daflas retaliated by capturing a number of people from the plain. After the event both parties reached an agreement and released the captives. The Daflas were allowed to levy *posa* on condition of their refraining from the act of aggression.

On the basis of the above discussion we can say that the Nyishis always resisted the Ahom moves of expansion or restricting the Nyishis into the hills. During the initial contacts with the Nyishis, the Ahoms realized the ferocious and independent nature of the former and in order to avoid any further complications, *Posa* was granted to them. Despite this, whenever the Nyishis were in need of labourers and other necessities of life, they simply came down to the plains and collected the dues from the villages. The Assam centric history portrays the Nyishi claim as the loot or plunder. The observation of Muhammad Kasim, a historian during the days of Aurangzeb, about the Nyishis needs to be mentioned here: 'The Daflas are extremely independent of the Assam Raja and whenever they find an opportunity, plunder the country contiguous to their mountains.' The introduction of the *posa* system, however, was an important measure taken by the Ahom kings to regulate the Ahom-Nyishi relations.

### 3.3.3 The Abors (Adis) and Miris (Mishings)

The Adis were known as the Abors in the Ahom and British documents (however, now-a-days Adi is popularly used in place of Abor). Now the Galos have separate identity, however, earlier known as the Gallongs, they were part and parcel of the Adi society, culture and identity. The Adis came into contact with the Ahoms when the Sutiya Kingdom was annexed to the Ahom territory in the year 1523 during the reign of Suhungmung, or Dihingia Raja. With this annexation the Ahom territories were extended up to river Subansiri, which was the homeland of the Adis, then called Abors. The Adis as whole lived in the East and West Siang, eastern border of the Upper Subansiri and the south western part of the Dibang Valley of present Arunachal Pradesh. Both belonged to the same origin, but in the process of migration the latter came down to the plains and settled along the north bank of Brahmaputra (Lakhimpur district of Assam). There had been close relationship between Adis and Miris. In fact, the Miris of the plains were claimed by the Adis as 'their dependents and runaway slaves.' The term 'Miri' in Assamese means go-between and true to this meaning, the Miris acted as such between the Adis and the traders of Assam. The Adis also claimed that all the fish and gold found in the rivers that flowed through their territory belonged to them.

Under the Ahom government the Miris played the role of intermediaries between the Abors and the traders of Assam. There were other branches of Miris who were called the Hill Miris, and settled in the hills to the north of Sisi and Dhemaji (Lakhimpur District). The Ahom government had granted them right to *posa* similar to the Nyishis, Akas, Monpas and Sherdukpens. But still the Miris raided on the plains in 1655 and again in 1665. Their raid on Sadiya (1683) during the rule of Gadadhar Singha was very violent one. They set fire to the house of the

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Sadiya Khowa Gohain, destroyed the villages, and killed about two hundred people. However, due to the pressure of the Ahom king they had to submit. In the later period, too, the Miris created problem for the Ahom government especially during the Moamaria rebellion.

The Ahom government did not grant right to *posa* to the Adis, as it was granted to other tribes. The Adis had a different type of right, that is, they claimed 'absolute sovereignty over the Miris of the plains, and an inalienable right to all the fish and gold found in the Dihong river. The Ahom government had tacitly accepted such claims of the Adis. It had relieved the Miris of all revenue charges for performing services to the Abors. In this way the Ahoms had acknowledged the subjugation of Miris to the Abors.

The Adis had a peaceful relation with the Ahoms, and they were 'never known to commit an act of unprovoked ravage or outrage on the villages of the plains'. Rather, on one occasion the Abors (Padam Clan) rejected the Khampti proposal of combined attack on the Ahoms. The Padams got assistance from the Ahom government. Some of the Abors even came for help of the Ahoms during the Moamaria rebellion.

In recognition of this privilege that was given to them by the Ahoms, the Adis were supposed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom government. Some historians have maintained that through such agreements, 'Posa' was granted to the Adis but this does not seem to be true. The concessions which were granted to the Adis by the Ahoms were not actually concessions but a mere recognition of the claims of the latter over the Miris. No direct relation worth mention ever existed between the Ahoms and the Adis and the Adis continued to trade with the outside world through the Miris. Likewise the Ahom Buranjis do not give us any clue of Adi-Ahom conflict.

### 3.3.4 Mishimis

The Mishimis were the immediate neighbours of the Sutiya and so after the annexation of the Sutiya kingdom, the Ahoms came into contact with the Mishimis. To the east of the Adis across the Dibang river lived various branches of the tribes who were collectively called the Mishimis. The clan, also known as Digaru Mishimis, lived to the west of Digaru river, near the famous Brahmakunda and were constantly in touch with the plains. They also acted as guides to the Hindu pilgrims visiting Brahmakunda. The Mezho lived to the north-east of Du river and traded with Tibet; the Maros lived south of Brahmaputra and their settlements were scattered and mixed up with Khamptis and Singphos. Various groups of Mishimis (such as, the Idus or Chulikata, the Taraon or Digaru and the Kamanor Miju) lived in the hills to the east of the Adis. At present they mostly inhabit in the Lohit, Anjaw and Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Ahoms had peaceful relations with the Mishimis. They had not been granted right to *posa*, but they enjoyed trade facilities. In fact, the Mishimis were keen traders and their contact with the neighbouring countries and the markets in Assam proved to be a catalyst in facilitating the same. They used to come to Sadiya market with the hill produces. They traded mainly in musk, skins of animals, 'Mishmitita', some ivory and few other articles. The policy of non-intervention and better trade opportunities offered by the Ahoms led to the better relations between the Mishimis and the Ahoms.

There are not many references to the Mishimis in the *Buranjis* (the Ahom chronicle). King Sutyinpha (1644-48) constructed a *Mishimi-garh* (Rampart) to



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resist the Mishimi raiders. The only conflict that took place between the Mishimis and the Ahoms was during the reign of Ramdhraj Singha (1673-75), when, in the month of June in 1675, the Mishimis killed four Ahom priests in the Deoghar (temple) in Sadiya. When the Sadiyakhowa Gohain (he was an Ahom officer, who was appointed to guard the Sadiya frontier against the inroads of the tribes) informed the Ahom King of the incident and requested for assistance, the Mishimis, with the help of the Doanias, who are said to be the half-breeds of the Singphos, erected a stockade near a deep sheet of water. The combined strength of the Mishimis and Doaris compelled the Ahom forces to retreat and some Assamese villages were also burnt by the tribal near river Ziri.

The Ahom king then sent fresh reinforcements and also ordered Baraphukan to proceed against the Mishimis. A fort was erected at Tishing and the Ahom forces put up there. A few days later one Chaodang Kataki was sent to ask the Mishimis the reasons for their inroads. Chaodang brought back two hundred Mishimi men with him. Upon inquiry, it was revealed that four Mishimis who had committed the murders were Pude, Mirishang, Bajing and Phakushi. The Baraphukan and Sadiyakhowa Gohain were determined to capture and punish the offenders and the Ahom forces rather frightened the Mishimis who agreed to hand over the guilty. The culprits were subsequently handed over to the Baraphukan by the Mishimis along with some tributes. These culprits were put to death, and thereafter no major raid worth mention was carried out by the Mishimis over the Ahom territory. We have some evidence to show that the Ahoms recognized the possessions of the hills adjacent to the Dibang river by the Mishimis and the Mishimis paid four baskets of poison to the Ahoms as tribute. This fact is reflected in a stone pillar of octagonal shape found on the banks of Deopani river about 7 miles north of Sadiya. The agreement to this effect was signed in 1687 between the Mishimis and the Dihingia Phukan also known as 'Bargohain of Sadiya.' Thus the Ahoms followed a policy of equity and persuasion towards the Mishimis.

The *Sadiya Stone Pillar Inscription* (probably inscribed in about 1687) issued by the Dihingia Bargohain (the Ahom overlord of the Sadiya region) confirms a settlement between the Ahoms and the Mishimis. The Mishimis were asked to pay tribute to the Sadiyakhowa Gohain.

### 3.3.5 The Khamptis

The Khamptis were probably the nearest kinsmen of the Ahom ruler of Assam and migrated to India from the ancient kingdom of Mung-Mau or Pong in Burma. The Khamptis entered in big numbers the borders of Sadiya in Assam in the middle of the 18th century due to constant wars and confusion in the Mogoung area. Being the close kinsmen of the Ahoms, the Khamptis were allowed to settle on the banks of the Tengapani river in 1751 A.D. But the other migrants, particularly the Singphos (of Burmese stock) ousted the Khamptis from their settlements, so they moved to the Sadiya region. South of Manbhum ranges on the bank of Buri Dihing there were four important Khamti villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square and on this river, were located the other nine Khamti villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Khamtis were rice cultivators, traders, warriors and good artisans. They used to come to the Sadiya market to buy and sell various articles. They had their small principality. E. R. Leach in his book *The Political System of the Highland Burma* (London, 1959)



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provides a detailed description of the origin, migration and settlement of the Khamptis in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

Things went on peacefully and no confrontation took place between the Khamptis and the Ahoms in the beginning. This peaceful co-existence did not continue for long. The opportunity to fulfill the political ambition of the Khamptis to expand their area of influence in the territories of Assam came only when the Ahom rulers were in trouble due to the Moamaria rebellion (1779-onwards). The Khamptis crossed the river Brahmaputra in 1794, ousted the Sadiyakhowa Gohain, the Ahom Governor of Sadiya, and established their rule over Sadiya with two chiefs namely Burha Raja and Deka Raja. The Ahom king was rather compelled to accept this agreement because of the overall adverse political condition. The Khamptis, however, were not contended with that and during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811), came further down the plains in 1799 A.D. We have some evidence to suggest that the Khamptis were helped by some other Shan tribes such as Pan, Naras and Phakials and also by the Miris, Mishinis, the Muluks and the Adis. This time, however, the Khamptis were badly defeated by the Ahom army sent by the Prime Minister, Purnananda Burhagohain. The Burha Raja of the Khamptis was captured but was pardoned and re-established by the king. The Khamptis remained quiet for some time but certainly caused trouble to the Ahoms during the Burmese invasion of Assam (1816-1824), because the British found that the entire Sadiya tract was under the control of the Khamptis. Thus we see that the Khamptis took full advantage of their kinship relations when it suited them and forgot it at other times when the Ahoms became weak.

The Ahom Rule was on decline at that time. It seems that the Khamptis, at the time of the Burmese invasions of Assam, regained their hold over Sadiya.

### 3.3.6 The Singphos

The Singphos, like the Khamptis migrated from the Upper Burma and settled in this part of Arunachal Pradesh. In the south of Manbhum ranges on the bank of Buri Dihing there were six Singpho villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square; and on this river, were located the other eighteen Singpho villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Singphos were loosely organized under two significant chiefs of Bisa Gam and Duffa Gam across the Patkai ranges in Burma. Besides the fertile rice valley and the rich forestland, this area was rich in mineral resources such as coal, lime, iron, silver and petroleum. The indigenous tea-bushes and elephant-catching and trade in ivory tusk and elephants were other attractions of the area. The nearby forest also abounded in the natural rubber trees, which were tapped and the juice was processed for producing rubber. The Singphos like the Khamptis were keen traders in slaves; mostly captured from the territories of Assam and traded up to Bhamo or Yunnan province of China.

The engagement of Singphos with the Ahom rulers came during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) when the Moamaria rebellion was in full swing. The Singphos entered into some understanding with the Moamaria rebels who had been defeated by the Ahoms, and attacked a number of villages in the eastern parts of Assam. They also imported some Burmese troops. When the Ahom king got this news, he sent troops under Deka Phukan. The Singphos, initially, were successful in checking the Ahom advances and also inflicted losses to them; but in a renewed

#### Check Your Progress

1. How can we summarize the Ahom policy?
2. How was the term, *posa* generally applied?
3. What kind of weapons did the Ahom rulers have?



attempt, the Ahoms were able to break the fort of the Singphos. An agreement was arrived at and the Ahom Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain presented an Ahom girl named Rangili to the Singphos chief Bichanong. Bichanong presented Rangili to the Burmese king in order to strengthen ties with him. The agreement of the Singphos with the Ahoms did not last long and during the time of the Burmese invasion of Assam, Singphos like the Khamptis, made a number of attacks on the villages in the plains, carried away a number of slaves, and reduced the population of the village in the eastern parts considerably. About 3000 of the Assamese subjects were recovered from the captivity of the Singphos by Capt Neufville, the first Political Agent of Upper Assam. The problem of slavery abolition and occupation of Singpho land for tea cultivation were the areas of concern between the Singpho-British relation which will be discussed in the following units. The Singphos, thus, took full advantage of the troubled times of the Ahoms, and refused to be ever loyal to them after their appearance in Assam.

### Highlights of the Tribal-Ahom Relations

When the Ahom rule was established in Assam, the tribal of Arunachal continued to follow their policy of trade and raids (extortion and plunder) on the plains of Assam. This policy of the tribal was the result of difficult geographical conditions of the hills, the want of the necessities of life in their areas and the traditional rights of the tribes of the hills upon the plain people of foothills of Assam to collect dues. The Ahom rulers of Assam when could cross the northern bank of the Brahmaputra, assumed the responsibility of protecting their subjects from the raids of these tribes. Here it would be worth mentioning that any political or socio-economic relation between the tribal and the Ahoms was, in almost all the cases, initiated by the Ahom government and not by the tribal. Most of the tribes of Arunachal were very independent in nature and never desired any outside interference in their lives unless compelled by their existence at stake.

So far as the Ahoms were concerned, their policy towards the tribals of Arunachal was based on the policy of reconciliation and persuasion; for the occupation of the hill areas of Arunachal was out of question, and the Ahoms never had any desire to interfere with the polity of the tribal. The tribal were hardly influenced by the formative changes taking place in the plains of Assam, and continued to live during the Ahom period as they used to do thousands of years ago.

In order to protect their subjects from the raids of these tribals and also to maintain peace and tranquility in the area, the Ahoms granted the right of *Posa* to some of the tribes of Arunachal, and certain other concessions were given to the tribes, like the Adis, who were not granted *Posa*. The Ahom policy towards these tribes of the hills was of conciliation followed by the display of force whenever possible. However, in spite of the *Posa* and other concessions granted to them, most of the tribes often violated the friendly agreements and raided the villages in the plains. This rather compelled the Ahom government to send some punitive expedition against these tribes resulting in the loss of lives and properties. But, generally speaking, the Ahoms were able to maintain comparative peace and harmony with the tribes of Arunachal and in most of the cases these tribes accepted the Ahom sovereignty in the plains and paid tribute to them in return of the various concessions given by Ahoms.



## The Noctes

'Naga' is a generic term applied to a large number of tribes and sub-tribes living in the Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Historically, their place of habitation had been in the valley of the Dhansiri in the west to the hills of the Patkai in the east, and from the border of Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam in the north to the North of Cachar and Manipur in the south. They were organized in many groups, such as the Banferas, Noctes and Wanchos. In Assam they were known by their place of abode, such as the Namsangias, Bordurias and Panidurias. Lakshmi Devi (op.cit. pp. 19-56) provides a comprehensive picture of the Ahom-Naga relations.

The Ahom-Naga relation in the context of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is mainly concerned with the noctes. Noctes means village people (*noc* means village and *te* means people) and were settled in the Tirap district of Arunachal from as early as the 12th or 13th century. These noctes came into contact with the Ahoms when the latter were wandering for permanent settlement. The Nagas did not welcome the early invaders and gave tough resistance to them. The Ahom king Sukapha terrorized them by adopting the brutal method of suppression. Later on, the Ahoms conciliated with them (as has been discussed already). Conflict between the Ahoms and the nagas continued throughout the period of the Ahom rule. The main causes of the conflict were the right to use the Naga products and control over the salt wells. The nagas of Jaypur, Namsang, Paniduria and Barduria lived mainly by manufacturing salt, which they traded in Assam. There were as many as eighty-five salt wells in the lower hills. The Ahom government imposed a nominal tax on the salt brought for sale by the Nagas. Later Ahom rulers (for example Purandar Singha) employed their own men to extract salt from the wells. The basic source of conflict between the noctes and the Ahom were the salt-springs and wells and according to the Buranjis, the Ahom seized a salt-well in Mohang in 1536, and in due course of time enjoyed either exclusive rights on several such wells or share in the salt produced in them. There are also evidences to suggest that some of the groups of noctes entered into friendly alliances with the Ahoms. One Bonfera chief named Karangpha entered in close friendly relations with the Ahoms. King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) tried to check the naga attacks by constructing a rampart called the Naga-garh. But the naga raids could not be prevented permanently. During the rule of King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) the Namsangia Nagas attacked an Ahom salt mine in 1692. They again attacked on a salt mine at Barhat in 1701. King Rudra Singha (1696-1714) subdued them. But there is one instance of 1576 when the Nagas obtained a remarkable victory over the Ahoms, and it was decided that the Nagas would use the salt springs of Longpong during the daytime and the Ahoms at night. Amrendra Kr Thakur in his article 'Salt: Sources and Struggle in Arunachal Pradesh', (*Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 30th session, Nagaon, pp. 124-136) provides a detailed account of the struggle between the Noctes and the Ahoms for the same.

The Ahoms considered the Nagas as a whole of their subjects and they were asked to pay tribute in the form of slaves, elephant teeth, spear shafts, goat's hair and above all these salt. In return, the Ahom government granted lands (*khats*) to the Nagas. The Ahoms had good relations with some of the Nagas. Sometimes the Ahom kings acted against one Naga group on the request of the other Naga group. Thus, in 1665 on the request of the Banfer or Banpara Nagas, the Ahom King



Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-1670) attacked on the Banchang Nagas, and defeated them. Their houses were destroyed. In fact, the Ahoms had special relationship with the Banferas. In fact, the enmity among the Nagas themselves prevented a united resistance of theirs against the Ahoms. In spite of this, the Nagas could not be subdued permanently and their insurrections occurred throughout the Ahom rule. It may be mentioned here that the Nocte-Ahom relationships were not always based on friction and enmity, but friendship, commercial and cultural intercourse also existed between them. Evidences show that the Namsangia, Borduaria and Paniduaria Noctes traded with the Ahoms for the supply of salt to the plains of Assam. A nominal tax was imposed by the Ahoms on the salt brought from the hills. By the way of trade, the Noctes also developed cultural contacts with the plains of Assam. A section of them came under the influence of Vaishnavism and adopted a very elementary form of Vaishnavism which was rather a compromise between some tenets of this sect and the tribal ways. Ajay Kr Mishra in his article 'Religious Practices of the Noctes of Arunachal: Exposure and Response' (*Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 25th (Silver Jubilee) session, Shillong, 2004, pp. 265-273) provides detailed accounts of impact of the Neo-Vaishnavism and the title given to the Nocte chief as 'Narrottam'.

(There is a story that one of the Ahom King Supimpha's wives happened to see a Banfera Naga chief who had come to pay tribute. She praised the beauty of the Naga chief. The king, being unhappy with this, gave away his wife to the Naga chief. She was pregnant at that time and subsequently gave birth to a son in the Naga village. King Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) became very much impressed to see the boy, named Senglung, who used to come to pay tribute. He also came to know that his mother was already pregnant before Supimpha sent her away. Suhungmung patronised Senglung by creating a new post of Barpatra Gohain for him. This post was made equal to those of the Bar Gohain and Burha Gohain).

### 3.3.7 Khasis

According to the legends, the Khasis were said to be the earliest immigrants who made their way across northern Myanmar to the present location where they established new centre. Linguistically the Khasis represent a unique case of being the isolated austere group, speaking the dialects from the Mon Khmer family of languages which is spoken in the other South-East Asian region.

The tribes in Meghalaya can mainly be classified into three groups Garos, Khasis and Pnars or Jaintias. Garos are believed to be the descendants of Tibeto Burman race who came down all the way from Tibet to the North-Eastern States while the Khasis and Pnars or Jaintias are the descendants of Proto Austroloid Monkhmer race. While Garos can be located in the Garo hills of Meghalaya, the Khasis are scattered all across the State and are known by different names.

Mainly, the pure Khasis can be sited at the Khasi hills, the Pnars or Jaintias can be located on Jaintia hills. Apart from these, there are many other tribes in Meghalaya. They are Bhois in the north of Meghalaya, Khyntriams in the central and Wars in the southern region. They are all a sub-tribes of Khasis and live a lifestyle similar to that of the Khasis.

The term—Khasi is applied to the group of matrilineal and Mon Khmer speaking people who presently inhabit the East and the West Khasi Hills and the



Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya. The term includes Ainwis and the Lyngams. Garo is a term used by others to refer to a particular group of people who are mainly concentrated in the Garo hills. The Garos prefer to be called by *Mande* or *Achik*. The term—Jaintia is a generic term which includes the Pnars/Synteng and other sub groups.

### **Anglo Khasi War ( 1829--1833)**

U Tirot Sing as a king of the Khasi people in the early 19th century, ruled in Nongkhlaw, which was part of the Khasi Hills convened a Durbar, where he passed orders for the British to evacuate Nongkhlaw. The British, under David Scott who was the agent to the British Governor General for the Northern Territory did not pay any heed to the order. That is how the Khasis attacked the British garrison in Guwahati on 2nd April 1829 and killed two British officers. The British retaliated with a fury and started military operations against U Tirot Sing and other Khasi chiefs. Thus began the Anglo-Khasi war during 1829--1833.

Although the Khasis lacked firearms and had only swords, shields, bows and arrows they resorted to guerrilla activity, when they found that it was impossible to engage in open battle against an enemy who could kill from a distance since they were untrained in the British type of warfare. The Anglo Khasi war continued for the next 4 years from 1829.

The might of the British colonial rulers overpowered the Khasi's as U Tirot Sing was finally captured by the British and in 1832, the Khasi king was deported to Dhaka, where he died on 17 July 1835. His death anniversary is commemorated every year in Meghalaya.

After the Khasi king surrendered, the British increased their influence over the Jaintia Kingdom, which was finally annexed on 15 March, 1835. The king of Jaintiapur handed over his property in Sylhet and was given a monthly salary of ₹ 500.

The British administered the plain areas directly and the hill region indirectly via a system of 15 dolois and 4 sardars, as an agent of the British administrators. The 15 administrators were free to adjudicate on all but the most heinous crimes. Eventually, the British incorporated Meghalaya into Assam in 1835. Later, the British occupied the Garo Hills in 1872.

When Bengal was partitioned on 16 October 1905 by Lord Curzon, Meghalaya became a part of the new province of East Bengal, along with Assam. However, when the partition was reversed in 1912, Meghalaya became a part of the province of Assam.

### **3.3.8 Jaintias**

It was in the beginning of the 17th century that the Ahoms and the Jaintias first came into contact with each other. At that time, Pratap Singha (1603-1641) was the Ahom king. The Jaintia king, Jasa Manik formed a bond of friendship with King Pratap Singha by offering him two Jaintia princesses in marriage. The friendship was short-lived. With new rulers taking over the thrones of both the Ahoms and the Jaintias, hostility became the common factor. It ended only after AD 1662, when the Ahoms defeated the Mughals and drove them out of Gauhati. Yet, some skirmishes did take place between the Jaintias and the Ahoms even after 1662.



### 3.3.9 Kacharis

According to the Ahom-Buranji records, 'In ancient times, the heavenly King Sukhapa conquered the Sutiya, the Kacharis, the Matak, the Barahi, the Nagas and the Kamateswars. They were allowed to remain as they were on the condition that they offer tributes.'

Even the Purani Assam Buranji carries a similar statement. Chronicles also record that when Sui-Ka-Pha reached the valley of the Brahmaputra, these territories gave him their tributes. To quote, 'After this, the king Sukapha arrived in this country. He got homage and tributes from all.'

From what has been discussed, it would seem that Sukapha kept getting tributes from the Kacharis. The territory of the Kacharis was on River Dikhow's left bank.

The fact that the Kacharis paid tributes to Sukapha is further confirmed through the warning that was given to them by Suteupha (Sukapha's son) to pay tribute or move out of their territory right till Namdang River. The warning could have come, because seeing a new king, the Kacharis deliberately stopped payment of tribute.

The Ahoms were not averse to foul play, when it came to pushing the Kacharis out of the region they occupied. Here is an example to quote from I S Mumtaz Khatun's (Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Gauhati): *The nature of the Ahom-Kachari relations:*

'On learning that the Kacharis were highly superstitious and could easily be duped, the Ahoms proposed that this should be decided by a test in which both parties dig separate canals. Whoever could link the canal with the river Dikhow, before daybreak would be considered the owner of the tract. The Kacharis, having agreed to the proposal, the two sides started digging the canals. In their attempt, the Kacharis almost surpassed the Ahoms, who, on learning this, brought some fowls and made the birds to crow as they would do before dawn. The night being a full-moon one, the Kacharis heard the fowls crowing and thought that it was already dawn. Thus, they left the canal incomplete while the Ahoms continued to dig and succeeded in finishing the task before dawn. The Kacharis, admitting defeat, surrendered the territory (till Namdang), to the Ahoms'.

It took the Kacharis nearly 200 years to get back at the Ahoms and make them subordinates. They defeated the Ahom King Siu-hen-pha (AD 1488-1493) and forced them to offer a girl to the Kachari king.

Siu-hum-mong, was the ruler of the Ahoms from 1497 to 1539. He was not averse to using any means to establish the old territorial status with the Kacharis. Headed by Kan Seng, an army was sent, which used dexterous means to take hold of region till the Dhansiri valley. This success made the Ahoms bold and they set on a path to crush the Kacharis. A battle ensued in 1531, in which, Khunkhara was defeated and the Ahoms put Detchungpha on the Kachari throne. He claimed to be descendent of the original Kacharis. Then, the Kacharis became subordinate to the Ahoms and in every Ahom correspondence, the term thapita was used for them, meaning established.

Some years later, the new Kachari king tried to assert independence and an Ahom army was sent against him that killed his mother and him. Prince Madan was taken to the capital of the Ahoms. Later, when the Kachari nobles made a solicitation to the Ahom king, Madan was put on the Kachari throne. He was renamed Nirbhaya Narayan. He was also given a girl by the Ahoms. Nirdhaya Narayan consented to

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pay annual tribute to the Ahoms. The Kachari king came to be known as thapita-sanchita which means established and preserved.

The Kachari kings wanted to shake off this title and used the smallest opportunity to free themselves of Ahom authority. Their first opportunity came when after having defeated the Ahoms, the army of the Koch led by Chilarai brought the Kachari kingdom under it. The Kacharis regarded this as the suzerainty of the Ahoms, leaving them forever. Therefore, when some years had gone by, during the reign of Pratap Singha, Sundar Gohain was killed by the Kacharis and they openly declared that they would stop all tribute paying to the Ahom overlords. At the same time, the Kacharis renamed their capital to Kirtipur and their king changed his name from Yasa Narayan to Pratap Narayan.

To quote from I S Mumtaza Khatun's *The Nature of the Ahom-Kachari Relations*, 'Just after the accession of Sui-ram-pha in 1641, to the Ahom throne, after the death of Sui-sen-pha, the Kachari king, Indra-bal-narayan, the successor of Bhim-bal-narayan, deputed envoys with letters to the new Ahom king. These were sealed with *Singha-sab*, or the seal of independence, instead of the *Phukan sab*, or the seal of subordination, which he was supposed to use.

While one envoy was sent to get the communication again with the Phukan sab, the other was held by the Ahoms.

Another instance, in which the Kacharis tried to gain their independence, was when the Ahoms were under Mughal attack during 1615 to 1619. Bhimbala Narayana, the then Kachari king, in an attempt to assert his position, attacked a village which was part of the kingdom of the Ahoms. He was well aware that at such a time he would face no resistance from the Ahom forces.

Another time, following the invasion of Mir Jumla, envoys were dispatched by Chakradhvaj Singha to the Kachari Kingdom for gathering information regarding Barchetiya, an Ahom officer, who had run off to the kingdom of the Kacharis. To begin with, Barchetiya was not returned by Bidarpa Narayan and he insulted the Ahoms by sending his reply through an envoy. This was not the existing etiquette. The letter was returned to the Kachari King, unaccepted by the Ahom ruler.

There are various such repeated incidents which show that while the Ahoms wanted the Kacharis under their subordination, the Kacharis incessantly strived to remain independent. The Ahoms expected the Kacharis to carry five letters in all diplomatic exchanges, for the king and the ministers. After having broken relations, if the Kacharis wanted to revive them with the Ahoms, they needed to provide five letters for the resumption of good relations. This was resented by the Kacharis. Yet this process was repeated time and again. Whenever the Kacharis did provide the five letters, the Ahoms promptly began to refer to them as thapita-sanchita. This was disliked by the Kacharis and they promptly made a demand for an Ahom girl, which would prove that they were really established, when in fact they knew that providing a girl would show the subordination of the Ahoms.

Though the Kacharis did not like to be called thapita-sanchita, they were only too happy to be in such a situation where the Ahom king was powerful. Also, the Kacharis rejoiced and declared their independence each time that a foreign invasion, like that of the Mughals took place on the Ahoms and they were pushed against the wall. Promptly, when the Ahoms were victorious, the Kacharis would rush to revive good relations.



According to I S Mumtaza Khatun's *The Nature of the Ahom-Kachari Relations*:

'Another point, which comes to our notice, is that the Ahom king himself never took any initiative to establish friendly relations or to revive such relations. In case of extreme necessity, the Ahom monarch sent envoys on behalf of his ministers as in the case of Pratap Singha, who, anticipating the Mughal invasion, sent five people on behalf of his ministers and the governor, to the Kachari court in AD 1615.'

Ahom Relations with  
the Tribes of  
Arunachal Pradesh

## NOTES

### ACTIVITY

Talk to some people from the North East living in your locality or working with you. Find out how different their lifestyle, is as compared to yours.

### DID YOU KNOW

North East possesses more than 550 varieties of orchids, which is said to be almost 70% of the total species of orchids identified so far.

## 3.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The Ahom government adopted a policy of conciliation, as well as a policy of force towards various tribes of the north east.
- The Ahoms did not interfere too much in the affairs of the hills. Rather, they conciliated with the tribes by providing them many types of facilities and privileges.
- The Ahoms led very few expeditions towards the hills, because of many types of problems.
- The Ahoms were more or less successful in their dealings with the tribes of the hills and were able to control the tribes in the confines of the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, except the trade missions, in which they could enter beyond the foothills.
- The Ahoms also applied force against the tribes, whenever the situation demanded.
- The tribes of the hills also utilized the troubled times of the Ahoms, due to foreign invasions or the internal problems and chaos due to the rebellion of the Moamarias.

## 3.5 KEY TERMS

- **Haat:** It is a place to exchange goods.
- **Sama-dana-danda-bheda:** The political methodologies prescribed by the scriptures
- **Ambuscade:** Attack from an ambush

### Check Your Progress

4. How did the Ahoms come to India?
5. When did the Ahoms and the Jaintias first come in contact with each other?
6. How long did it take for the Kacharis to get back at the Ahoms and make them subordinates?

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- **Duars:** The floodplains and foothills of the eastern Himalayas in North-East India around Bhutan
- **Paik system:** A type of corvee labour system on which the Ahom kingdom of medieval Assam was based
- **Posa:** It is a system that allows you to pay for only what you sell
- **Ryot:** A general economic term used throughout India for peasant cultivators but with variations in different provinces
- **Khats:** Fertile land at foothills
- **Lingua franca:** A medium of communication between peoples of different languages
- **Overlord:** A ruler, esp. a feudal lord
- **Paramountcy:** The state of being paramount; the highest rank or authority
- **Warlike:** Suggesting war or military life

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### 3.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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1. The Ahom policy was to conciliate the tribes in the north-east region by promising to furnish them their necessities as far as possible. If they indulged in wanton pillages the miscreants were to be pursued and captured. However, the limits were not to be overlapped.
2. In general, the term *posa* came to be applied to all payments made to the tribes of the hills by the Governments; whether it was in commutation of blackmail or compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh.
3. The Ahom rulers had advanced war weapons (matchlocks and guns), large surplus production and the *paiks* to aggressively pursue their imperial policy.
4. Originally from Burma, the Ahoms entered north-eastern Assam, via, the North Eastern Frontier and the Patkai range.
5. It was in the beginning of the 17th century that the Ahoms and the Jaiantias first came into contact with each other.
6. It took the Kacharis nearly 200 years to get back at the Ahoms and make them subordinates.

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### 3.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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#### Short-Answer Questions

1. List the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. What do you understand by *posa*?
3. What acts reflect the policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh?
4. How were the relations between the Ahoms and the Nyishis?
5. What measures were used to stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory?



### Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the policy of conciliation of the Ahom rulers.
2. Write a note on the relations between the Akas and the Ahoms.
3. Discuss the policy of subjugation.
4. Summarize the highlights of the relations between the Ahoms and the tribals.

Ahom

Aruna

NO

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# UNIT 4 BRITISH POLICY

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## Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 *Posa* System
- 4.3 Show of Force
- 4.4 Katokies
- 4.5 Markets
- 4.6 Inner Line
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 Key Terms
- 4.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.10 Questions and Exercises
- 4.11 Further Reading

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## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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The establishment of British rule in Assam, as a consequence of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, brought the colonial forces closer to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The colonial masters adopted the policy of peace and cooperation as well as the policy of armed intervention and other coercive means whenever and wherever required. And finally they drew the line 'Inner Line' between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to monitor or regulate the movement of people between the hills of Arunachal Pradesh and the plains of Assam. The British policy in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh has been the subject of study by many scholars as a part of the whole of Northeast India or Assam.

Although Amalendu Guha in his book *Planter- Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* [New Delhi, 1988 (reprint)] does not discuss the areas of Arunachal Pradesh, the book otherwise provides a comprehensive account of the British policy. The accounts, reports and other such publications of Robert Reid, J. F. Michell, W. W. Hunter, L. W. Shakespeare, R. S. Kennedy and host of others are important to comprehend the various dimensions of the relation between the British and the tribes of this region including that of Arunachal Pradesh. The contemporary writers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have also written several books and articles (some are published in the *Proceedings of North East India History Association*) dealing with the British on one hand and the tribals on the other.

British colonial interests (political, economic, commercial and strategic keeping in view also the areas beyond Arunachal Pradesh) shaped the British policy in Arunachal Pradesh. The growing colonial economy in the Brahmaputra valley in the form of tea, petroleum, coal, rubber and increased revenue from improved agriculture on the foothills of the border area greatly depended upon the capacity of the colonial administration to maintain law and order in the border areas. The need to keep the foothills peaceful made the British initiate various policies which are discussed in this unit.



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## 4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the *posa* system
  - Describe the relationship of the British with the Khamtis and Singphos
  - Recognize the role of the Katokies
  - Discuss the market scenario in Arunachal Pradesh
  - Describe the Inner Circle
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## 4.2 *Posa* SYSTEM

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The article by Braj Narain Jha, 'Politics of *Posa*: A Case Study of Pre and Post Independence Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam,' in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (57th Session, December, 1996, pp. 446–458)* is important in this context because it discusses the *posa* system comprehensively. Jha also provides thorough discussion on the *posa* system in his Ph.D. Thesis 'British Colonial Intervention and Tribal Responses in the North East Frontier of Assam (1825–1947),' unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, Arunachal University, Itanagar, 2002. Though Mackenzie's views are very clear and true to the nature of the *posa* rights of the tribal chiefs, the official writings of the British period distorted the facts in this regard. In general, the term *posa* came to be applied to all payments made to the hill tribes by the governments; whether these were in commutation of black-mail, compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh, it was often confused with 'blackmail' in the official jargon of the British period.

The British administrators neither had the intention to understand the true nature of *posa* nor could they make their doubt clear as to what it was. They cared little to ascertain 'whether these claims had their basis in primeval rights or whether they were merely the definite expression of barbarian cupidity.' Till the third quarter of the nineteenth century they often expressed their grudge that, '... we are met to this day by difficulties arising from the indefinite nature of the connection subsisting between the Assam sovereigns and their savage neighbours.' It is because of this apathetic attitude towards ascertaining the true nature of *posa* that we see the conflicting visions of the British administrators on *posa*. Sometimes it was called 'blackmail', and at other times it was understood as 'a well-ascertained revenue payment, on account of which a corresponding remission was made in the state demand upon the *ryot* and was compared even with 'the chouth of the Marattas and blackmail of the ancient highlanders.' The situation becomes gloomier when one finds the same comparison of *posa* with 'blackmail' in recent publications.

Thus, we see that proper and objective analysis of the nature of *posa* based on the socio-political realities of the contemporary period of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has hardly been made in any serious studies or in the administrative historiography. That is why it has often been wrongly interpreted as blackmail. Actually, the blackmail had originated in Bengal in a different context. The system of payment of blackmail was, in fact, a British polity stated to buy the raids of the aborigines of the Rajmahal hills in Bengal presidency.



The British continued the *posa* system even after the occupation of Assam as it was under the Ahoms. It was the initial policy of the local British officers especially under David Scott 'to maintain intact the arrangements of their native predecessors, and to avoid the appearance of anything like radical or unexpected change.' However, demands within the British establishment were to either change the system or altogether abolish the system as the direct collection of *posa* was viewed as inconvenient and as the rights of the tribal over the ryots of Assam who considered the British as their subjects. Robertson directed Captain White in early 1834 to carry on negotiations with the chiefs of the hills under which either a certain sum of money should be annually paid to them in lieu of all demands or a certain quantity of various articles be collected for them at fixed localities. Under no circumstance were they allowed to proceed beyond a defined line to collect their contributions personally. In this connection, the Government of India held the view that stopping of *posa* might lead to troubles and since it did not affect its interests immediately, the conciliatory policy regarding the *posa* collection should continue. Accordingly, Captain White recommended payment of *posa* in cash than that in kind directly from the ryots. It was thought by the local officers that a humane policy displayed towards the tribes would effectually secure the peace of the outlying areas and lead to beneficial results.

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Commutation to cash payments from the treasury proved useful for the British and by 1852 the *posa* of the Akas, the Sherdukpens, the Thembang Monpas, the Dzongpens of Talungdzong and the Nyishis were commuted to cash. In the case of the Adis all dues in kind were commuted to money payments in 1877. Subsequently, various unsuccessful moves were made towards bringing changes to the system or altogether stopping it.

During the British period though the payment of *posa* continued, we also witness that the payment was stopped to some as a punitive measure against the tribe. The payment of *posa* to the Adis was stopped after the Abor expedition of 1894 and consequent blockade of the Ahor hill and it was never resumed thereafter. Commenting upon the violations of the terms by the Adis, Lancelet Hare had earlier argued, 'By their exaction from the Miris, their obstruction of the survey and their assertion of territorial rights the Abors have undoubtedly forfeited all claims to such a subsidy.'

Accordingly, *posa* began to be paid from the respective treasuries of the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts. In 1860, the right of collection of *posa* extended to some of the Adi chiefs under treaty obligations, but the *posa* to the Adis was stopped once and forever in AD 1900. However, the *posa* of the first kind continued. The debate over 'continuance vs abolition' of *posa* continued from the beginning of British rule in Assam to the end and surprisingly enough during the post-Independence period, but the system of *posa* still continues. It is also to be observed that no change has been made regarding the existing practice of the British period.

Cash payment in lieu of all *posa* claims were given with a view to popularizing British products in the hills and for revamping the trans-border trade. *Posa* payment made to the different tribal chiefs in the annual fairs was spent by them then and there and the gifts given to them on the occasion gradually induced them to use cheaper and factory-made British goods. These measures also served the process of emergence of differentiation within the tribal societies and the power of state was indirectly used to strengthen an economic nexus between the imperial state and the chiefs monopolizing the payment of *posa*. Kingship and kinship combined into the institution of traditional chiefs was gradually made to serve the interest of the State. However, the amount of

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payments remained the same throughout the British period which has scope for further investigation.

After the immense growth of plantation economy and other economically lucrative ventures, the debate of 'abolition vs continuance' gained momentum since the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but to serve the strategic interests and because of lack of sufficient knowledge of the socio-political and cultural affiliations of the tribes of western Arunachal Pradesh and incomplete consolidation of administration in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh the system of *posa*, except for the Adis, was kept intact.

B. N. Jha in his Ph. D. Thesis (op.cit.) and S. Dutta in his article 'The *Posa* System: A Historical Analysis' in S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.), *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh*, (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 161 – 181) provides the details of the *posa* paid to various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh during the British period. The details given below are from the two sources.

### ***Posa* to the Hrusso (Aka) chiefs**

David Scott succeeded in concluding an agreement with the Hrusso (Akas) by which they agreed to forego their right of direct collection of *posa* from individual *ryots* for an annual payment of ₹ 175 by the British government. An agreement was made with Taghi *Raja* wherein he agreed not to attack the *ryots* in the plains for a monthly pension of ₹ 20. Suitable stipends amounting ₹ 360/- per annum were also granted to other chiefs of the Akas with further extension of six more pensions in 1848 to another six chiefs. Capt. J.T. Gordon concluded agreements with Hrusso (Akas) chiefs in February 1844 for commutation of their *posa* to cash on prevailing market prices of goods. Monetary payments to the Aka chiefs were finally fixed at ₹ 668 in aggregate in 1848. The relations of the British with the tribe began to improve after the grant of *posa* in cash to the chiefs. Though later on the chiefs tried for an increase in the amount and troubled the British, the latter as a punitive measure withdrew and stopped the *posa*, the chiefs finally surrendered in 1888 and their *posa* was restored from 1890.

### ***Posa* to the Nyishi chiefs**

On 17th of April 1836, after much persuasion, eight Nyishi chiefs of *Charduar* area agreed to receive the *posa* articles in future from the *Malgoozari* (local revenue officer) who would collect the articles from the *ryots* of their respective villages as per revised rates. In accordance with the direction from the Governor General-in-Council, that appreciated Capt. Methie's agreement with the eight Nyishi chiefs, his successor Lt. Vetch, carried on negotiations with the remaining five Nyishi chiefs of *Charduar* who made similar agreements on April 5, 1837. The Nyishis of *Naoduar* also agreed to receive the *posa* through the village revenue officer by 1838-39. Finally, ₹ 2494-0-1 was annually paid to the Nyishi chiefs of *Charduar* and *Naoduar* commuting their rights to raise *posa* in the *Duars*.

The presence of petty clans, independent of each other, suggests that inter-tribal sub-divisions existed in Nyishi society. There were 30 to 40 chiefs in the same clan or village representing an oligarchic form of government. The chiefs were called *Gams*. Dalton, therefore, noted that 238 Nyishi *gams* of chiefs were in receipt of ₹ 2543 as *posa*. In 1853, the total amount of *posa* to the Nyishi chiefs was ₹ 4129-15-0 with 24 *maunds* of salt to the Nyishis of Bankotta in lieu of certain *hat* (weekly market) dues. It is evident from the official records that it was only by 1852 that the *posa* paid to the Nyishis along with other tribes like the Sherdukpens and Akas were finally commuted



for money payments. After about a year of the commutation of *posa* into money payments, Gordon mentioned, 'No adverse effects on peace has been felt due to commutation of *posa* to money payments 'as stipends to the chiefs.' Great numbers of these clans have left the hills and settled in the plains since the commutation was effected.'

### ***Posa* to the Sherdukpen chiefs**

On 28 February, 1836 Captain Mathie entered into an agreement with the *Sat Rajas* of the Sherdukpens commuting the *posa* to an amount of ₹ 2526-7-0 annually. The *Sat Rajas* received this amount regularly up to 1839, when their payment was stopped in consequence of their having allegedly murdered Madhu Saikia, the revenue officer of Orung in Panbari village. In 1884, however, the Sherdukpens came to terms and on recommendation of Capt. J.T. Gordon the payment of *posa* was resumed. The amount of *posa*, however, was reduced to ₹ 1740 annually. Since then, the Sherdukpens seemed to be reconciled to the change and behaved peacefully in general.

### ***Posa* to the Monpa chiefs**

In early 1844, Capt. Gordon entered into an agreement with the *Sat Rajas* of the Kuriapara *Duars* along with the *Gelong* of Talung *Dzong Gompa* and *Nyetsang* as the representative of the *Tawang Deo*, binding the chiefs formally to relinquish all their claims to the lands of the Kuriapara *Duar* in consideration of an annual payment of ₹ 5000. The relation of the British with these *Sat Rajas* remained peaceful till 1852 when a misunderstanding developed because of interception of the amount of *posa* by one of the *Gelongs* who had supervisory authority over the chiefs. But peace was restored through a treaty signed on 28th January 1853 at Kuriapara by three representatives of the *Tawang Deo* ratifying the earlier agreements of commutation of *posa* to cash amounting to ₹ 5000.

### ***Posa* to the Monpa chiefs of Thembang**

The Monpa chiefs of Thembang collected *posa* from the Mazbat area in *Charduar*. In 1844, they were allowed an annual sum of ₹ 145-13-6 as commutation of their *posa* to cash.

### ***Posa* to the Hill Miris**

From the *Report on the Province of Assam* of Mills in 1853 it is known that Hill Miris were also allowed by the British to draw *posa* in cash and kind annually. The Hill Miris got ₹ 851-3-9 and 12 *maunds* of salt annually. From a resolution of the chief commissioner of Assam of 1884 it seems that the different clans of the Hill Miris were in receipt of annual *posa* of ₹ 281-7-5, ₹ 930-4-9 and ₹ 25 in lieu of their rights of collection in the Sisi, Dhemaji and Bordoloni *Mouzas* of the present Dhemaji district of Assam.

### ***Posa* to the Adis**

While discussing about the *posa* in the case of the Adis Mackenzie writes, 'So far as can be gathered, the Abors, though much more powerful than any of these tribes, had no such rights. This was, owing no doubt to their comparatively remote situation, cut off as they were by the great river Dihang from the cultivated country along the Brahmaputra valley.' But some *Buranjjiis* written in the 19th and 20th centuries mention that *posa* to the Adis had been granted along the *paiks* of some villages. These *paiks* cultivated the Adis had been granted along the *paiks* of some villages. These *paiks* cultivated paddy for their lords and fishermen of their allotted *khels* supplied them with fish. These

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cultivators and fishermen allotted to the Adis were exempted from paying revenue to the Ahom government.

Initially the different sections of the Adis were paid *posa* in kind such as, iron hoes, salt, rum, *abkaree* opium and tobacco. But the *posa* payment was commuted to annual payment of allowances in cash and also in terms of salt and rum as early as 1854. In the case of Padam-Miniyong section of the Adis, the *posa* payments in kind were commuted to cash payment in 1877 and began to be paid from 1878. It is noteworthy to mention here that the right to *posa* as police payments to maintain law and order in the border had been extended to the Padam-Miniyong Adis through different agreements between the years 1862 and 1866. After that, we see that annual monetary payment to different tribal chiefs and *gams* continued till the end of the British rule in India except for the Padam-Miniyong section of the Adis, whose payments were stopped in 1894 and was never resumed. The amount granted to the different clans/villages of the Adis was ₹ 3312 per annum and was distributed as follows:

Bor Adis (Padams)	— ₹	1096-0-0
Adis of Mebo	— ₹	562-0-0
Adis of Padu	— ₹	264-0-0
Adis of Duku and Silli	— ₹	425-0-0
Pasi-Miniyong Adis	— ₹	465-0-0
Adis of Kebang	— ₹	393-0-0
Adis of Mankong	— ₹	55-8-0
Adis of Retung	— ₹	51-8-0

**Posa to the Noctes**

Even after the occupation of Assam by the British, the Nocte chiefs continued to retain their *khat* managed by their respective *katokies*. The British decided to continue the system and in 1841–42, Captain Brodie entered into agreement with these chiefs by which they were allowed to use those *khats* in lieu of payment of a trifling tribute. In addition, he abolished tools and cesses collected from the Noctes on brine spring held in their possessions. In 1873–74, the government resumed some of the *khats* of the Namsangia and Borduria Nocte chiefs, which had already been connected into tea gardens, for annual payments in cash. By 1920–21, however, all their *khats* were resumed by the government and annual payments in cash were allowed to the concerned chiefs.

During the Ahom period, the relationship among the state (Ahom state), *posa* holders (tribal chiefs and people) and the allotted *paiks* (*Bahatias*) were interwoven in a system. But after the annexation of Assam by the British the *paik* factor was eliminated from the *posa* system. Now it became an agreement between two contracting parties, i.e. the colonial state and the *posa* holders in which the state took the responsibility initially in kind and subsequently in cash to pay them. Also, no remission was made in the revenue to be taken from the erstwhile *paiks*.

**4.3 SHOW OF FORCE**

The British power did not adopt the policy of annexation in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh. Neither did they have a uniform policy towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What was the agreement between the British and Taghi Raja?
2. The term \_\_\_\_\_ came to be applied to all payments made to the hill tribes by the governments.
3. The Monpa chiefs of Thembang collected *posa* from the Mazhat area in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. After the annexation of Assam by the British the \_\_\_\_\_ factor was eliminated from the *posa* system.



Force was used as and when required, otherwise the policy of peace and non-intervention was followed.

The British government had the first encounter with Taghi *raja* (Aka chief). He continued collecting dues from the Duar forcefully and also murdered an official posted at *Charduar*. For this reason, they had been declared as outlawed. In 1829, Taghi *raja* fought with the Hazari Khowas, and then fled to Assam, where he was captured by the British and sent to the Gauhati jail. In 1832, he was released. He again mustered his people and started outrages in the Duar. In 1835, he burnt the Assam Light Infantry outpost at Balipara and killed seventeen people. Taghi *raja* committed several raids in the foothills. The British Government stopped the annual payment to the Hazari Khowas. It was unable to capture the culprits. The British decided to send a punitive expedition to the Aka Hills, but in 1842 Taghi *raja* surrendered. He was released on an oath of good behaviour, and was given a small stipend of ₹ 20. Following him, many other Aka chiefs also accepted stipends in 1844 and in 1848. However, the Aka chiefs always demanded an increase in the amount of *posa* and to maintain control over forest and forest produce they too pressurized the government. Consequently, the relation was not always peaceful with the British.

A controversy appeared on the question of rights in the forest. In 1900, the Akas demanded a sum of ₹ 3000 from a merchant of Balipara for tapping rubber in their hills. The deputy commissioner of Darrang interfered in this matter. It was decided that in future all agreements regarding rubber tapping and the payment between the merchants and the hill men would be done in the presence of the deputy commissioner.

The change in the mode of collection of *posa* during the British period was unacceptable to the Nyishis as a whole and remained a matter of dispute between the two forces. Their policy of raid was also a point of constant dispute between them. The Nyishis wanted to collect the *posa* directly from the people of Assam. In 1835, the Nyishis committed a raid on the plains. They carried off several British subjects. The British government sent a small military force into the hills and rescued the captives. After this event, several Nyishi clans of the north of Che Duar submitted. They left their right of collecting *posa* from the *paiks*, and agreed to receive the articles of *posa* from the revenue officer of the villages. They also undertook a policy not to assist the enemies of the British. Their new *posa* was fixed at one coarse *arkut* sheet, one long cotton handkerchief, two seers of salt, one dao, and one goat for every ten houses. Many other Nyishi clans also accepted it. The British government always took seriously any raid by Nyishi clans on the plains of Assam. To stop the same economic blockade, withholding of the payment of *posa* and finally the armed intervention was followed. We see all these measures in the British intervention in the incidents of the raid of the village Amtolla (in Darrang in 1872-73). The beginning of the twentieth century marked a change in the British policy towards the Nyishis. To establish direct contact with them in 1911, a survey party (known as the Miri Mission) visited many villages of the Nyishi hills and collected important information. This resulted in the inclusion of the Nyishi hills in the Western section of the North East frontier.

The British occupation of Assam brought about a change in the *posa* rights of the Adis. The gold washers and fishermen, who had now become the British subjects, refused to pay to the Adis. The Adis in revenge carried off many of them to their hills. In this way, the British-Adi conflict began. So far, the Adis were not so hostile to the British even they helped the British in various ways in the rebellion of the Singphos and Khamptis. The British government tried to conciliate with the Adis on the matter of

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gold washers and fishermen. In 1847, captain Vetch, the political agent, met Pashi, Mebo, and other Padams (Adis) and got the captives released. But the Adis were not ready to renounce their claims over the gold washers and fishermen. The Deba Adis of the Dihang carried off some gold washers in 1847. Captain Vetch got them released in 1848, but not without a small struggle which was the first one between the British and the Adis. While some of the Adis were going to settle in the plains, the others started attacking the gold washers. The British government then took the responsibility of the protection of the gold washers. This step only aggravated the relation between the British and the Adis. This problem continued between the various Adi groups and the British. The problem in their relationship continued in the coming years over the issue of Behecas, Sonowals and the slaves under the Adi masters. The British moves in the Adi hills were also the result of the geo-political situation of the Adis and the moves of China from the other side of the border. Of various missions in the Adi hills by the British government, the murder of Neol Williamson proved a turning point in the history of the relation of the British and the Adis and the Anglo-Adi war took place in 1911-12.

During the initial years of British rule in Assam, the relation of the British with Khamptis was peaceful. However, over land dispute with the Matak the British intervention was not acceptable to the Khamptis and the latter occupied the land. Taking it as an offence the British removed the chief from Sadiya and his post was abolished. Although the other privileges of the Khamptis were retained, they were very angry at the loss of their right to rule as the Sadiya Khowa Gohain. The result was that on 19th January 1839, about five hundred Khamptis attacked the British at Sadiya. In this event, Colonel White, the Political Agent, and a large number of British soldiers were killed. The British government took it very seriously and immediately sent a punitive force. The Khampti insurgents fled to the Mishmi hills. The British vigorously pursued them, but they could not be submitted before December 1843. After this event, Sadiya and Matak were directly brought under British rule. This development proved decisive in the history of British-tribal relation and an evidence of the use of force by the British. The Khampti unity was broken by the British and the former remained peaceful in the relationship. The superiority of arms of the British played an important role in the same.

During the period of the Burmese occupation of Assam the relationship between the Singphos and Khamptis became an open confrontation and the Khamptis lost. The Singphos carried off a large number of people from Assam as slaves and kept them as their slaves to work on their lands and others were sold as slaves as far as to the Yunnan province of China. The Khamptis asked for British help in this situation. In the beginning, the Singphos were not ready for any agreement, but later on the British compelled them to come to terms and to release all the captives. While the British wanted to utilize the Singphos against the Burmese, the Singphos were in need of British protection against the same. But the Singphos made a common cause with the Burmese when they appeared on the Patkai in June 1825. The British expelled the Burmese from the Singphos villages of Bisa and Duffa Gams. The Singphos chiefs also surrendered. About 6000 captives were released and measures were being initiated for the release of the rest. The Singpho land was also useful for the tea plantation of the region. And the British were eyeing upon the same. The Singphos, in fact, did not like interference by the British in their old privileges. The British also used to protect the loyal Singpho chiefs (Bisa Gam) against other chiefs (Duffa Gam). Consequently, Singphos revolted against the British. The British took prompt action and suppressed the revolt. In the end all the chiefs surrendered.

## Check Your Progress

5. The British occupation of Assam brought about a change in the *poso* rights of the Adis.  
(True/False)
6. How did the British-Adi conflict begin?
7. In 1914, the \_\_\_\_\_ tract was included in the Eastern section of the North East Frontier.



This was the last Singpho uprising, after which they remained peaceful throughout the British rule. The Singphos assisted the British officers when they visited their country. In 1914, the Singpho tract was included in the Eastern section of the North East Frontier. The British collected poll tax from them. The policy of acquiring land for plantation and other colonial use and liberating the slaves of the masters of Arunachal Pradesh and encouraging them to settle in the British territory of Assam and use the same for colonial use were the cause of confrontation between the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the British Government of Assam.

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#### 4.4 KATOKIES

As described earlier, the *katokies* played an important role in promoting and maintaining relations between the Ahom and tribal chiefs and leaders of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The institution and its importance was also appreciated by the British and they, therefore, continued the offices of the *katokies*. The *katokies* were appointed to deal with the Akas, Nyishis, Adis and Hill Miris of the bordering hills. The services of these *katokies* were also utilized for trade regulations between the Monpas and Sherdukpens.

The British issued them a letter of appointment known as *parwana* and a register was maintained in the headquarters in which details regarding the *katokies* were mentioned. The main duties of these *katokies* were to go into the hills as and when required and to provide information about the tribal affairs to the authorities. These *katokies* also accompanied the deputy commissioners when the latter went into the hills on tours. They were in close contact with various tribes and accompanied the tribal when they came down to the plains during fairs and other occasions. *Katokies* were given revenue-free lands and a nominal salary was also paid to them sometimes. On certain occasions, they were also rewarded by the tribals whom they assisted. Generally speaking, no formal education was required for appointment as *Katokies*, the only requirement being the knowledge of the tribal dialect and capacity of carrying transactions with the tribal. The importance of these 'go-betweens' gradually declined after the creation of the post of assistant political officer at Sadiya in 1882.

#### 4.5 MARKETS

The markets on the borders of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh underwent tremendous change during the British period from that of the Ahom period. The Ahom rulers were promoting free exchange of goods; and trade was a popular economic exercise. However, with the development of colonial economy and administration the system changed subsequently. In this part of this unit we will be discussing the same. The aspects of trade and markets have been studied in the past by some scholars working on the history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh. For this part of the unit, the following researches have been used Sudatta Sikdar's 'The Eastern Himalaya Trade of Assam in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of British Policy' (unpublished Ph. D. Thesis), Dept. of History, N.E.H.U., Shillong, 1982; S. Dutta & B.N. Jha's 'British Colonial Design Behind the Udalguri and Doimara Fairs and its Impact over the Monpas and Shertukpens of Arunachal Pradesh', *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, 20th session, Dibrugarh, 1999, pp. 305-316 and the articles by Amrendra Kr Thakur 'Colonial and Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: The Monpas in Perspective', *Journal of Historical Research*, vol. XII, 2002, Department of History, Dibrugarh

#### Check Your Progress

8. What was the main duty of the *katokies*?
9. Formal education was required for appointment as *katokies*. (True/False)



University, Dibrugarh, Assam, pp. 51–59; 'Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: A Reconstruction of Economic History', *Resarun* Vol. XXVII, 2001, pp. 17–27, Journal of the Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, special issue on Golden Jubilee of the Department of Research, Itanagar, 2002 and 'Pattern of Pre-Colonial Trade and Polity Formations in Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of their Relationship' in the *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, (hereafter *PNEIHA*), Imphal Session, 2000 pp. 299–318.

During the pre-colonial period, the cold weather annual fairs were held at Udalguri and Doimara in the foothills of Assam which practically lasted from November to March. Udalguri fair was mainly attended by the Monpas of Tawang and Kalaktang and in less number by the Thembang Monpas. The Doimara fair was visited principally by the Shertukpens and also by the Thembang Monpas. At the Udalguri fair main items of import from the Monpa areas were horse and ponies, gold, blankets, salt, musk, wax, spices, yak-tails and rubber. On the other hand, the main items of export to the hills were cotton pieces, silk manufactures, brass and copper manufactures, iron, cotton twist and yarn, woollen goods, tobacco and betelnut. Common items of import from Shertukpen and Thembang Monpa areas at the Doimara fair were spices, wax, musk, chilli, salt, sheep, and blankets. However, export items of this fair were almost the same as those at Udalguri. The Sadiya fair, held in the Lakhimpur District of Assam catered to the needs of Adis, Mishmis, Duariah, Singphos and Khamptis. These tribes used a number of passes from the hill territories to the Assam plains.

Restoration of administration (after the Burmese intrusions) had created a political environment, which boosted trade within and outside Assam. Restoring the frontier *haats*, the centres of trade, revived frontier trade with the neighbouring hill tribes became the priorities of the British administration. These *haats* in course of time became centres for collection of raw materials for export of primarily forest products, and also distribution centres for British machine-made goods. Revenue was extracted from these foothill markets. These *haats* – which the tribes frequented to exchange their produce for salt – came to be used as an instrument to exert political power. This measure of economic blockade helped in keeping the tribes under control and maintaining British paramountcy. Frontier trade in the Province of Assam under changed political conditions became an exclusive domain of the Marwaris, Bengalis and settlers from outside. They came in as a class seeking avenues for trade, and in the absence of a local trading class, soon gained foothold over the entire gamut of trading activities.

Revival of the trade fairs was in line with the broad framework of the mercantile motive of the East India Company reflected in its Report of 1797 which gave emphasis on 'creating a demand for articles, the products of Europe and Bengal' and supplying with a valuable return in bullion. The motive is also evident from the *Notes by David Scott on Welsh's Report on Assam*: 'The quality of goods of European manufacture has of late increased, and it is probable that there may hereafter be a considerable outset for woollens at a sort of annual fair held on the confines of Durrung, to which merchants from Tibet and the intermediate country resort.'

The nature of import and export proves beyond doubt that the policy of the British colonial government was to popularize European goods. This conclusion is further strengthened from the trade statistics that the export of British cotton piece had been valued at ₹ 76 only in 1877 while it increased manifold in a single year and touched the figure of ₹ 11,751 in 1878. To add further, the Report on Trade between Assam and Adjoining Foreign Countries and Tribes for the year 1889–90 clearly mentioned that the



tendency in trade indicated a steady increase in the demand for European cotton piece – goods, cotton twist and yarn, brass and copper, salt and silk manufactures.

Till 1853, the annual trade at Udalguri was in a flourishing condition which gradually showed a downward trend. This was mainly due to the reduction in the market price of salt owing to the introduction of cheap manufacture salt, and increase in the rice. With the beginning of tea plantation in the Brahmaputra valley, local markets established themselves at all centres where the villagers were encouraged to bring their produce for sale. As the gardens increased in number, Marwari and Dacca traders increased and the demand for local produced grains increased. The development in railways, coal mines, the strengthening of staff in district offices, the introduction of troops increased the consumer of local produce more than the producers. Consequently, the prices of all articles in particular food grains sprang up.

In fact, taste for finished goods was already there to a limited extent, since the customary dues to the hillmen of the Darrang frontier were paid in terms of *gamocha* (handkerchief), *khania kapor*, *cheleng*, *mekhela-chaddar*, cotton twist and yarn, *dao*, etc. from the Ahom period. When the British commuted these customary dues to cash, they began commerce like Tezpur (in the case of the Shertukpen, Thembang Monpa and Aka chiefs) or at fairs (as in the case of the Sat Rajas of Karipara durar, who were paid at the Udalguri fair). Evidently, this mode of payment was directed at diverting the taste from finished Assamese goods towards cheaper European finished goods. This intention is corroborated further by the fact that along with the payment of the amount of *posa* the British used to present these chiefs articles of British manufacture like broad cloths, bottles of rum and knives. Once the people became used to these articles, they began to purchase them either from Tezpur or from the Udalguri and Doimara fairs. This colonial culture of exchanges culminated in making the chiefs addicted to those goods. The following official assertion about the importance of fairs gives a fair indication of the politico-economic motives behind the organization of fairs:

‘.....the fairs served some purposes of commercial and political utility.’ To take the discussion on the Udalguri and Doimara fair further, we find that statistics regarding the volume of trade in Doimara fair have not been shown separately after 1885 and the Udalguri fair also lost importance from the closing years of the nineteenth century. In 1902, the import and export figures at Udalguri fairs stood at a low level of ₹ 8220 and ₹ 8598, respectively. However, the Udalguri and Doimara fairs contributed throughout the British period. While assigning the reasons for decline in brisk trade of these fairs, the following factors draw our attention:

- (i) The Darranga fair which began to be organized in 1883 onwards gained importance at the cost of these fairs.
- (ii) These cold weather fairs failed to serve the increasing and regular demand of the rising population in the Darrang district due to enormous expansion of the tea industry and the consequent increase of population. Hence, alternative sources of commerce in the form of weekly markets and permanent centres situated at Orang, Amratola, Mazbat, Lahabari, Balipara and Tezpur became the regular channel of commercial transactions.
- (iii) Lastly, we also notice a firm determination on the part of the British colonial government for direct entry into foreign trade with Tibet which is evident from the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1894, Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 and the commercial treaty concluded with Tibet in 1914.

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(iv) Enactment of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 on the Darrang frontier in 1875 and its consequent amendment in 1892 and 1898 along with the Forest Regulation of 1878 further amended in 1891 need special mention in this regard.

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With the gradual consolidation of British rule in Upper Assam, the Marwari traders who by this period had monopolized the internal trade of Assam as an agent of the British trading houses of Calcutta were encouraged to open their trading agencies at the frontier areas and trade with the hill people. These Marwari traders had their headquarters at Goalpara and Guwahati in Assam. As early as 1833, the Governor-General in council decided that the tract between the rivers Buridihing and Dibang, part of which was occupied by Khampti and Singphos, should be placed under an officer at Sadiya and in defining the powers and functions of the officer, the agent to the Governor-General, North East Frontier categorically stated,

Another great object will be the advancement of the commerce in the frontier and any obstruction to a free trade that the agent of the Marwaris may bring to your notice either on our side or on the side of the Ava you will endeavour to remove and report to me as you deem necessary.

In 1834, Lieutenant Charlton was appointed in charge of Sadiya. In a letter written to David Scott, Agent to the North-East Frontier, Captain Neufville expressed the urgency of encouraging the rising spirit of commercial extension and enterprise amongst the border tribes and give them a good market at the frontier supplied with such articles of English and Indian produce as were most in demand at a reasonable price receiving in exchange for the native products. The former should, Neufville suggested, consist of coarse med broadcloth, med bailze, chintze, white cotton cloth, black muslin, cotton coloured handkerchief, velvet, salt, opium and med blanket of Bhutan and eri cloth of Assam and the latter would be chiefly ivory, gold, amber, musk, munjee, mishmiteeta and Khampti *dao* and spear. David Scott also entertained the idea that the trade with the hill tribes to the northward as well as the Singphos would naturally increase and proposed to establish a mart at Sadiya. This he hoped would also appease the Singphos who were suffering from loss of their slaves. An attempt in this line was already undertaken by Scott in 1827, when silk goods of the value of 800 rupees were despatched from Calcutta together with the present for the chiefs. Unfortunately, on their way the whole of the consignment was plundered. Though Scott once applied for a fresh investment of goods, the smallness of sum guaranteed, mere two thousand rupees and the want of any officer to supervise the business led to venture falling through. Neufville recommended that the merchant adventurer Charles Alexander Bruce who was in charge of the gun boats at Sadiya should be vested with the charge of the whole business at a salary of one hundred rupees for a month with a share in profit. Neufville hoped that eventually this trade would extend through the Hukong valley to Mogaung on the Upper Irrawady. Moreover, it would gain some profitable occupation to the Singphos in return of their faithful abandonment of their predatory habits and prevent their falling into distress from the loss of slaves and disinclination to agricultural labour. In 1834, first four Marwari traders opened their ships at Sadiya. Jenkins was confident that Sadiya which had been a place of considerable trade during the Ahom period, the condition of things would be slowly restored and hastened by the judicious measures adopted by the British for encouragement of trade.

By mid-nineteenth century, different *haats* and shops grew in and beyond the frontier areas. The Nyishis, Miris, Adis, and Mishunis all gradually started settling down



peacefully and traded all along the frontier. The Mishmis came as far as Dibrugarh for trading purpose. Several of the Singphos were employed as blacksmith at Dimapur by the European entrepreneurs and all were taken greatly to the cultivation of their fields.

The rapid expansion of the tea industry in Upper Assam necessitated a greater market for its consumption. Serious thoughts were given to official circles to popularize British Indian tea among the hill tribes of the Eastern Himalaya and capture the markets of Central Asia, particularly Tibet through them. In 1868, Lieutenant Johnson, Superintendent of Keddha Department reported to the officiating secretary to the Government of Bengal, that an inconsiderable trade was carried on with Tibet through the medium of Digaru Mishmis and Adis and with northern Burma through Singphos and under proper management this trade might be greatly developed. There had always been demand for the produce of Tibet and northern Burma but the distance from Sadiya often prevented men from taking their goods to the best market and since sufficient encouragement was not given to the traders, few Marwaris at Sadiya did not find it profitable to lay in a large stock of things for which they had no sale on the spot. It was pointed out that whatever money was needed by the hill tribes was immediately reinvested so that increase of trade in one side would cause a corresponding increase in others and one means of increasing this trade was to establish an annual fair at Sadiya. That the British Government was more interested in opening up Tibetan trade through the intermediary hill tribes rather than establishing direct intercourse with Tibet is evident from C.U. Aitchinson; Secretary to the Government of India's instruction to C. Bernard, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal,

...the appointment of a special officer for Tibet is neither necessary nor expedient. It will be quite sufficient in Colonel Haughton continue to collect all the interpretation in his power as to the goods most in demand, the restrictions placed on trade and to encourage trade by the establishment of fairs in our territories on the border. Our frontier officers may be told generally that any opening for friendly relations should be most of and at once reported to Government whenever it appears available.

Hence, to accelerate the process official patronage was given not only to the already existing trade fairs but attempts were also made to increase the number of fairs as an auxiliary to regular trade.

Marwari traders and Assamese from the plain attended the fair in large numbers. The European planters attended Sadiya and Udalguri fairs and the latter was also the resort of the Cacharese, the inhabitants of *duar*. There were several roads connecting the fairs with the other places of Assam such as the Orang-Udalguri, a fourteen-and-half-mile road which carried much of the traffic during the days when the fair was held. Sadiya was connected by Assam Trunk Road linking Brahmaputra at Saikhowaghat. Ferries were mostly used to cross the Brahmaputra at Saikhowaghat. The Sadiya fair was attended by the European traders from Tezpur and Mongoldoi and traders from Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur. The construction of Dibrugarh-Sadiya Railway between 1885 and 1903 which linked Saikhowa further added convenience to traders of plains. A daily service of passenger steamers and a fine fleet of cargo boats owned and managed by the Indian General steam and Navigation Company plied on the Brahmaputra between Goalundo and Dibrugarh.

The hill people were accommodated in long sheds constructed by the British Government, providing shelter for about 100 at a time. To each family on arrival was allotted a small space in the shed which members again partitioned and formed residence while in plains. In the same cases such accommodation was also provided to

NO

Self-Ins.  
Materia





## NOTES

the merchants of plains. The importance of Sadiya fair to the hill tribes also diminished to some extent because of the establishment of numerous shops by the Marwaris at the outskirts of Lakhimpur district. The tendency since the late 19th century for the hill tribes was to visit permanent shops and markets that grew both in and beyond the Inner Line and the inevitable result was the falling off of trade in the fairs.

Sadiya developed into a market town with as many as 25 permanent shops. It was a market of wax, ivory, rubber, timber, Mishmeteeta and limestone brought by the Adis, Mishmis, Singphos and Khamptis. Besides the Marwaris' shops there were general stores under European management and a number of shops owned by the Muslim traders both at Dibrugarh and North Lakhimpur. At Margherita the Khamptis brought down amber from Hukong valley.

The markets frequented by the hill tribes were located in Brahmaputra Valley. Though it was comparatively easy for the hill people to come down to the plains, it was not easy for the people of the plain to have access to the mountainous terrain of hill territory. Notwithstanding these difficulties, enterprising Marwari merchants established permanent shops beyond the Inner Line too.

Rubber and opium were the main articles of exchange. In 1886, there were three licensed shops beyond the Inner Line in Lakhimpur district and their number gradually increased. The import of opium of the hill people was discouraged by the British Government, but encouraged the sale of high-priced government opium to them, to maximize their profit.

#### 4.6 INNER LINE

After the occupation of Assam in 1826 the British followed almost the same policy towards the tribes of Arunachal. The Ahoms followed the policy of reconciliation towards the tribes and at no time considered the extension of their rule into the hills. David Scott, who is considered to be the architect of the British administration in the North East, favoured status quo in their relations with the tribes of Arunachal as well as others. Gradually for administrative convenience and needs of the expanding colonial economy the need for boundary demarcation (in any form) between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh was realized. Hence, the whole exercise of demarcation started.

Regulation I of 1873, called 'Regulation for the Peace and Good Government of Certain Districts on the Eastern Frontier' came into operation on 1 November, 1873. This became popular as the Inner Line Regulations because of the name given to the line of control by the author of the Act, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, a member of the Viceroy's Council. This regulation is also called 'The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation I of 1873.' According to this Act, which was to be applicable to the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jayantiya Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Chittagong Hills, a restriction line was laid down to regulate intercourse between the tribesmen and the British subjects in the plains; bordering the hills. This line was called the Inner Line and beyond this no British subject was allowed to enter without a formal pass from the concerned authority. The Regulation laid down that 'any British subject or other person ... who goes beyond the Inner Line .... without a pass, shall be liable on conviction before a magistrate to a fine not exceeding ₹ 100 for the first offence and to a fine of not exceeding ₹ 500 or to simple or rigorous imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or to both for each subsequent offences.'

#### Check Your Progress

10. During the pre-colonial period the cold weather annual fairs were held at \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in the foothills of Assam.
11. Sadiya had been a place of considerable trade during the Ahom period. (True/False)



The Regulation further laid down that, 'any wood, wax, ivory, rubber or any other jungle products found in the possession of any person without permit, may be confiscated to the government.' The Act also prohibited the killing or catching of the wild elephants without a license, and laid restrictions on the possession of land beyond this line, by saying that, 'it shall not be lawful for any British subject, not being native of the district, to acquire any interest in the land or the product of land beyond the Inner Line, by sanction of the local government.' The local government, however, was empowered to suspend or alter these restrictions from time to time. It was also made clear that the Government of India was not to be held responsible for the loss of life or property beyond the Inner Line, of those persons who went there without a permit.

The Inner Line was notified for Lakhimpur District on 3 September, 1875, in accordance with the Regulation of 1873. This Line was initially proposed by Major W. S. Clarke, Commissioner of Lakhimpur district, on 22nd May, 1875. Later on, some changes were made on the suggestions of the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The Government of India, while passing the Regulation of 1873, had suggested to the Government of Bengal that while prescribing the Inner Line, they should see that the line corresponded to the natural features of the country and if there were no such features, it was to coincide with the obligatory points like crossing of a road. The place where a road crossed the line was to be clearly shown on the map and if the area through which it ran had not been mapped, arrangements were to be made for topographical survey as well. If any tea garden was there in the frontier, it was to be brought within the Inner Line if it was possible to avoid any complications.

In accordance with these suggestions, the Inner Line which was finally drawn up in Lakhimpur was to take the course of the Buri Dihing in the South Eastern Sector, as it was a good natural boundary though it kept outside the Inner Line, the coal fields of Tirap and Nandang. The tea gardens of Namsang, Hukanjuri and Taurack, however, were brought within the Inner Line after an agreement with the Namsangia chief. The tea gardens of Joyhing and Harmoti were also brought within the Inner Line. This Inner Line starting from Desang was to go along Desang River, Namsang river, Boori Dihing, Kherampani, Noa Dihing and up to river Brahmaputra. From the north of Brahmaputra, starting from the boundary of Darrang, it was to go along the Rajgarh Ali, Dihing, Rangnadi, Joyhing tea garden, the Sisi river upto the Dimu guard. From there it was to go to the Puba guard, Lalimukh, Debongmukh upto Debong and Dikrang guard. It terminated on Noa Dihing Mukh in the east.

### ACTIVITY

Draw a map depicting the Inner Line.

### DID YOU KNOW

The city of Shillong acted as the capital of the Assam province created during the British Rule. It remained the capital of undivided Assam until the formation of the state of Meghalaya in 1972. The capital of Assam was then shifted to Dispur, a part of Guwahati, and Shillong became the capital of Meghalaya.

### NOTES

#### Check Your Progress

12. What was Regulation I of 1873 called?
13. The tea gardens of Namsang, Hukanjuri and Taurack were brought within the Inner Line after an agreement with the \_\_\_\_\_ chief.



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## 4.7 SUMMARY

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In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The occupation of Assam by the British has impacted on the lives and conditions of the people of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Though initially the British continued the policy towards the chiefs and other powerful sections of the societies of Arunachal Pradesh and the institutions and privileges of the Ahom days to continue with certain changes, later with expansion of the colonial economy and the administration a number of changes took place.
- The crystallization of the structural tendencies, combined with the specific cultural orientations prevalent herein (the various areas of Arunachal Pradesh) culminated in the rise of autonomous centres of social and structural creativity and identity formation. These centres, with sufficient material base would certainly have given birth to the urbanization and stronger polities and states in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The establishment of British rule in this part of India completely reversed the process of centre formation, resource use, defence mechanism, traditional technology-based production and above all urbanization in Arunachal Pradesh.

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## 4.8 KEY TERMS

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- **Gamocha:** A kind of towel.
- **Malgoozari:** The local revenue officer
- **Oligarchic:** A small group of people having control of a country, organization, or institution

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## 4.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

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1. An agreement was made with Taghi Raja wherein he agreed not to attack the *ryots* in the plains for a monthly pension of ₹ 20.
2. *Posa*
3. Charduar
4. Paik
5. True
6. The gold washers and fishermen, who had now become British subjects, refused to pay to the Adis. The Adis in revenge carried off many of them to their hills. In this way the British-Adi conflict began.
7. Singpho
8. The main duty of these Katokies was to go into the hills as and when required and to provide information about the tribal affairs to the authorities.
9. False
10. Udalguri, Doimara



11. True
12. 'Regulation for the Peace and Good Government of Certain Districts on the Eastern Frontier'.
13. Namsangia

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## 4.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the agreement of Capt. Gordon with the Sat Rajas.
2. How did the British occupation of Assam bring about a change in the *posa* rights of the Adis?
3. Who did the *katokies* deal with? How were they appointed?
4. What was the significance of Udalgiri?
5. What did Regulation I of 1873 concern?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the *posa* system.
2. How did the British impose force on Arunachal Pradesh?
3. Discuss the *katokies*.
4. What was the impact on the markets of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh?
5. Write a short note on the Inner Line.

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## 4.11 FURTHER READING

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Amrendra Kr Thakur. 2008. 'Historical Studies of Arunachal Pradesh: An Overview', in R. Bezbaruah, P. Goswami and D. Banerjee (eds.), *North-East India Interpreting the Sources of its History*. New Delhi: I C H R and Aryan Books.



# UNIT 5 RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

R.

## Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Unit Objectives
- 5.2 Historiography of Colonial Expansion in Arunachal Pradesh
- 5.3 Adi/Abors: Expeditions of 1894 and 1911
- 5.4 Nyishis: Relations with Adis and the British
- 5.5 Akas and the British
- 5.6 Khampti Relations with the British
- 5.7 Singpho–British Relations
- 5.8 Summary
- 5.9 Key Terms
- 5.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 5.11 Questions and Exercises
- 5.12 Further Reading

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

The British in course of their Colonial penetration in Arunachal Pradesh faced persistent resistance from the tribals, such as the Adi, the Nyishi, the Aka, the Khampti and the Singpho. The British always felt the scarcity of free labour and land. They delegitimized the institution of slavery and consequently made vigorous attempts to liberate the slave population, under the control of the pre-colonial masters. The liberated slaves were extensively recruited as free labourers in the colonial enterprises. Subsequently, slaves were liberated and any raid to capture new slaves was also prohibited. It was certainly aimed at destroying the power and position of the pre-colonial chiefs, as slave labour in agriculture and income from slave trade was their main economic support base and the use of slave as militia was another source of their power. These practices were detrimental to colonial rule and hence, were resisted by the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Determined efforts were made towards the abolition of slavery and other socio-economic evils. It has very less to do with the 'freedom principles' arising in the so-called consciousness of the 'whites', 'Christians' and others.

## 5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the historiography of colonial expansion in Arunachal Pradesh
- Describe the Adi/Abors expeditions of 1894 and 1911
- Describe the relation of Nyishis with the Adis and the British
- Discuss the Akas of Arunachal Pradesh
- Describe the Khamptis of Arunachal Pradesh
- Describe the Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh

Self-Ins





## 5.2 HISTORIOGRAPHY OF COLONIAL EXPANSION IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in the General President's Address, *The Colonial State: Theory and Practice* (The Indian History Congress, 65<sup>th</sup> session, 2004, p.14), has rightly opined that 'The legitimation of colonial state's authority was accompanied by the delegitimation of pre-colonial authority at levels ranging from the pre-colonial claimants to sovereignty to lower levels such as the "native princes", chiefs and the like.' Also in Northeast India, the colonial state intervention was able to 'delegitimize' not only the Ahoms of Assam, but also other neighbouring hill polities including that of Arunachal Pradesh. However, the colonial administrators and writers presented colonial intervention in this area, as the saviour of society and means of service to humanity. The earlier generation of historians, which relied greatly upon the colonial sources, subscribed to the colonial views in their writings.

The historiography of colonial expansion and the tribal resistances in opposition to the same has another problematic area. It is the 'anthropolization' of the tribes of the area. They were described as 'primitive', 'cultural isolates', 'barbarous', 'head-hunters', 'criminals', and 'opium eaters'. The pre-colonial socio-economic and polity formations were fully neglected and they were analysed as a category of 'undeveloped', 'uncivilized' or 'semi-civilized'. Consequently, the reactions of tribes against the colonial power, the British, were never treated in their true spirit of the terms, neither by the colonial masters nor by the early generation of historians. To them they were 'personal' or 'local' in character. It was never assessed as a phenomenon of indigenous reaction protesting against the colonial penetration. It can clearly be observed that the British were forcefully penetrating into the hills, occupying the land and controlling the people. And we have evidence of resistance, protest or rebellion from almost all parts of Northeast India during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Amrendra Kr Thakur has tried to study the same in two of his papers 'Labour, Land and Laws: Aspects of Tribal Resistance in 19th Century Arunachal Pradesh', and 'Colonial Penetration versus Indigenous Reaction: Slavery Abolition in Northeast India'.

Another problem found in the historiography of Arunachal Pradesh is that its history is largely a victim of Assam-centric historiography. Historians also heavily depended upon the records and writings of the colonial masters; resulting in creation of myths and distortions in the history of Arunachal Pradesh. The article 'Some Aspects of Socio-economic and Political Formations in Pre-colonial Arunachal Pradesh: Myth and Reality' in *The Indian Historical Review* – Amrendra Kumar Thakur also analyses the problem mentioned above. It also caused the lopsided growth of the historical research of the area. The author without any analysis and explanation to the fact has kept the areas of present Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur outside the scope of his study. The author has negated the economic and political dimensions of historic relationship between the people of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Even during the 'Planter Raj' the impacts of the legislations, administrative orders and military campaigns are quite evident on the land and people of Arunachal Pradesh, besides some socio-cultural influences. The casual and unhistorical approach of the author towards the tribes of the area is also clear from the description about the Singpho revolt.

The difference in the approaches, objectivity in research and reconstruction of the past, free of bias and distortions would be clear from the observations cited below.



While the issue of how these tribes were held responsible for the British actions against them is the main thrust of the official writings of the British period, contemporary literature is almost silent on this issue. H. K. Barpujari (*op.cit.* vol. I, p. 28) describes the details. The magnitudes of the raids (committed by the Khamptis and the Singphos) were frightening before the British rule in this area. Both banks of the river were swept by their depredations, and the number of captives carried off amounted to many thousands. Of these, the greater parts were sold to the hill Singphos, Khamptis, Shans and others. The anarchical condition caused by the depredation of the Singphos inevitably demanded continued operation of the British forces even after the Burmese evacuation of Rangpur. The terror inspired by the Singphos was gradually removed and confidence was restored in the minds of the people, to return to their villages.

The same historical development has been cited by S. K. Bhuyan, of course in a very different way. To quote, 'The Singphos in concert with the Moran rebels had imported troops from Burma and ravaged a number of villages in the eastern part of Assam. To placate the Singpho leader Bichanong, Purnananda Buragohain had presented to him Rangili, together with numerous slaves and attendants. Bichanong in his turn palmed off Rangili to King Bodawpaya with the object of strengthening his friendship with the Burmese monarch.' Unlike the records of the British period and consequent lacunae in the historiography of the tribal resistances of Arunachal Pradesh created by the Indian scholars, the *Tungkhungia Buranji* does not indicate the atrocities and deserved harsh punitive measures against the Singphos and other tribes. The details of the same can be seen in S. K. Bhuyan (ed.) *Tungkhungia Buranji (A History of Assam 1681-1826 A.D.)*

### 5.3 ADI/ABORS: EXPEDITIONS OF 1894 AND 1911

The Adis (earlier known as the Abors) live in the east and west Siang districts and in the Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh. In all the earlier writings, the Galos were included in the Adis. The Ahom government had granted some villages in the plains to the Adis for the cultivation of paddy. Besides this, the Adis always asserted their sovereignty over the Mishings (the Miris) who had settled on the plains. They also claimed right to all the fish and gold found in the streams that flowed from their hills, and had share arrangement with the gold washers and fishermen (the Sonowals and the Beheeahs/Bihias, respectively). The British initiated moves to change the system of the Ahom period. Alexander Mackenzie in *The North East Frontier of India* provides us the official version of the development of relations. Till the middle of the nineteenth century, the Adis claimed and received levies. A policy of non-interference and maintenance of the status quo was followed by the British even after the establishment of British control in Assam and the Adis had a friendly relation with them till the year 1847. But around the middle of the nineteenth century the gold washers, fishermen and the Mishings, encouraged by the attitude of the new authorities, the British, and feeling a sense of security and protection, began to defy the Adis; some even moved down to remote places beyond the easy access of the Adis. This led to a change in attitude on the part of the Adis; rather, the Adis had to coerce the refractory subjects whom they regarded as their hereditary slaves, and, thus, violated the law of the British, which they did not know and considered unnecessary to observe. Thus, began the strife between the Adis and the British.

It is seen throughout the Ahom reign that the Bihia-Sonwal Kacharis remained loyal to the Adis. But soon after entire Assam was taken over by the British imperialist,

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. The historiography of Arunachal Pradesh is highly Assam-Centric. (True/False)
2. The anarchical condition caused by the depredation of the \_\_\_\_\_ demanded continued British operation even after the Burmese evacuation of Rangpur.



these Kacharis, encouraged by the attitude of the new government, became their own masters, and many of them moved down the valley to avoid the subjection of the Adis. The few, who remained, began to repudiate the claims of the Adis. This vicissitude led to a changed attitude on the part of the Adis. They now had to coerce the refractory Bihia-Sonwal Cacharis whom they regarded as their hereditary subjects. Capt. Vetch had gone to the hills with a small party of troops to demand the restoration of a body of Cachari gold washers carried off by the Adis. The captives were restored but his camp was attacked at night and the Adis could be defeated only after hard fighting in 1848.

In the meantime, the government had framed out the right of gold washing to the Beheehs at the rate of ₹ 80 per year. Thus, it had become the moral and bounded duty of the government to protect the gold washers from the depredations of the Adis. A policy of coercion and conciliation continued but the prospects of a friendly relation did not seem to last long. So long the British claimed sovereignty over lands up to the foothills and the Adis were denied the right of collecting their dues directly from those whom they considered as their vassals. On the next occasion too, due to the same reason, the Galos were the first to strike followed by the Padams in Dibang Valley (Bomjir-Dambuk). More serious was the raid of the Kembang Minyongs over a Bihia village Sengajan, only six miles from Dibrugarh wherein twenty-one persons were killed and six were wounded in January 1858. These punitive Adi raids upon the Bihias caused great concern to the British authorities at Dibrugarh. The British government now had to deal with the Adis to secure protection of the British subjects, administrative office and officers and the planters in Upper Assam. This brought in a series of arm actions between the Adis and British. The resultant development was the second expedition of 1859. This was the first serious outrage of the Adis. Despite the odds of the English in India due to the Revolt of 1857, the government had to sanction a punitive expedition against the raiders to protect the people who paid taxes to them. Hurriedly, therefore, an expedition was sent under the command of Capt. Lowther, the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur, Capt. Biver, also went along with the expedition. The expedition ended in a fiasco due to various reasons such as paucity of troops, difficult terrain and the failure of the supply line. It was given up within miles of the Kembang village, the ultimate target of the expedition. On the retreat it was also harassed and suffered great casualties.

Emboldened by their success, the Minyong Adis, allying with the neighbouring clans, had advanced and took up a threatening position at Pasighat towards the plains. The government now was required to prove that it was capable of giving necessary protection to its subjects and chastise those who threatened their security. Accordingly, another expedition was sanctioned on a much larger scale to retrieve the lost prestige under Col. Hanney, in 1859. The expedition left Sadiya by boats for Pobamukh on the 21st February 1859. It succeeded in destroying Kembang and its allies. But Minyongs were still posing threat to the British. As a precautionary measure, the government posted military guards on the Adi frontier, stockades were built and communication improved. In this way, their movements were restricted. Many Adi chiefs were now ready for some sort of settlement. Thus, eight Khels of Minyong Adis concluded an agreement with the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur in November 1862. The Adis accepted British sovereignty up to the foothills and promised not to violate it and disturb the British subjects. The British would provide them the necessary articles on condition of maintaining peace along the border. Following the Minyong, the Kembang and the Padam Adis also made such agreements with the British.



Those agreements, however, could not satisfy the Adis, and the relationship between the Adis and the British remained strained subsequently too. The Adis did not like the close watch on them by the British and the several moves of the British which were detrimental to their survival and traditional privileges. After these agreements were concluded, the Adis seemed to be conciliatory, but their discontent remained. In 1863, the Mebo Adis refused to accept the present as the Deputy Commissioner refused to join hands with them; in 1865, the Minyongs abstained from coming to accept the presents on the plea of the outbreak of small-pox and cholera epidemic; in 1866 again, they insisted on the removal of the Pobamukh guard post. In 1876-1877, hostility was shown upon the advance of the trigonometrical survey party in the hills. The Padams took up an aggressive attitude towards the Chulikata Mishmis compelling the government to take up advance position in 1881. The British thought that once the Adis were allowed to cross the Dibang, they would establish themselves in the plains and would threaten Sadiya, and therefore, the Bomjur and Nizamghat posts were occupied.

Jack Francis Needham of the Bengal Police was appointed Political Officer in 1882 and posted at Sadiya. When Needham visited Adi villages, in 1884, they complained of the paucity of the *posa* and British authorities giving shelter to their runaway slaves. They also pointed out that the government had been favouring the Mishings and had built a Namghar for them. However, there was none for the Adis. Moreover, there was no rest house for the Adis at Sadiya. The details of the Adi-British relationship have been provided by R. Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam*, Shillong 1942; *Report on the Operation against the Bor-Abors, 1893-94*; H. K. Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes North East Frontier 1873-1962*, Vol III, Gauhati, 1981, pp. 125-38 and M. L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh (op.cit., pp. 72-82)*. The Adis complained to return their slaves, as they cost them a lot of money and they could not do without them; but he (Needham) refused to do so, and 'lately he has insulted us (the Adis) by offering us about one-fourth of what they actually cost us as ransom money.'

In 1882, the chief of Padam, in a raid murdered a sepoy of the guard house and killed two Miris. In 1887, four girls along with some articles of domestic use were carried off from within the British territory. When the payment of *Posa* was stopped, the girls and the articles were returned but the guilty persons declined to come down. Four Miris were enticed across the frontier and murdered in 1889. A blockade forced the offenders to pay a fine of twenty Mithuns. Incidents of attack on the police patrolling parties had also increased in the meanwhile and it was evident that the whole tribe was in a disaffected state. On 27 November, 1893, three sepoys of Bomjur outpost were waylaid and murdered by the men of Bomjur, assisted by the men of Pobamukh Siluk.

The problem continued even after the limited complaint and it created bitterness between the British and the Adis. On 18 November, 1893 they told Needham at Bomjur (while on visit of the area) that they had no wish to be friendly with the Maharani any longer. They categorically stated 'Our runaway slaves are detained, and we are insulted by being offered half what they cost us.' Finally they declared, 'All right! Now we shall see who kills whom.' The Adis were the first to strike. On 27 November they cut up three military sepoys near a patrol party killing one and wounding two on duty. This hostility resulted in the expedition of 1893-94 of the Adi area by the British. The expedition was sanctioned under the command of Capt. R. M. Maxwell and Political Officer, Needham. The Adis began to retreat and Bomjur was taken without any resistance. Dambuk was taken after a small fight. Then the party



advanced to Damroh, as Needham was convinced that the Padam village of Damroh was the main source of power behind the hostilities of the Adis. But the attempt to storm Damroh proved to be futile. With supplies being cut, ration in short supply, and incessant rains adding to the misery, it was decided to retreat. The Adis intercepted the retreat and harassed the force. Thus, the expedition failed to achieve its main objectives. In the meanwhile, the camp at Bodak had been attacked, everyone was massacred and ration was destroyed. Therefore, on the return march Needham destroyed Padu and Mebo villages who were thought to be responsible for burning the Bodak camp. Bomjur was also evacuated and burnt.

After the return of the expedition, Needham claimed that it was a partial success because the villages of Bomjur, Dambuk and Silluk had been punished. The Chief Commissioner also tried to justify the expedition in the following words: 'One important result of the expedition is that we now know the way to Damroh, and the nature of opposition we may expect in any future expedition is undertaken against that village'. The statement of the Chief Commissioner clearly reveals that the expedition was a failure and did not succeed in suppressing the Damroh village.

The relations with the Adis did not improve after the apparent discomfiture of the expedition in 1894. The Pasi Minyongs repeatedly troubled the British. Therefore, the payment of *Posa* was stopped and in 1900, a general blockade was resorted to. This could only stall the raids of the Adis temporarily. They continued to disturb peace. Under these circumstances, Noel Williamson succeeded Needham in 1905, as Assistant Political Officer of Sadiya. From the beginning of the twentieth century the British Government became more concerned about the independent status of the frontier hills. The main reason for British concern was the increasing activities of the Chinese in Tibet and in some of the hills of the frontier region. The disturbance in the region would have also affected the tea cultivation wherein British planters have invested lots of money. So, the British Government adopted forward policy and sent several missions to the hills. Thus, the Lhasa Mission was sent to Tibet in 1904. In this series, Noel Williamson visited the Mishmi and Adi hills. He became the Assistant Political officer in 1905 and was posted at Sadiya. He was keeping a close watch on the Chinese activities in the region. With this view he made contact with the hill people and visited Mishmi and Adi hills many times. Thus, in 1907 he went upto Rima (in Lohit Valley) and Kebang in the Adi hills. In 1908, Williamson visited the Pasi, Minyong and some Galo villages around Pasighat. In 1911, he again went to the Mishmi hills up to Walong. He noticed Chinese activities in Rima. Seeing this, he became concerned about the Adi hills, and in March 1911, he decided again to visit the hills. He was accompanied by Dr. J.D. Gregorson and more than forty other people. On 18 March, Williamson and his party reached Rotung, from where they went up to Pangti. On 30 March, he left the Pangti camp, leaving Dr. Gregorson there. On the same day the Adis of Kebang and Babuk came to Pangti and killed Dr. Gregorson. Then they followed Williamson and he was also killed at Komsing on 31 March 1911. The murder of Williamson might have been a result of a long period of British-Adi conflicts over various issues and regular British intervention in the hills, but the result of the murder was significant.

The direct result of murder of Williamson was the Adi (Abor) expedition of 1911 and subsequent Adi war. The murder of Williamson and his party was a serious challenge to the British government. The expedition was led by Major General H. Bower. It had to establish British Military superiority in the hills; to punish the culprits of massacre to get indemnity for the massacre; to explore and survey the hills and also to find the possibility of demarcating a boundary line between India and Tibet.



The British force was much more powerful than that of the Adis. Almost all the Adi clans rose against the British, but the Adis could not resist the enemy due to their well-organized military system and advanced weapons. The British captured and destroyed many Adi villages, such as, Korang, Rotung, Kebang. The murderers of Williamson and his party were captured, tried and given punishment. In this way, British supremacy was established in the region. After a successful military campaign the British government started a survey of the areas in order to establish a boundary line between the Adi country and Tibet. But no immediate success could be achieved.

The Adi war government divided the whole frontier tract into three sections, i.e., eastern, central and western. The Adi areas were included in the eastern section, with the headquarters at Sadiya. An Assistant Political Officer was posted at Pasighat. Several trading posts were opened at Pasighat and Rotung. Trade relations with the plains were thus re-established. After the war, the British Government started extensive explorations of the Adi areas. They continued for almost three decades. In the meantime, the British relations with the Adis remained peaceful. The British tried to check internal feuds of the Adis, trade routes were opened and the whole area was on the way of progress.

### Outcome of the expedition

After the peace treaty was signed between the British and the Adis in 1912, the following terms were imposed on the main offending villages of the Minyongs.

The villagers of Sissin were to pay a fine of 2 Mithuns and 6 pigs and were to assist the government in collecting any further information. The villagers of Panggi, who were found to be guilty of the murder, were asked by the government to dismantle all the stockades and to deliver 500 iron-barbed arrows with quivers, 6 Tibetan swords, 20 mithuns, 50 pigs and 50 mounds of rice. They were also required to return any property which belonged to Williamson or Dr. Gregerson. The Kebang village was required to obey all the orders of the Government in future and not to prevent people from trading in the plains. They were to return five rifles that were stolen by them from the party of Williamson, and also the telephone cables that they had stolen during the Abor war. In addition, they were required to surrender 2000 war arrows and complete war kit of 50 soldiers. They were also held responsible for maintaining the road from Yambung to Puak and to surrender 25 mithuns. In return, they were allowed to rebuild their village one mile further upstream. The village of Yamsing was issued a strict warning against any further indulgence in any conspiracy against the British and was to bring 10 bows, 20 war-arrows, 1 sword and 1 helmet. The villagers of Ringging were ordered not to interfere with the people who wanted to go down to the plains for trade, and were also to maintain the road between Sirpe and Sirki. The village of Babuk was fined 5 Mithuns, since they had participated in the murder. They were allowed to re-build their village on the condition that in future they would not prevent anyone from going to trade in the plains, and they were also to maintain the road between Sirpe and Retung.

It is important to remember that unlike any other expeditions and survey missions that were sent by the British into the hills after 1826, the aim of the expedition in 1911 was to establish a boundary line between Tibet and Assam, and for this purpose, it was necessary to make a survey of the area. This was directly in response to the growing Chinese imperial interests in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh.



## NOTES

Whatever may be the outcome of the expedition, the Adi resistance clearly shows that the aggression of the Adis against the British was mainly the outcome of their grievances against colonial administration and when all peaceful appeal and meetings could not safeguard the interests of the Adis they resorted to violence and murder. This resistance from the middle of the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th century can be compared with any nationalist movement because the native population was trying to protect their economic and political interests.

#### 5.4 NYISHIS: RELATIONS WITH ADIS AND THE BRITISH

Before we proceed to discuss the Nyishi-Adi relations, it is important to mention an article on this problem. A. Ramchandran in his article 'A Survey of Nishi-British Relations (1825-1947)' in *Proceedings of North East India History Association* provides a general picture of the developments related to the same. Though this article is based on the secondary sources, the other works which have dealt with the problem are H. K. Barpujari (*op.cit.*), M. L. Bose (*op.cit.*) B. C. Chakravorty, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam since 1858* (Calcutta, 1964).

The habitat of the Nyishis extends eastwards of Bharali River, occupying the hills in Darrang north of Naoduar (the nine passes), and Cheduar (the six passes) in Lakhimpur, as far east as the upper courses of Sundri. According to Dalton, there were about 238 chiefs of the Nyishis. Sometimes they were thirty to forty chiefs in the same village or area. The Nyishis were assigned by the Ahoms certain Paiks called Dafla-Bohotias, to enable them to get supply of rice and other necessities. When Assam was taken over by the British, they continued with the same practice in the beginning. But later on they wanted to stop the practice and tried to check the Nyishis from collecting the *Posa* directly. The Commissioner of Assam had also instructed the Political Agent of Upper Assam, Capt. White that the blackmail collected by the hill tribes should not be stopped but the negotiations for the commutation of their rights in the Duars should be carried on.

In the case of the Nyishis, like the case of the Adis as discussed above, labour, land and the new laws were always the reasons of friction between the Nyishis and the British. It included giving shelter to the runaway coolies from the neighbouring tea gardens. In August 1896, some garden labourers ('coolies') of Dikrai Tea Estate of the Bishnath Tea Company ran away. Some Nyishis captured them. Only a woman among the captured coolies, named Parona, succeeded in going back to Dikrai. According to her account, the total number of captured coolies was thirteen: six men, four women and three children. The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, M. A. Gray finally sent a Dafla gam, Kandura who had been long settled in the plains near the Dikrai Tea Estate with a formal sealed *parwana*, three Kotokis (emissaries) and two other Assamese to carry their effects. As a result of the peace talks, the Nyishis were ready to release the coolies in exchange of two slaves of Hukai Gam.

The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang referred the cases to Cotton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, for final decision. Therefore, the Commissioner of the Assam Valley District, P. Maxwell, disfavoured the exchange with the Nyishis. According to the British laws the slaves of the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh became free as soon as they entered British territory. The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, under the instruction of Cotton, established a blockade of the Nyishi areas and the payment of *posa* was

#### Check Your Progress

3. The \_\_\_\_\_ live in the east and west Siang districts and in the Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh.
4. Name three Adi villages.



stopped to the Nyishi chiefs until the captives were freed. Therefore, the coolies were finally freed through peaceful negotiation in February 1900 and the payment of *posa* was restored. The crux of the problem lies in the refusal of exchange, which gives an insight into the considerations of the local British economy in the interest of the colonial economy and to legitimize and disguise the refusal through constitutional safeguard. The paradox of the situation may be judged from the fact that on the one hand they declared that the runaway slaves of the Nyishis became a free citizen as soon as they entered British territory and desired to settle there, but on the other hand the coolies voluntarily fled to the Nyishi area to escape worse treatment than that of blacks in the American plantation. The problem of runaway slaves or coolies continued in the relationship. It is not important to discuss every individual case but it is more important to understand the same as the economic and political needs of the hill people because the Jhum cultivation was labour intensive and directly proportional to the labour engaged and the yield. On the basis of several instances we see a general policy of the British that in the disputes of the two Nyishis generally the British administration used to be neutral.

The Nyishi-British encounter took place in the year 1835. Some Nyishis of Charduar area sided with the Aka chief Thagi Raja in the raid. Consequently, as a punishment the Nyishis of that area along with the Akas were prevented from collecting the *posa*. In December of the same year, the Nyishis retaliated by raiding on the Charduar plains and carrying off several persons. A punitive expedition was sent to the hills and nine captives were rescued and two Nishi chiefs were captured. Capt. Mathie then opened negotiations to stop direct collection of the *Posa*, eight out of the thirteen of the Dafla clans came to terms. They refused to accept money instead of the articles but agreed to surrender their right to collect their dues from the riots directly. In the case of any dispute, they, however, agreed to refer the matter to the magistrate. They also agreed not to aid the enemies of the British and help in the capture of the offenders. The *Posa* was fixed at, 'one coarse arkt sheet, one long cotton handkerchief, two seers of salt, one dao and one goat for every ten houses.' After this, five more clans came to agreement on similar terms. For sometime peace prevailed in the Charduar area.

The British, however, found it more difficult to tackle the Nyishis of Naoduar. They claimed a share of two-thirds of all revenue paid by the *paiks*. In 1838-39, in retaliation they carried away some British subjects as captives. Capt. Vetch immediately stopped the payment of *posa* and threatened that the entire *posa* would be collected and used for strengthening the stockades and the outposts. This pressure technique of the British brought results in their favour. The Nyishis of the upper areas pressurized the chiefs who had been committing offences to make their submission. Thus, agreements were executed wherein it was decided that the Nyishis would be paid their *posa* through the village Revenue Officer. Subsequently, a list of the riots that paid dues in these duars to the Nyishis was prepared in 1841. In 1852, Col. Dalton and Lt. Biver modified the list excluding those who did not claim their *posa*. The revised list had 238 Gams or chiefs who received a total of ₹ 2543. The total amount of *posa* had reached ₹ 4129. Besides, 234 mounds of salt in lieu of hat dues (weekly market dues and rights of fishing and gold mining) were also paid, including 26 bottles of rum and a diet allowance of ₹ 5.

Some Nyishis settled down in the plain areas of Darrang and Lakhimpur. Col. Woodthorpe made a survey on some parts of the Nishi land in 1883, and got enthusiastic support from them. From 1888 to 1891, there were some local disputes between the



hill Nyishis and the plains Nyishis, but the British Government was not interested to interfere in the political affairs beyond the Inner Line, and in most cases it declined to take upon itself the burden of punishing the offenders.

## NOTES

The policy of pacification and non-intervention were not always successful. The Nyishi outrage had increased considerably during the years 1904 and 1908. Ultimately, therefore, an expedition was sent in 1908 which achieved its purpose and met no opposition in the hills. But Captain Nevill was attacked at Riang by the Nyishis during the course of the Aka promenade. Nevill had fined them 20 pigs and 10 swords and also had recorded that the Nyishis were yet to recognize the British authority. In 1918, Miri Pathar Nyishis raided the Nyishi village of Gaigaon and Boranipathar in the plains and carried off 59 captives. Fourteen made their escape and twenty were released by the Political Officer proceeding to the offending village, Pigerong. In 1919, it was decided that no settlement was to be allowed within five miles of the Inner Line and a special magistrate was appointed to try the cases involving the Nyishis.

Instances of petty aggression, inter-clan feuds and raids on the borderlands continued by the Nyishis. In 1931–32, the Political Officer, N L. Bor had to lead three expeditions: (i) to punish Chengung for imprisoning a British subject (ii) to Sengmara, in order to burn it for being set up within the Inner Line against the government orders and (iii) to punish Midpu for raiding a plain village of Laluk. The following years witnessed the widespread clan feuds between different clans causing loss of lives in great numbers. In spite of intervention of the British government from time to time, the situation did not improve and peace in the hills continued to be disturbed. With a view to bring larger areas under control, in 1946, the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two separate administrative units namely, the Sela Sub-Agency and the Subansiri area. The western Nyishis fell under the Sela Sub-Agency and the eastern Nyishis came mostly under the Subansiri area. The British relations with the Nyishis were, therefore, full of events and the government had to keep a watchful eye on the Nyishis throughout their rule in India. The overall survey of the Nishi-British relations points out that their relationship was strained during the whole period and occasionally temporary friendship was maintained.

## 5.5 AKAS AND THE BRITISH

To the west of the hills of the Sherdukpens and north of Charduar lived the Akas who now call themselves Hrusso. The tribe had two major clans, namely – Kutsun (Hazarikhowas or the eater of a thousand hearts) and Kubatsun (Kapachors or Kapachor or the cotton thieves). The Akas were also accorded by the Ahoms, the right to collect *posa* from the people of the bordering Charduar plains. As was the case with other tribes, the Governor General's Agent, David Scott, continued the practices. But the British soon found this practice of allowing hill men to descend on the plains for collecting their *posa* and other petty dues as difficult and troublesome too. It very often created administrative problems for the government. So, David Scott advocated the commutation of *posa* claims of the hill-tribes to cash payment; he succeeded in making an agreement with the Hazarikhowas by which they agreed to forgo their right to direct collection in consideration of an annual payment of ₹ 175 by the British government. But as a result of the Balipara massacre of 1835, perpetrated by the Kapachor chief, Thagi Raja, the payment of *posa* to the Hazarikhowas was stopped because they were suspected to be

### Check Your Progress

5. The habitat of the Nyishis extends westwards of Bharali river. (True/False)
6. What led to conflict between the Nyishis and the British?



involved in the plunder. The *posa* to them was restored only after nine years when a settlement was made in 1844.

As regards the British relations with Thagi Raja, shortly before the advent of the British in Assam, he had murdered the native official in charge of Charduar, along with twenty of his followers. David Scott, the first Commissioner of Assam, had declared them outlaw and forbade them to enter into the British territory of Assam. But they continued to do so evading the British vigilance. In 1829, having been under pressure from the Hazarikhowa Akas, Thagi Raja fled into Assam where he was apprehended by the British and put in Guwahati jail. On his release in 1832, mainly due to the influence of his Hindu Spiritual master, he returned to the hills, and in the words of Mackenzie 'rallied Assam. Thereafter, the daring act of his career came in the beginning of 1835. He set fire to the house of a Patgiri, Madhu Saikia at Orung and before that he set fire to the Assam Light Infantry outpost at Balipara in which seventeen persons were killed. Such acts of violence and the repeated attacks on Charduar areas caused by Thagi Raja continued unabated. In December, 1837 he carried off several persons as captives to the hills. In 1838-39 and yet again in March 1841, he raided the plains of Charduar. All the efforts on the part of the British to capture him proved abortive. His energies and daring acts had made him at this time virtual chief of both clans of Akas, and were able to influence the neighbouring Nyishis. Captain Mathie was, however, doubtful of the success of a punitive expedition into the hills. So the British resorted to blockade and strengthening of the outposts with more guards. However, due to the continued outrage, when the government was seriously thinking to send an expedition against Thagi Raja, there arrived the surprising news of the surrender of Thagi Raja. The Kotokis (interpreters) played an important role in bringing about the surrender. It was quite possible that the Raja might have been at last weary of a hunted life. A monthly pension of ₹ 20 was granted to him and three of his chiefs: Seemkolee, Sooma and Nisul. An agreement was executed to this effect in 1842. Subsequently, other chiefs came down and accepted pensions from the government. Captain Gordon, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, granted annual pension to four Aka chiefs in 1844 and five others in 1848. The total amount of stipends amounted to ₹ 360 per year.

The relation between the British and the Akas began to improve after the grant of these pensions to the chiefs. The amount of *posa* and pensions were also gradually increased and raised to ₹ 668 per annum. The Hazarikhawas had further received 18 *puras* of land for their temple in Darrang district. But in 1857, the Aka chiefs wanted a further rise in their *posa* and this issued remained an irritant in the relationship of the two.

The British-Aka relations started deteriorating subsequently from the 1870s due to a higher demand for rise in *Posa*, the differences in the demarcation of boundary line and the British encroachment upon their plain land and forests. In 1872-73, Lt. Col. Graham, the Commissioner, demarcated the boundary line between the Akas and the tribes living to the west of them. According to the new line, the lands in the foothills were brought within the boundary of the Darrang district. The Akas refused to accept the new line as it meant less of forests to them. The Hazarikhawas petitioned a further grant of revenue-free land and the Kapachors demanded nearly 200 *pura* of land. On the recommendation of the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang district, 36 *puras* of land were granted to each clan and perhaps on this both of them were satisfied with the new boundary which was demarcated in 1874-75. Medhi, who had succeeded Thagi Raja as



chief even agreed to send two of his relations to schools in the British territory and the British agreed to bear all the expenses. But this proved to be a temporary patch-up. The real cause of the grumbling was not settled; the hill men were not prepared to surrender their lands (forest and plains). All these grievances of the Akas culminated into the raid of the Akas to the Balipara Forest Range Office in 1883-84 and carried off the Ranger and his clerk together with a compass, some money and two guns. The leader of this raid was no other than Chandī, the brother of Medhi Raja. This was the first Aka raid after the grant of *posa* to them in 1842.

When the surrender of the captives was demanded, the Akas sent very insolvent letters reviving their claims to the land and forests in the plains. Hence, the British government sanctioned an expedition into the hills to punish the offenders. The expedition left for the Aka hills under the command of the Political Officer, Capt. Maxwell with 290 Frontier Police under W B. Savi and Lt. E H. Molesworth, 571 officers and men drawn from the 43rd Native Infantry, 210 men of the 12th Khelati Chizais from Cachar, 2 mountain guns, and a party of Sappers under the command of Brig. Gen. Sale Hill. When the force advanced, the Akas evacuated some villages and attacked the vanguard, but were easily overpowered and dispersed. The expeditionary force reached the village of Medhi and found that the village was already deserted. The houses of Medhi's brother, Chandī, Naloo and Kota, who were considered the chief culprits of Balipara incident, were burnt. The stocks of grain were destroyed and the livestock were carried away. The Aka chiefs then sent back the captives together with the property they had carried away earlier. A fine of 10 Mithuns (valued between ₹ 700-1000) was also obtained. Maxwell stayed for some time in the hills but owing to the outbreak of fever in the camp, returned considering the result of the expedition as satisfactory. But the Chief Commissioner of Assam was not happy with the return of the expedition as it failed to hound the culprits and make the Medhi surrender.

Therefore, as further punishment to the Akas, a blockade of the Aka country was instituted immediately. It was not lifted until January 1888, when Medhi and Chandī appeared in person and made their submission to Col. Campbell, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang. An agreement of good behaviour was executed with them, whereby, the foothill was accepted as the boundary between the Akas and the British. It was also stated that the *posa* would be restored again after two years if they behaved well.

The Akas were in dire need of the restoration of *posa* and the lifting of the blockade against them as they used to purchase their essential items with that money. In 1890, the *posa* was restored to them after a lapse of seven years. In 1896, again, a small expedition was sent to the Aka hills to rescue the captives, whom the Akas had carried away from inside the Inner Line. A group of hill men had done it due to personal animosity. However, the captives were rescued and the guilty were punished by releasing six of their slaves.

Again in the year 1900, the question of rights in the forests brought the Akas into conflict with the British. They demanded and took away ₹ 3000 from a merchant of Balipara market for tapping rubber in their territory. When they were on their way back with the money, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang appeared and fined them ₹ 3000 for their conduct. To avoid any further complications, it was decided that all agreements for rubber tapping between the merchants and the hill men, would henceforth be made in the presence of the Deputy Commissioner and all payments would be made in his presence.



After this, there was no rift in the relations between the British and the Akas. In 1913, Capt. Nevill, the Political Officer of the Western Section led a Promenade to the Aka hills with a view to explore and survey the area. The Aka hills were brought under control from 1914, and there was no opposition from the people.

## 5.6 KHAMPTI RELATIONS WITH THE BRITISH

### NOTES

The Khamptis occupied the area to the north of Sadiya and to the southeast of the Mishmis. When the British came to power in Assam in 1824, the Khamptis rendered good service to them. Therefore, David Scott, the Governor General's Agent, recognized the Khampti chief 'chonsalan Sadiya Khowa Gohain, as the local officer and permitted him to collect the poll-tax from the Assamese subjects of the British and exempted the 'Khowa Gohain' from paying any tax himself. He was required to maintain a contingent of 200 men to be armed by the British. He was also to obey the orders of the political officer of Upper Assam.

The friendly relations between the British and the Khamptis continued. It was only disturbed openly in 1839, which was known as Khampti Uprising of 1839. The main reasons for the uprising were as follows:

The Khampti Chief, Sadiya Khowa Gohain, whom the British had earlier confirmed in his post, died and his son Chowrangfat showed dissatisfaction. His loyalty to the British was thus questioned. When the situation was increasingly uneasy, a dispute arose between the Khampti Chief of Sadiya and the Bor Senapati of Muttak, the Moamaria Chief, with regard to a tract of land on the south bank of Brahmaputra. The political officer at Sadiya, in order to avoid any collision, asked both the parties to appear before him. The new Khampti Chief, Chowrangfat, openly flouted the orders and forcibly took possession of the disputed land. So the disputed land was attached by the Governor General's Agent. At first the Khampti Chief was suspended and subsequently removed from his post. He was shifted to Guwahati with a pension of ₹ 50 per month. His territories were brought under the British administration and taxes were collected. But the Khamptis of other territories were left under their respective chiefs and no tax was collected from them. The deposed and ex-Sadiya Khowa Gohain was later allowed to return to Sadiya in private capacity in recognition of the Khampti services against the Singphos in 1838.

The Khamptis could hardly tolerate the loss of the post of Sadiya Khowa Gohain, a post they had been looking at as the it rightfully place to them. They also suspected the government of a design to subject them to the taxation and to lower their status to that of the Assamese. Indeed, they used to consider themselves as superior and the Assamese riot no more than their servants. So they enjoyed their superior position by not paying any poll-tax. Also, they had been traditionally dependent on the slaves for cultivation of their land. The British action in releasing the slaves was resented and considered as the most high-handed act of all.

All this resulted in a pre-mediated outbreak of 19 January, 1839, when 500 armed Khamptis attacked the Sadiya post. They killed Col. White and his men, burnt the communication lines and inflicted other losses. The Khamptis of the south bank also revolted but were quickly put down by the British. The successful Khamptis on the north bank, however, retreated with their adherents and took refuge amongst the Dibang Mishmis. Lt. Marshall, who pursued the fleeing enemy, succeeded in killing Raima Gohain,

#### Check Your Progress

7. To the west of the hills of the Sherdukpens and north of Charduar lived the Akas who now call themselves \_\_\_\_\_.
8. In 1913, \_\_\_\_\_, the political officer of the Western Section led a Promenade to the Aka hills with a view to explore and survey the area.



## NOTES

the principal investigator and another 125 men on the spot. Capt. Henney, who took over the command, burnt down all Khampti villages near Sadiya and Derek.

Compelled by the distress in their jungle refuge, one chief, Chouking Gohain, surrendered and then led a British force to compel others to follow him. In 1839–40, two more expeditions were sent to disperse the Khamptis from the hills and finally in 1843, all the Khamptis surrendered to the British under agreement of good behaviour. To break their resistance forever, and to prevent them from giving any further complication, the Khampti colonies were dispersed over a very wide stretch of the country. Those who settled at Sadiya, Dereck, Nidopani, Tengapani, Dehing, Morowapani and Kopahtoli were exempted from paying any revenue while the rest at Bhodia and Dhemaji paid regular taxes. The weakened Khamptis could not resist further and the relation between the two remained cordial.

## 5.7 SINGPHO-BRITISH RELATIONS

Let us begin our discussion on the Singpho-British relations with observation of R. M. Lahiri: Lahiri writes, 'The British seemed to step in as saviours rather than as conquerors. ... Assam was a liability rather than an asset. The Singpho territory had been overrun and pacified no doubt, but an influential number of the Singpho chiefs were still evading the protecting hands of the British government. The Singphos were a predatory horde.'

As discussed in the introduction of this unit, the Singphos were held responsible for acts which were never committed by them. It was the colonial need and greed that formed the background of the relationship. The British reports of the Singpho-Khampti raids into Assam and their outcome were designed to legitimize the British aggression in this part of Arunachal Pradesh. Amrendra Kr Thakur's *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, especially the chapter on abolition of slavery, also provides a critique of the same development.

The Singphos were the immigrants from a tract of land on the eastern banks of the river Irrawady. They gradually crossed the Patkai ranges of mountains and settled on the banks of Tengapani river, east of Sadiya and on the upper Buridihing in Namrup. They were split into many groups and each group was under the control of a separate chief called Gam. The two important Gams, to which most of the Singpho groups acknowledge loyalty, were Bisa Gam and Dafla Gam, and even these two groups were hostile to each other.

The whole of Eastern Assam was laid waste and deserted due to the Burmese invasions. The Burmese were beaten back by the British and to check further Burmese invasion into Assam, engagement were conducted with the Bor Senapati of Mattak and Khampti Chief of Sadiya. At this state the British had to think of two counts: first, out of moral responsibility they were required to get the release of the Assamese people carried away by the Singpho, and second, from the strategic point of view, they were required to have a buffer zone between the territories of the Khamptis and Burma. They wanted this tract to be inhabited by some friendly tribes, which were then inhabited by the Singphos.

Due to the earlier conciliatory attitude of the British, the Singpho chief felt encouraged to solicit British protection against the Burmese. Captain Neufville informed four Singpho chiefs that they would be allowed to hold their lands if they surrendered the Assamese slaves, recognized the British supremacy and agreed to inform them of the Burmese activities on the border. Shortly afterwards, when the

### Check Your Progress

9. The Khamptis could hardly tolerate the loss of the post of \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Chouking Gohain \_\_\_\_\_ and then led a British force to compel others to follow him.



Burmese forces under three Maganng chiefs took position at a place twenty five miles south of Noa Dihingmukh, the Singphos quickly surrendered the stockade to them. But at the same time, they sent secret messages to the British at Sadiya expressing their fervent appeal that they should be saved from the Burmese attack. In June Capt. Neufville advanced up the Noa Dihing and, by a series of attacks, expelled the Burmese from Assam. Many Singpho chiefs who had taken sides with the Burmese were also attacked. The chiefs fled into the hills and many slaves more than 6000 in number were set free.

After these raids, in June 1826, the Governor General's Agent David Scott, made a trip to Sadiya where sixteen out of twenty eight Singpho chiefs entered into treaty agreements with the British Government. They set free the Assamese slaves, promised to help the British in case of future needs and refer all disputes of inter-tribal nature and heinous crimes to the attribution of the British officer at Sadiya. The main provisions of the treaty agreements were as follows:

- (i) If we abide by the terms of this agreement, no tribute shall be paid by us; but if any Assam paik of their own accord resides in our village, the tax on such Paik shall be paid to the British Government.
- (ii) We shall govern and protect the Singphos under us here to face and adjust their differences; and if any boundary disputes occur among us, we will take up arms without the knowledge of the British Government.

One of the effects of these agreements was that the Dafla Gam, the rival chief of Bisa Gam continued to remain hostile and kept himself aloof from the British as they had recognized the Bisa Gam as the permanent chief of the Singphos. He also continued to raid Bisa Gam and his allying villages. On the other hand, the loss of slave labour had impoverished the Singphos. The British attempts to open up trade in their tract proved to be futile too.

Thus, several Singpho chiefs remained hostile towards the British, the Dafla Gam being prominent among them. In 1830, the hostile Khamptis and Singphos attacked the villages of Luttora Gam on the Tengapani River. They were also about to advance upon Sadiya on rafts. But they were driven back by Capt. Neufville with the aid of the friendly Singphos. After this incident, in 1834, a European Officer was posted at Sadiya to conduct relations with these chiefs. On the other hand, the Singphos also took to elephant catching.

Despite these, in 1835, came a sudden attack from across the border with the leadership of the Dafla Gam. They took away many prisoners including women and succeeded in enticing to their side many chiefs who had earlier vowed their allegiance to Bisa Gam. Immediately, an English force was dispatched which not only broke the combination of the hostile chiefs, but also succeeded in dispersing the Singphos who came from Burma. All the chiefs except for Lattora Gam reaffirmed their allegiance to the British. The Lattora Gam, the powerful chief next only to the Dafla Gam, also submitted in 1837. The Singphos were active again in 1838 when Peeshee Gam and Lat Gam were locked in inter-tribal feud. The next year in 1839, some Singpho chiefs even joined the Khampti rebellion against the British.

Now the British government wanted to restrain the raids from the side of Burma by pressing the Burmese government to check their subjects. However, the negotiations failed as the Burmese delegation put forward extravagant and ridiculous territorial claims practically over the entire tract of Upper Assam upto Joypore. These claims were rejected and a military post was established on the Burihing for the protection of the Singpho borders. The next few years until 1843 were uneventful. Capt. Vetch who visited the



## NOTES

Frontier in 1841–42 noticed that there was apparent peace everywhere. After the visit of Capt. Vetch, the management of the Singphos was transferred from the Political Department to the Revenue and Judicial Department of the Bengal Government. But peace did not last long. In 1843, the Singphos attacked simultaneously the British post at Nigaroo and the guard post at Bisa. A large number of Singphos and Khamptis threatened the British post at Sadiya and a combined attack was reported to be imminent. All the Singphos rebelled against the British. The Tippum Raja of Hookoom (Hukong) was said to be the main spirit behind this movement. All the Singphos settled on the Noa Dihing and Buridihing pledged support to the uprising. To the surprise of the British, the Bisa Gam and Ningroola were reported to be involved in the conspiracy. The British forces were quickly sent there before it assumed a threatening proportion. Ningroola and Bisa Gam at once surrendered and many chiefs came back to the British side. The Singphos on the other side of the frontier were organized under Seroola Sain and the Lat Gam. The Lat Gam made his submission after a complete rout. This Singpho uprising was one of the biggest and lasted for a relatively long time.

The government wanted to investigate the causes of the revolt and appointed Lt. Lyon and Stainforth to conduct a thorough probe into the Singpho affairs. It enumerated the following causes: (i) encroachment on the lands and privileges of the Singphos, (ii) the seizure and punishment by local officers of some members of their tribe (iii) the orders and influence of Tippum Raja, then chief of the Hookoom province under Burma. The government reviewed the report and brushed aside the last two causes as being of no great importance and fixed upon the first the prime cause of the Singpho unrest. However, in the final report, it was held that the main reason behind the Singpho rebellion was the loss of their Assamese slaves not the land for the tea plantation and other colonial purposes. They not only became peaceful and obedient but also assisted the British exploration parties which were sent to the frontier hills.

## 5.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The Adis (earlier known as the Abors) live in the East and West Siang districts and in the Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The habitat of the Nyishis extends eastwards of Bharali River, occupying the hills in Darrang north of Naoduar (the nine passes), and Cheduar (the six passes) in Lakhimpur, as far east as the upper courses of Sundri.
- The Nyishi–British encounter took place in the year 1835. Some Nyishis of Charduar area sided with the Aka chief Thagi Raja in the raid.
- The Khamptis occupied the area to the north of Sadiya and to the southeast of the Mishmis. When the British came to power in Assam in 1824, the Khamptis rendered good service to them. Therefore, David Scott, the Governor General's Agent, recognized the Khampti Chief 'Chonsalan Sadiya Khowa Gohain' as the local officer and permitted him to collect the poll-tax from the Assamese subjects of the British and exempted the 'Khowa Gohain' from paying any tax himself.
- The Singphos were the immigrants from a tract of land on the eastern banks of the river Irrawady. They gradually crossed the Patkai ranges of mountains and settled on the banks of Tengapani river, east of Sadiya and on the upper Buridihing in Namrup. They were split into many groups and each group was under the control of a separate chief called Gam.

### Check Your Progress

11. The Singphos were the immigrants from a tract of land on the eastern banks of the river \_\_\_\_\_.
12. The two important groups, to which most of the Singpho groups acknowledge loyalty, were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.



- The two important groups, to which most of the Singpho groups acknowledge loyalty, were Bisa Gam and Dafla Gam, and even these two groups were also hostile to each other.
- The historiography of resistance by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh against the British penetrations into the hills is full of distortions and biases.
- The pressure on the labour force and land of the tribes were always exerted by the British and for the same the British laws and other coercive measures were always used. Being unsuccessful of all these, the British never hesitated to use the forces. In the relationship the influences of the neighbouring foreign powers also played a significant role.

## 5.9 KEY TERMS

- **Coolies:** Garden labourers
- **Kotokis:** Interpreters
- **Massacre:** Destruction
- **Mithun:** A domesticated animal of the north east belt of India resembling a buffalo
- **Historiography:** Body of historical work on a specific subject or topic

## 5.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. True
2. Singphos
3. Adis
4. Korang, Rotung, Kebang are three Adi villages.
5. False
6. The question of labour, land and the new laws were always the reasons of friction between the Nyishis and the British.
7. Hrusso
8. Capt. Nevill
9. Sadiya Khowa Gohain
10. Surrendered
11. Irrawady
12. Bisa Gam, Dafla Gam

## 5.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. What were the three expeditions led by N.L Bor?
2. What were the main reasons for the Khampti Uprising of 1839?
3. What were the main provisions of the treaty that Singpho chiefs entered into with the British government?



4. Enumerate the causes of the Singhpo uprising.
5. Who were the Gams? Name the important ones.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. After the peace treaty was signed between the British and the Adis in 1912, what terms were imposed on the main offending villages of the Minyongs?
2. Discuss the relation between the Nyishis and the British.
3. Write a short note on the Akas.
4. Write a short note on the Khamptis.
5. Write a short note on the Singhpo–British relation.

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## 5.12 FURTHER READING

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- Amrendra Kr Thakur. 2008. '*Historical Studies of Arunachal Pradesh: An Overview*', in R. Bezbaruah, P. Goswami and D. Banerjee (eds.), *North-East India Interpreting the Sources of its History*. New Delhi: I C H R and Aryan Books.
- Falling Rain Genomics, Inc.-Along 'Census of India 2001: Data from the 2001 Census, including cities, villages and towns (Provisional)'. Census Commission of India. Archived from the original on 2004-06-16. Retrieved 2008-11-01.





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